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Audience responses to a film in rural Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Though development communication has been theorized about and practised in African countries since the late 1950s and more so after independence, there has not been a consistent effort to continuously review it in the light of advances in general research on media and communication. One aspect of the communication process which has received attention – and also raised debate and controversy – is the issue of what audiences do with the media products (or texts) which they are exposed to and how far their social and cultural context affects their engagement with media products. For development communicators this aspect is of particular importance since they expect that their messages will influence the audience in some way. In the introductory section this paper argues that there are links between the theories of development, development communication and audience studies. The main body of the paper discusses a study done in 1997 on the reactions of audiences to a “development” film in rural Zimbabwe. Such a once-off study, as the paper argues, cannot yield conclusive results. However the virtue of such a study is to point at possibilities of other such studies in the future which should also help in theory building based on our own empirical experiences.

PART I

Introduction

IN AUGUST 1997 we set out to do a field assessment of audience responses to the film *Mwanasikana* (The Daughter). It tells the story of Tariro, a beautiful, hardworking and intelligent girl living in the rural areas of Zimbabwe with her parents and young brothers. She is determined to go as far as she can with education and make something of her

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life in the future. However, this ambition is frustrated by her father, Jumbe, who embodies the old fashioned, patriarchal belief that women should receive only enough education for them to make acceptable housewives and to fetch an attractive bride price. If educated beyond primary school a woman may become insubordinate and fail to fetch any or a good enough bride price. Indeed, in her final year of primary school Jumbe has already arranged to marry off Tariro to a local womanizer and businessman, Mudiwa, in return for beer and other goods from Mudiwa's shop. The film shows how Jumbe comes to change his attitude after Tariro's sister, Precious, who was also stopped from going on in school, forces the father to recognize the deep pain that awaits a daughter who does not have a chance to make something of her life after receiving adequate education.

The film, officially launched in November 1995, was intended for viewers in the rural areas. The assessment therefore entailed visiting venues in the rural areas where the film was shown by the government's mobile film units (the main way that the film is disseminated).

Our objectives were to assess the film's ability to deliver themes and messages in a way the target group could easily understand; to establish what feelings and emotions were stirred by the film; to assess its relevance and entertainment value to Zimbabweans and to determine the film's ability to influence and effect changes in socio-cultural values, norms, practices and attitudes.

It was decided that the assessment should be done in rural areas in Manicaland (Makoni District), Mashonaland Central (Guruve District) and Matabeleland North (Tsholotsho District) provinces which were regarded as fairly representative of the whole country. We visited two or three venues in each province.

Using this project as a basis, this paper also seeks to explore links between theories of development and development communication on the one hand with those of audiences and reception studies on the other. The issues the paper seeks to address are therefore admittedly broad and cannot be dealt with exhaustively in a paper of this length. This, then, is a tentative statement needing follow-up work.

Development theories and communication

BY THE END of the 1980s it was already known that “development” in Africa had failed – and hence so had some of the theorizing on development (Leys 1996 and 1997). By this time much had also been written on development communication and development support communication. Leys (1996) argues that, unlike previous development theories, the development theory of the 1950s came to the fore to understand the post-World War II world in the process of decolonization. It was informed by questions such as: how could the previous colonies become more productive, manage their economies properly and achieve growth and employment, while avoiding communism? The response to these questions called for theorizing which was nonetheless oriented to the practical and intended to provide grounds for immediate action. This was to lead to a dominant predisposition “against philosophical dispassion and reflective self-criticism” in development work and the dominant attitude was “development is done, not theorized about”. Hence the new theories of development were not located in a broad social history, including that of the development of global political and economic relations. Development was studied and theorized about as if it did not have “significant historical roots or philosophical roots or presuppositions” (Leys 1996:6).

The study and practice of communication at the formal level in Zimbabwe and in most other Africa countries has been influenced by this background. It has mainly been learnt in order to be *done* by practitioners in such areas as business and management, advertising, journalism and development. Here, as elsewhere, development theories have influenced theorizing on, and practices in, development communication. Thus, development communication can be linked to modernization theories as well as to theories found, for example, among the Frankfurt School of social and cultural theorists, suggesting that the media have a very strong and irresistible effect on a passive mass society. Dependency theory can equally be related to concerns with cultural imperialism and calls for more equitable global economic relations and a balanced flow of media products such as those by the proponents of the New World

Economic Order and the new World Information and Communication Order. These two theories and development communication theorizing and the practices they were to influence were more or less holistic. They were concerned with national issues as well as relations between the newly independent countries and the developed world. In this sense, they anticipated the new phase of neo-liberal development practices and current debates about development (and democratization) in a globalized and unequal world.

The dominant modernization development theory embodied two aspects that were problematic. First the understanding of development assumed that it would be a gradual, evolutionary process. The media were expected to play a central role in achieving normative economic, political and social goals as part of the nation-building project soon after independence (Hallin 1998:155). This holistic approach therefore relied on large mainstream media organizations (as opposed to the smaller local ones). Behind it was also an assumption of communication as a social process (though this aspect was rarely studied or explicitly stated). What was clear was the top-down and linear view of communication and social development in which benefits coming from the West, through the local élite, were eventually expected to trickle down to the ordinary people.

Secondly it was assumed that development of the formerly colonized countries would only come with material aid from the “developed” countries, particularly the USA. From the time of Truman’s Four Point program, for example, the notion that development was inseparable from the giving and receiving of foreign aid became a more or less normal one. It was also assumed that the culture and mind-sets of those who were to be thus turned into receivers were the problem to development. Far from contributing to development this culture and psychology had to be smashed with the force of the media and replaced by a western sensibility and culture. The result, however, has been that this material and cultural dependency has led to inferiority complexes and dependent mind-sets among those to be “developed” which has ultimately militated against development.

In response, dependency theorists argued that the problem lies in the material and structural relationship between the developed and developing countries. Participatory development approaches and theories, on the other hand, refuted the notion of our culture's inferiority and argued for the inclusion of local cultures and knowledge in any development planning. Further, it was argued, local people themselves are not passive and inert recipients but are active in the making of their own development. Influenced by the liberation movements and the work of Paulo Freire, in which the dialogical approach is emphasized, participatory approaches claim to be bottom-up. They are based in local communities. Ideally they respond to the needs expressed by the community; mobilize local knowledge systems; utilize the existing channels of communication and information flow and rely more on "small media", that is the smaller more locally accessible, interpersonal and interactive ones. The approaches are mainly concerned with productivity in specific micro-projects or ones that are dealt with at a local level – usually entailing interpersonal communication.

Development communication and research in communication

IN A 1987 PAPER James Halloran was to argue that development communication "is essentially a part of mass communication research, and consequently shares the general weaknesses of this field as well as possesses its own peculiar ones". In other words, development communication should not be regarded as separate from the main traditions and practices in communication research. Halloran further recommended that communicators should be able to make sense of the society and social processes in which communication takes place. In order to do so, there is a need for "valid models of society and these, amongst other things, must take into account organization, structure and institutional interrelationships. We also require an adequate understanding of social processes, *particularly of the communication process and the process of influence*" (Italics added). This last requirement draws our attention to the fact that communication is a more or less complex process grounded in, and influenced by, the social and cultural context in which it takes place. It involves distinct elements (such as a sender with

specific intentions and goals, processes of encoding, message, channel, receiver, processes of decoding and of making sense of the message). Thus, according to Halloran, discussions on the likely *influence* of media messages should also take into account the social-cultural context, the communication process, and the process of *reception* of the message. However, he criticized the (then) bulk of mass communication research as lacking in this holistic approach. He therefore drew attention to what he calls “the generally atheoretical nature” of development communication work, its “crudeness of conceptualisation” and “little appreciation of the complexity of communication process” (1987:134). Halloran thus reminds the practitioner in Africa to be self-reflective. Among those areas needing attention are:

- the dominance of sender-oriented approaches in which the sender often, implicitly or explicitly, targets the individual psychology and mind-set of the intended receiver and ignores social, cultural and economic factors;
- a need for a more nuanced understanding of how people make sense of the messages received from the mass media and what they do with these. On the one extreme there are those who hold that the meaning of a message is wholly immanent in and a property of the text which should then be understood in the same way by all audiences. On the other extreme are those who hold that receivers are free to make what meaning they want with the text of a message. In between these are analytical positions concerned with understanding both the text of the message, the conditions of its production and the conditions under which specific audiences are likely to receive the messages in certain ways. Such variables include:
 - the way in which the textual construction, the denotative and connotative meanings are able to express the conscious intentions of senders;
 - the already pre-existing knowledge and meaning systems among the target audience;
 - the interest and prior knowledge which the audience may have of the subject matter;
 - the social and cultural background of the target audience and how.

far this has equipped the audience with skills and competence to effectively decode and comprehend the message; the social and cultural factors which may lead to agreement or disagreement with the message after it has been understood.

As has been noted by researchers, some texts are more closed than others in the sense that they do not allow for many differing interpretations. This is true, for example, of factual statements. However, texts of a fictional nature (such as *Mwanasikana*) are more open, allowing for more ambiguity and different interpretations depending, of course, on how didactic they are. As Bordwell and Thompson (1989:33) tell us, films have "meaning only because we attribute meanings to them. We cannot therefore regard meaning as a simple product to be extracted from the film. Our minds probe an artwork at several levels, seeking referential meanings, explicit meanings, implicit meanings, and symptomatic meanings". In such situations there are likely to be differences between what the sender means by the signs offered from what the receiver understands by the signs received (Dimbleby and Burton: 1992:223. See also Corner, 1999:82 and Thompson 1990: 36-44).

Studies of audiences and reception behaviour seek to make clear such audience behaviour in specific social contexts. In any case concerns with messages should also reflect sensitivity to the more humanistic approach where artistic skills and strategies (including language, narrative styles, symbols, images, discourses) are discussed and texts analyzed.

Development communication implies a theoretical premise even when this is not acknowledged. Practitioners therefore need to be aware of the theories implied in their practices and of the research that led to such theories.

Those working in development communication in Africa also need to have a body of knowledge, derived from field research, on communication and information channels and how development works in specific contexts in African societies (rather than in the USA). This knowledge will lead to the challenge of how to enrich development communication with positive developments in other disciplines in the field of communication. Audience research is one such area.

Audiences

The search for an audience is linked to an old and dominant tradition in media research that attempts to answer the question: just how does the media affect us? Later another question was added: just how do we appropriate media “products” and make meaning and use of them in our day-to-day lives? Although the term “audience” has always been around it contains a certain ambiguity that has led to a corpus of literature (see for example McQuail 1997; Dickinson *et al.* 1998; Jensen and Rosengren 1995 and Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998).

There has also been a main strand of international research with a long tradition of paying attention to audiences through a variety of survey and focus group methods. Daniel Lerner’s work, for example, developed out of his audience research for the Voice of America. Indeed his research included interest in radio listening behaviour (Samarajiwa 1987). Yet, as Corner (1999:80) argues concerning television research, “however subtle this research had become, in terms of its sense of the complexity and indirectness of influence processes and the active character of viewing itself, *it had not shown much interest in how television’s meanings were actually produced through the specific engagement of viewers with programmes*’ (Italics added).

Indeed, often unacknowledged by them, researchers and practitioners in development communication have, for a large part of their concerns, been interested in the way communication influences people – in the hope that the meanings made out of received messages will persuade them to a change in attitude and behaviour. This places their concerns within what has been of central concern to media researchers generally – for the process and nature of influence of media messages on receivers.

Reception: the missing link

ESSENTIALLY THEN, the trend of research has been to move us away from a sole concern with what the media does to people to also pay attention to what people do with the media. As Thompson (1990) has insisted, research in communication takes into account three areas: institution, message and reception. Research has, for example, developed from a

concern with whether the media does have the influence it is expected to have, to include investigating whether there are specific circumstances or social and cultural factors which may affect the media's influence on people. This has been accompanied by a shift away from a tendency to understand the media as having an all powerful and unmediated affect on people.

Reception studies then simply draw attention to the fact that a reader of a book, listener of a radio programme or someone watching a movie does play a role in making what they are reading, listening to or watching mean something. This includes their decoding, interpretation, perception and comprehension strategies. Reception research is concerned with how this happens in specific social and cultural contexts. Clearly the background, previous experiences, values, beliefs, expectations, predispositions and even psychological attributes which a member of the audience may bring into the reception activity influence the process of making meaning. Also very important is to look at the context of reception (home, movie house, or open spaces as in the case of the reception of *Mwanasikana*), and consider how this may affect reception. Such an approach is useful because it takes the commonsensical position that before a book, programme, film or any other "text" can satisfy a need, be used in a certain way or generally have some kind of effect (as indeed most texts are expected to), it must first of all be meaningfully decoded and appropriated into meaningful discourses and practices by the receivers. It is hoped that, after this, it will also influence attitudes, practices and behaviour. However, while media audiences sometimes negotiate and contest the meaning implicit in the media framework, they often lack ready access to alternative meaning systems that would enable them to reject the definitions offered by the media in favour of consistent alternative definitions.

Thus reception studies draws our attention to the point that production of media messages is not mechanically determined by the structures of economic power and ownership and by the political environment. Nor is the message received by passive audiences who are easily swayed by the message. We are also made aware that reception is an interpretative process leading to cognition or the processes whereby people's

ideas are shaped by the symbolic forms that the media circulates. Apart from drawing our attention to this cognitive aspect, there is also the behavioural one which "focuses on reception as a social practice and on the ways in which media use constrains, determines, or contributes to more general patterns of social behaviour" (Garnham 2000:110).

Accordingly (and notwithstanding some weaknesses in its application), reception research has had something to contribute to the practitioner of development communication's understanding of the communication process (see for example, Curran 1996; Ferguson and Golding 1997; Morley 1992 and 1996). Most importantly, by focusing on "the ways in which meanings is made and experienced by viewers", it directs attention to interpretation and the variables affecting this such as the way people mediate messages and how these interact with their public and private lives. (Corner 1999:81).

Concern with audiences in development communication

INDEED THE CONCEPT of audiences, as we have discussed it here, has actually been more or less explicit (though not thoroughly discussed) in communication intended for development. The use of communication as a tool for changing attitudes and behaviour leads to attention being directed at the receivers of messages and thus, into the field that has been central to media researchers generally. In social marketing approaches, for example, such target message receivers are defined and segmented in measurable social variables and lifestyles. This can facilitate the understanding of certain cultural and sociological aspects of audiences. Similarly the research that was to lead to the two-step theory of the flow of information and to the theory of the diffusion of innovations drew attention to the importance of opinion leaders and to interpersonal networks of communication (a point that led to attention being paid to social groups and subcultures in communication). Such a concern begins to link up with notions of the collective and participatory mobilization of existing knowledge (or what is known as Indigenous Knowledge Systems) and to the ways in which new information is received and incorporated into this collective reservoir of knowledge through the existing communication networks and systems.

In any case, as Windhal *et al.* have pointed out, strategies of planned communication (or information campaigns) have become less rigid, less one-way and less sender-oriented. This shift has been influenced by the advances made in communication research and the consequent enriching of theory and understanding. Concerns with audiences and reception can also be linked with shifts in development communication and the debates and change that took place at the end of the 1970s. This change came with a new awareness of the importance of social and cultural contexts and the fact that audiences may not be an inert mass of people. It also came to be accepted that audiences did have some knowledge to contribute to the development process. In other words, apart from the perceived failure of development theories and development communication to bring about development there was also a more or less implied perception that the approaches to development communication had been based on faulty theories about the media and communication.

The new shift was towards concerns with contexts, local cultures, information flows, interpersonal communication and the ways in which people individually and collectively make do with messages in their every day lives. Importantly, then, participatory development approaches recognize that people are active in the communication process and that, ultimately, they are the subjects and objects of development. However it is still not clear to what extent the practice of development support communication has taken advantage of research and theory. It is hoped that this paper makes a tentative contribution in this direction.

PART II

Methodology

RECEPTION ANALYSIS is a meeting between humanist and social science traditions. It favours qualitative methods, including the consideration of the structure of the content of the book, radio programme or film and the meanings proposed by the author and by the way the text is structured and organized. However it focuses on empirical (that is to say, actually existing) audiences, not imaginary ones.

The requirement is to get at the audience's own formulations and perceptions; to describe their own process of reception. However it is also recognized that it is not easy to analyze the meanings they make out of the reception activities. In other words, for our project, it was important to conduct research precisely from the point of view of the film's audience. The following methods have been found to be of use and were used for data collection in the field in this study: participant observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Those targeted for individual interviews included key personnel in the production and showing of the film. The total number of respondents was about 140. Field research was conducted from 4–15 August 1997 with the assistance of Dr Rino Zhuwarara.

Constraints of the assessment process

IT HAD BEEN PLANNED to hold discussions with audiences after the film shows each night. This proved to be difficult due to the specific conditions of viewing. The films are screened at night and shows lasted till after 9.30 p.m. After this most people were eager to get back home (which often entailed a long walk). For security, especially in Lower Guruve where there are wild animals, people preferred to walk back to their homes in groups. However in all cases the film operators explained to audiences the importance of the film and drew their attention to the importance of the themes which the film dealt with.

During the interviews and focus group discussions on the morning after, respondents were generally very co-operative and forthcoming. We would, however, have preferred a larger sample of male respondents. In Matabeleland, where SiNdebele is spoken, the language in the film was a negative factor (the film is in Shona). Women in this province may have been more adversely affected as they tend to have lower levels of education and mobility and are less likely to understand a foreign language than men. However those younger people in this province who did come forward gave us important insights, not least on the language question.

Nonetheless, in spite of these difficulties, we consider that we were able to gather data that were sufficient and rich. Further, the consist-

ently similar responses in all the areas and among the different audience subgroups indicate the representativeness of the findings. This is also strengthened by the observations, comments and daily reports of the mobile film unit crews and also by the monthly reports of the provincial information officers

The film, *Mwanasikana*

THE FILM WAS produced through joint efforts by Ministry of Education, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and UNICEF, in response to the problem of educating girls in Zimbabwe. It was specifically produced with the rural population in mind because:

- Most Zimbabweans (about 80 percent) live in the rural areas and therefore the greatest impact, nationally, would be made by targeting this majority.
- Targeting rural people is consistent with Zimbabwe's developmental strategy of focusing on areas ignored by successive colonial governments.
- Rural communities generally do not get information as quickly as urban ones. They have limited access to the mass media. This was to be addressed by distributing the film through the Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications mobile film units which, when operating in full strength, can be in 24 different rural locations at the same time.
- As change is slower in rural than urban areas it is here that the problem of educating girls is more visible.

The film was made after research in the rural areas and wide consultations with interested groups and individuals. This research also helped to establish for the film-makers the situations, everyday experiences and the discourse and language used by the people in the rural areas. It also established the right tone for the intended audience in order to achieve the right attitude, elicit attention and attain credibility that what the audiences were watching (and hearing) did actually happen in their communities.

The film was thus expected to capture reality and represent it as accurately as possible, stimulate thinking and debate and promote a

fuller understanding of issues. It was also recognized that a fiction film also moves people emotionally and this further helps in persuading people to change their attitudes and behaviour.

There are some fathers who do not want to part with their money. The fathers who drink are the ones who normally don't want their children to go to school. The children grow up facing many problems with no help in life.

Rumbidzai, a Grade 7 girl pupil at Karai Primary School.

Hence the film's realism helps its didactic intentions. The setting is recognizable to rural audiences and in it rural audiences also see images of their own lives and lifestyles. One difference between the film characters and the experiences of most rural people is that the main characters' home is within walking distance of a shopping centre and this commercial centre influences the father's behaviour and values. He is a regular customer there and is persuaded at one time to marry his daughter, Tariro, off to a local shopkeeper in return for drinks and other goods. The shopping centre, on a regular bus route from the city (which delivers mail and other goods); with a bar and other peri-urban leisure amenities is a symbol of the existence of a new world – just as the father is a symbol of a passing world. However there is also a contradictory aspect in this new world in the image of the shopkeeper. What values are going to operate in this new world which girls are also aspiring to enter? Is the real antagonist of the future woman the shopkeeper, rather than the naive father? Does not the shopkeeper also represent a figure who, if given a chance, will in the new world of the future exploit women in order to satisfy his own lust and material advancement?

Another important aspect in the film is its cultural sensitivity. This is seen in the use of the actual language people employ. It also incorporates their aesthetics, values and beliefs (even when questioning these); their world-view and perceptions. However, at the same time, the film belongs to a tradition in African film-making which interrogates tradition in the name of positive change.

It has a simple linear plot with events following each other in a chronological order. The form is thus a conventional narrative of a domestic situation. It has a single or dominant thematic treatment without too many sub-themes and sub-texts. It thus positions audiences to focus on the problems of education faced by girls in our times of change and social transformation. It draws their attention to the usefulness of education in empowering girls to achieve more material independence from men; and to have more choices of what to become, and thus more hope for self-respect and less abuse and humiliation.

The characters are types, embodying familiar collective images and values and representing typical and recognizable attitudes and positions. Thus the problem of educating girls is discussed in the context of gender roles and beliefs. The film therefore addresses the socio-cultural context that influences the education of girls and their role and identity in society. Within the overall context of gender relations and the domination of women in these relations, the film offers related sub-themes by exploring the processes of decision-making at home and the unequal division of roles for boys and girls and men and women, leading to inequalities in the distribution of privileges and responsibilities at home. At the same time the film also indicates the possibilities of genuine love and warmth existing in a home.

I enjoyed it because it taught that we should never even entertain the idea that a daughter should not go to school. We saw that when Precious was divorced she could not find a job since she was not educated. Education should help every child irrespective of gender.

Elderly Village Development Committee (VIDCO) chairman, Karai Village

Audience reactions observed

GENERALLY, CHILDREN were in the majority in all the venues visited, followed by youth, women and then adult males, in that order. This pattern is confirmed by the reports the mobile film operators and provincial

information officers. The film was shown as one of about five or six other development- or education-oriented films. These were films giving different messages but which audiences were able to appreciate as providing pleasure while at the same time being informative on issues relevant to their education and development.

The researchers were quick to recognize that the film assumed new significance and meaning and their own understanding of it changed when they saw it, in its intended context, as part of a rural audience. In the moon-washed August nights of rural Zimbabwe, in the grounds of a small school miles away from tarred roads and with a rapt audience, the film took on new meaning. One came to appreciate more how close it was to the intended audience's lives and concerns. In many ways the researchers also reinterpreted the film and reassessed its significance.

As is expected of such audiences, comments and laughter were the norm though the manner and nature of commenting varied according to audience composition. In Matabeleland however, the fact that *Mwanasikana* is in Shona, drew a more muted response than that accorded to the other films.

A good part of the audiences were seeing the film for the first time. Indeed for some, like many of the Grade 7 boys at Karai Primary School, this was also the first time they had ever seen a film at all. However a few in the audience had seen it at other venues: these tended to provide running commentaries and interpretations for those near them who had not seen the film before. A good example is the woman viewer at Karai Primary who was quite vocal in her contempt of Jumbe, his drinking and his "selling his daughter" for drink.

However it was noticed that in spite of the commentaries and laughter – which is itself an indication of audience interest in, and understanding of, the film – the audiences became more silent and paid more attention where there are serious or tense moments as the story unfolds. Indeed we were struck by the rapt attention given by audiences to the films as a whole.

Women (mothers) were the most rapt and did not make as many comments as the other segments of the audiences. When they did make

comments these were directed at understanding or explaining the film to others. Adult men also tended to make few comments. Interestingly, some of their comments showed disapproval of the father for not supporting the diligent efforts of his daughter, Tariro, at becoming educated. They were not comfortable with his character and one sensed a desire to distance themselves from him. As it turned out during discussions and interviews, the older men thought the father irresponsible. Some commented on the appearance of the mother (who obviously has a warm and charming personality). When she smiled at her husband, a man was heard to remark that "with that kind of smile the man is not going to win".

Young men commented on the beauty of the two daughters, Tariro and Precious. For example, when Tariro first appears some said that she is "a real *mwanasikana*". They laughed at what they considered the folly of *mudhala* Jumbe – their father. The attempted rape of Precious by the shopkeeper, Mudiwa, raised comments from children and the young men but the women were more subdued. Obviously this was a painful scene for a woman with some understanding of the world.

Commentaries are the norm among rural audiences and it is easy to tell which parts of a film excite the audience and which do not. Though we should be careful about the meaning of exclamations, laughter and other responses it was nonetheless easy to tell from observing audiences that the film was well received. A few comments were made which indicated disagreement with the film's intended message. One or two said they did not find it exciting. These negative comments, however, were in the minority. One observation borne out by discussions and interviews was that the audiences are very hungry for entertainment and that the mobile film unit provides for them perhaps the only entertainment of its kind. At Tsholotsho the advertisements, which came before each film elsewhere, had been put together to make a separate film reel. It was interesting to see audiences construing this separate reel as entertainment and paying it the same rapt attention as the feature films.

Audiences' understanding

A FILM OR ANY TEXT is to be understood and interpreted in the audience's own terms and context if it is to impart the intended message and thus generate knowledge. Most data were gathered at least the morning after audiences had seen the film (and in one instance a few days after), with the major objective of finding out how well audiences were able to recall and retell the story, together with short summaries of what they had seen and learnt from the film. This was also a test to see whether audiences could recall and retell specific incidents and, indeed, the whole film and also provide their own understanding and interpretations. In almost all cases they were able to do this.

Most striking was the way that schoolchildren were able to retell the story and in the process to include their own understanding of the main themes and messages of the film and also their own opinion of the behaviour and attitudes of the various characters. This was also a good indication of the audience's comprehension of the implications of the film's message and their ability to link this with their own experiences and observations.

People who watched this film said that the story in the film was moving. The film is a good motivation for the parents to change their attitudes from not educating to educating their daughters.

Below appears a report of the mobile cinema unit's operators, Mashonaland Central Province, May 1997 in which the main new ideas which people learnt from the film are summarized.

Girls of Grade 7 age:

Schoolchildren need to be self-disciplined.

The value of working hard: ("I learnt that we should work hard so that we can do a variety of jobs and look after our parents who did not want to send us to school", and "we learn that if we work hard and persevere in our studies then we will lead a better life" and "once you succeed in education you will also marry an educated husband").

It was emphasized that girls should communicate with their mothers about their desire to go on with school and to seek help

wherever it could be obtained to make this possible. One girl said that she had learnt that if the father does not want his daughter to go to school but the mother does, the girl should tell the mother that she wants to go on with school "so she should send you to your relatives and send money to you so that you would succeed and get a job".

"Some parents are jealous of their children's success".

"Parents were taught that money should not be wasted in beerhalls and in pleasure".

Boys of Grade 7 age:

"I learnt that it is bad to rape a child".

All children should go to school "and I should not show that I want this child to go to school and not that one".

"I learnt that businessmen rape people".

One boy also learnt about exploitation: "Yes, because for some employers, you work for nothing; getting half of the monthly wage you ought although you work for the whole week".

"The film taught us that we should go to school in order to be successful."

Female respondent, Maqe Primary School, Matabeleland North Province:

Even if they (men) have the money they do not want to educate girls, because they say she will not listen to her husband. The mother is against this, but the father is powerful. Precious decides to educate her sister because she knows that, without education, there is no job and no marriage as well. So she also hopes to be supported by the sister in the future.

Older men and women:

It taught us to educate girls and not only boys, since even if our daughter marries and goes to live somewhere else she will lead a comfortable life compared with a woman who is not educated.

Woman at Takaruzva Village, Lower Guruve:

It was good thing that you came and taught us such a good lesson. I can go and teach children about rape.

Woman at Domborembizi:

Yes, I liked the film. What impressed me the most is the fact that there are still some people who don't know the importance of education. I wished there had been more parents here when this lesson was taught.

The film's relevance

Comments made by the audiences indicated that they thought the film was relevant to what is happening in Zimbabwe. Though the idea of discriminating against girls was felt to be old-fashioned and unfair, many, including both boys and girls, said that the film showed what happens in their homes and in real life and what was already a known problem. Respondents indicated that there are still some, mainly men, who did not like the idea of educating their daughters. For example Chief Madziwa at Domborembizi Primary school said emphatically: "This film exposes what is happening today. It is happening: so let's try to mend this". Also cited as resistant to educating girls are some Apostolic religious sects. According to the deputy headmaster at Domborembizi Primary School, Makoni district, some of these sect members will even prevent their daughters from doing sports at school. He added "Our community is full of Apostles who don't want to see children going to school, especially when we teach science. They say it's not right."

Agreeing that the film shows what happens in real life, Eusebia, a Grade 7 female pupil at Karai Primary School, Lower Guruve, observed "Some parents refuse to send their daughters to school so these girls run around looking for men in beerhalls". This consequence was also echoed by Chief Madziwa at Domborembizi Primary school who added that "Even in towns, when a girl is looking for a job she is told; 'a kiss first', and she complies because she is in poverty." Many comments thus linked what was happening in the film to the social and cultural situation in Zimbabwe. This recognition in the film of their lived experiences deepens the film's impact.

Economic factors

THE COST OF schooling is a consideration that was bound to come up though the film is silent on this. It was inevitable that in spite of this many of the audience were well aware of the importance of the relationship between educational achievement and economic opportunities and were quick to read this into the film.

I think the father stops the girls from going to school. He wants the boys to go to school because they are the ones who make the family rich. That is why a lot of girls do not go to school.

Rumbidzai, a Grade 7 girl pupil at Karai Primary School

The depth of insight brought by audiences into this film and the issues it raises is reflected in the fact that the question of the inequality in access to ideas and learning between rural and urban children was raised in all the three provinces. The discussion at Domborembizi Primary School, for example, linked behaviour, as shown in the film and as it exists in real life, to poverty and the changing times which bring with them crises of rising expectations and to inequalities in access to information and entertainment between rural and urban areas. Chief Madziwa of Makoni, for example, observed that rural life has been continuously changing as there is always interaction between rural and city people. The latter make the rural people feel their relative poverty and their tastes and expectations are influenced by those in the city – because they desire the same things and same lifestyle as those in the city. Hence “even bride price is different” between town and country.

In fact, viewing the film was seen as a good in itself, irrespective of the film’s message. According to the chief, whereas those in the city are exposed to and learn from films, rural people are not so advantaged. According to him, children in the rural areas are obviously disadvantaged since they write the same Grade 7 examination as those in the urban areas who have been exposed to films and other learning environments. Almost echoing the chief, a male respondent at Takaruz

village said, "We want our children to watch educative films like this one, also about this new disease. And films that teach them about how people live and also ones which teach us parents how to bring up children".

Children here are different from city children because city children see more films. Yet, they write the same Grade 7 examination. It's not fair. Here in Domborembizi films started to be shown only in 1995 and there has been only one show – only once. Some see films daily while many here missed the one shown in 1995. But they all write the same Grade 7 examination. Who do you think will pass?

We at Domborembizi are far from schools. Others live in Highfield (a Harare city suburb) near good schools. Tariro walked many kilometres to school. It's not fair.

Chief Madziwa at Domborembizi

Emotive impact

FILM IS A WORK of art and, through its specific language, it works on the emotions as well as on the cognitive side of audiences. Significantly, primary school boys reacted strongly towards the father's behaviour. One boy at Karai Primary said that if his own father behaved as the father in the film does, he would be very angry with him for trying to "stop me from going to school". Another boy was emphatic in his hatred of drinking: "I hate alcohol", he said. He had hated it since childhood and did not like the behaviour of people who are drunk and their "talking nonsense". Another emotive issue was the perception that, as one boy at Hambe Primary put it, "the father sold his daughter for beer The father was bad for selling the child for beer".

The enjoyment of the film is tied to the unfolding of the story: to what the characters do and what happens to them. This concept of "enjoyment" arises from the viewer's comprehension of and ability to judge the characters' actions and their fate. Many, especially both boys and girls, were angered by the father not wanting Tariro to go to school

and by his drinking: they said they did not like the parts in the film when the father was saying this and that they enjoyed it when "Precious was able to pay school fees for Tariro" or when, at the end, Tariro was to continue with her schooling. On the other hand, a woman said: "I did not enjoy the film because of the sensitive issue of preferring to send boys rather than girls to school". Another at the same village said: "It did not please me because we must be treated equally and if one is not educated nowadays life is tough."

As mentioned earlier, the attempted rape scene aroused deep emotions. Both boys and girls said they felt sorry for Precious and hatred for Mudiwa. A boy said he was moved when Precious comes back home "because I wondered, with all her property and belongings, where would she go?" Another indicator of the emotions raised by the film is contained in the remarks of Chief Madziwa about inequalities in access to ideas and learning between rural and urban children.

Clearly the concept of "enjoyment" here is linked to how far the theme and content of particular sections of the film – or the whole film for that matter – agree with preconceived social and democratic values and norms already held by the viewers. These are also linked to such practical considerations as the rights of women to employability and a materially secure future. This is also linked to the idea that people normally expose themselves selectively to media products in order to avoid conflicts between their own values and beliefs and those expressed in the media product (we see another example of this in the women avoiding the musical film because of the type of dancing in it which they associate with "sinfulness"). This is what media researchers have described as an avoidance of cognitive dissonance.

The film as entertainment

THE ENTERTAINMENT value is important, for the effect of certain artistic ("edutainment" or "infotainment") works lie in the way that, through entertaining, they are also emotionally involving and moving. This is how they excite audiences and help them engage in the message being promoted. As we have said above the film was enjoyed because of its educative message. During the viewing of the film those who had seen

it before would, by their comments, guide others through the story. The majority of those who were asked whether they would like to see the film for a second time (including those in Matabeleland) responded positively. The few who said they would not were mainly young men who had been exposed to different genres and types of film and had therefore their entertainment needs well catered for.

However it seems that some of the audience made a distinction between "enjoying" the film and regarding it as "entertaining". A middle-aged male respondent at Karai Village went further than others in making the distinction between "entertainment" and "educational" films. According to him *Mwanasikana* "is not for entertainment but for education. The ones that are entertaining are the ones with (music) bands". Nonetheless this same man said that he enjoyed *Mwanasikana*.

A good illustration of this point may be seen from the reactions to the (nondescript) musical film shown alongside *Mwanasikana*. It made the young male (obviously married) adults speak positively of the value of musical entertainment (or "pure" entertainment). The older members of the audience however disapproved of this film because of the *kwasa kwasa* dancing in it that involves suggestive wriggling of the hips and buttocks. It was noticeable too that a good many of the older members of the audience left during the musical. Fortunately this was the last film to be shown. One woman at Domborembizi, in fact, expressed hostility to this film and stated her desire for religious material to help bring up children in a moral manner.

The entertainment value of the film should therefore be understood in a context where there is great hunger for entertainment in the rural areas; where there is therefore a great demand for films. In the context of this hunger, "entertainment" may carry different meanings. For example, a middle-aged man at Karai village said, "we enjoy films which are educative in their content". This links up with the concept of "enjoyment" discussed in the previous section and serves as a reminder that adults in the rural areas see educational material, whether from radio or film, as "enjoyable" – perhaps the proper word here is "edifying" – and of course there may be many factors that a contemporary rural adult audience may require of a film for it to be "edifying".

Factors affecting the overall impact of the film*The entertainment value of the film*

Audiences clearly regard *Mwanasikana* as an edifying film: one that is expected to help them understand the issues that concern their lives. They have come to expect *Mwanasikana* and other films to play this role. In fact even the reports from the mobile film unit crews speak in the same breath of its “goodness” and educative function. In a similar vein a mother at Domborembizi said that they want “films about thieves and rapists and how they are punished so that children can see what will happen to them if they steal”. Another woman expressed the opinion of most parents that they would like their children to watch films frequently – at least once a month. However she did not like the musical film “I didn’t like it: I like films that teach children so that they know”.

Social learning from the film’s characters

I was disappointed. I felt the mother’s anger and frustration as if I were her. It’s not good because I keep thinking of my own child not going to school, while her father is drinking at Mushonga bar and is selling her for beer. Impossible.... Jembe is a greedy man who can’t look after himself because if a father cannot work on a farm he should be a carpenter. It’s better to sell cow harnesses to get money for beer than to sell your child.

Woman at Domborembizi

The comments by the woman at Domborembizi give us a cue on an important aspect of how a film works. Following social learning theory, audiences are persuaded to change behaviour if they identify with characters. The ability of audiences to identify (and to feel) with characters is caught in this woman’s strong identification with the mother in the film.

Characterization is therefore an important part of the didactic art and it was therefore useful to find out how the various segments and sub-groups of audiences responded to the different characters and how they understood the positive and negative values and attributes associated with each character. It is important to identify those characters

who serve as role models for the viewers and those who are derided and laughed at because of their perceived anti-social behaviour. For example a man at Karai Village explicitly saw in Precious a very desirable role model: "Precious didn't succumb to a bad influence and she was very hard working. She was very good influence – if only other children had followed suit.... I felt pity for her because the man had spoilt her whole life".

Tariro

Tariro impresses because of her seriousness. Grade 7 girls at Karai Primary School identified with her because she likes school, works hard and is determined to go on with schooling. She is thus regarded as intelligent, diligent and as a positive role model. Grade 7 boys were also impressed by her liking for schooling which they identified. One boy at Karai Primary School, for example, said: "I was impressed that she went to study in the evening, instead of wasting time talking."

Precious

Precious impresses both boys and girls because she supports Tariro and goes out to get a job so that her sister can continue with school. She is also admired for exposing her father's plan to marry off Tariro to Mudiwa and in helping to make the father to change his mind at the end. In terms of helping to promote the message in the film, the Grade 7 girls understand that Precious's problems are related to her not having gone on with school beyond Grade 7. Hence she cannot find a suitable job that will make her independent. Her husband also rejects her because of her inadequate education. They hold her parents responsible for this "because they did not send her to school like other parents do".

Women in their twenties at Maqe Primary school saw her as a good example of an independent woman. They do not regard her as impolite to her father. Instead the father is accused of getting angry with her and of ignoring family protocol which requires that he talk to his daughters through their mother. It is Precious who makes the father see that he is wrong. Significantly a young man at Tamaruru business centre also

does not blame Precious for the way she speaks to her father at the end “because she had seen her father was wrong from the beginning and this contributed to her being raped by Mudiwa.”

The Mother

Both girls and boys saw the mother as good and responsible because she encourages Tariro to continue with school. She cares about her family and she also does most of the work of sustaining the home as mothers do in real life. As primary school pupils noted: “Mothers cook for us when we come back from school. They collect water and even wash our uniforms.” Female respondents at Takaruzza Village, Lower Guruve, also commented on this: “The mother works and is submissive while the father brags about being the owner of the child.” The old Karai Village VIDCO chairman said: “She handled the situation well. She did not agree with the father. She was very good.” Her delicate role was thus understood in the context of the domination of women by men: “It is true that African customs give the husband absolute authority.”

W 1: When a woman is under the (man's) authority she has to obey. She can only say, "Father, this not possible". Precious is the only one who came and used more forceful language when talking to the father.

Q: In your homes, if you see that your husband is wrong don't you get angry?

W 2: You get angry, but don't show it.

Women at Domborembizi

Significantly, good number of male respondents were also ready to discuss the oppression of women by men. A young man at Tamaruru business centre said: “I cannot look down on her. As a woman, she is under her husband’s authority. But she tried. She couldn’t continue trying to force things because it would cause problems between herself and her husband.” One primary school boy was impressed by the way the mother talks to her husband when trying to convince him about

Tariro continuing with school. "If she had shouted she would have failed". Chief Madziwa, commenting on the oppression of women, said: "The mother may be good but she has no say because she is oppressed. There was abuse of women when Precious was almost raped openly. The businessman was bad because he may have had AIDS and given it to the girl".

Jumbe

Jumbe was heavily criticized by most of the film's audiences, including (most vocally) the Grade 7 primary school boys for not wanting Tariro to continue with school; for what is perceived as his heavy drinking; his intention to sell off his daughter for this drink which is taken on credit, and his apparent lack of concern for the future. This indicates that even boys at this young age are already sensitive to these issues. People in all age groups saw him as bad because he does not want Tariro to continue with school and in his attempt to foist her on Mudiwa as payment for his drink. This last aspect aroused a lot of negative comment. It is understood as selfish. "He is concerned only about himself he does not care about the child." One girl was critical of the father for wanting to marry her off to an old man instead of letting her go on with school. Thus neither boys nor girls identify with him. Significantly, the boys also support the education of the girl.

Boy 1: He was enjoying himself, drinking a scud, while the children did not have money for school.

Q: Is the father daft or what?

Boy 2: The father's disease is not lack of money but love of alcohol.

Grade 7 boys at Karai Primary School.

He remains a figure of ridicule to women. He was ridiculed for (as the Maqe village interviewees put it) "giving his child to the storekeeper so that groceries become the bride price" and for being so greedy, a hopeless beer drinker. He is "a bad man because he does not want to educate

the girl and because he has misconceived ideas that the girl would become a prostitute". From comments made by women during viewing and discussions, many seemed to accept that he represents a dominant type of male behaviour. Jumbe represents a well-known type that is feared and hated by women and children for robbing them of opportunities to improve their lives.

Male viewers generally distance themselves from Jumbe and do not accept that he represents typical male behaviour. He is regarded by men as well as by women as acting irresponsibly. Most men pointed out that drink in itself is not bad. It is the individual who drinks irresponsibly who is to blame. It was claimed by the men that most of them had come to recognize the value of educating both male and female children. Those who held this view varied in age, education and geographical location, from the VIDCO chairman at Karai Village, Lower Guruve, to a 21-year-old teacher trainee, Bongani Mabhena, interviewed at Magama Primary School in Matabeleland. However, he was quick to point out that some parents do not support their children through secondary school. "After primary school some parents say, 'I have done enough. Now you can look after yourself.' The children will then wait till they are old enough to go and look for a job and hence the same cycle is reproduced where those who are working, but do not have enough education, serve as role models for young people".

Mudiwa

Instead of identifying with him, boys did not like Mudiwa because of the way he treated Precious, in particular, for his attempt to rape her. In fact, some boys said they hated him for the attempted rape. One boy at Karai Primary School said, "I saw the businessman as a thief who wanted to rape an employee". It is significant that the girls regard Mudiwa as old – the fact that he is a shopkeeper and apparently one of the better-off people in the neighbourhood does not seem to impress them. His ostensible riches notwithstanding, they would reject him because of his age. Further, the girls suggest that they would resist their fathers if they imposed a marriage on them to a man not of their choice.

Teacher : So Mudiwa was an old man?

Children: Yes!

Teacher : Isn't it said that old men are responsible? Tariro's father drank a lot of beer from Mudiwa, so he knew Tariro would be looked after just as well. So if you were Tariro would you not want an old man, who owns a store and a lot of money? You would just get into the store and get lotion, bread, and biscuits whenever you wanted?

Child 1: I would not want to marry him because Mudiwa would be older than me and I would just be a child, so it's impossible. What I would want to do is embarrass my father for what he had done.

Teacher: So you would be getting married to someone who is younger than you?

Child 1: I want someone of the same age as me.

Child 2: I say I would want to look for my own husband.

Teacher: You don't want anyone to look for a husband for you, Tsitsi?

Child 3: I would not want anyone to look for a husband for me. I want to finish school and then work to earn a lot more money than the man with his store does.

Grade 7 female pupils, Karai Primary School.

Perhaps the final verdict is the one voiced by a woman at Domborembizi: "He is a murderer because he is one of those men you leave with children and they rape them. The father and the businessman worked together."

Socio-economic factors affecting the film's impact

The question of educating girls is placed within wider considerations of future security in material terms. In other words, the child's education, like a life insurance, is expected to give material support to the parents in their old age. This is clearly linked to material insecurity (if not poverty). It is in this context that the "traditional" aspect becomes

significant in considerations over who to prefer in education – the boy or girl. However we found that this is not a problem that is solely decided according to gender and sex.

Among the Grade 7 girls there was agreement that fathers are generally the ones who resist the education of girls because of narrow and selfish materialist motives. Generally the Grade 7 girls did not support the view that it is only boys who support their parent and bring wealth to the home. They expressed their own ambition to go on to secondary school, get jobs and support themselves, their children and their parents by buying things for them and building them homes “so that they can live well”. Grade 7 boys made more or less the same observations. They identified with the positive attributes in the female characters and did not seem to see any differences between boys and girls when it came to their supporting their parents in the future. One boy, for example said he did not like the father “because he refused to allow the daughter to go to school yet if she did she would later get a good job and support them in old age”. Another boy provided an interesting response. Looking ahead to the girl as a future wife and companion he said “Women should be educated so as to make good wives”.

However interviews and discussions with older people showed that reactions to this issue do not automatically follow predictable indicators such as age, gender, social and geographical locale. Our general conclusion is that if parents have money they will send both boys and girls equally to school. The real test is when parents do not have enough money to send all their children to school and have to choose between boys and girls. Debate over what should guide one’s choice centred mainly on who would be the most likely to take care of the parent in old age – the boy or the girl? The support for educating the girl was not as straightforward as may have been expected from people who had seen the film and had said very positive things about the need to send the girl to school. In summary, there were four major responses:

- Many said they would choose the boy
- A few said they would choose the girl
- About equal numbers said they would send the brightest and most able to school

- The smallest number said that they would try and find ways of making money so that all children could go to school regardless of sex

These responses could be placed in three categories based on the apparent material consideration underlying the response:

- Concern over the parents' future (with the educated child viewed as a kind of insurance)
- Concern over both the parents' and their children's future
- Those (admittedly only a few) who were mainly thinking and worrying about the future of their children; whether the children would be able to fend for themselves and could stand on their own feet

These responses were not dependent on age, sex or education. A good number of women, for example, said that they would give boys preference. During the discussion at Hambe Primary school a mature female teacher supported giving the boy preference while a younger female teacher felt that she would rather support the girl. On the other hand, the (older) village VIDCO chairman at Karai said that he would give preference to the child who showed the higher aptitude and most promise to succeed in school. Equally both the male and female respondents at Takaruzza Village indicated that they would find it difficult to have to make a choice as all children deserve to be educated.

Our impression was that there is a slowly growing recognition of the changing role of girls and women and more parents are beginning to think of their children's education not only in terms of their own security but also in terms of the security of their children in their own right, regardless of gender. The concern about the educational inequalities between rural and city children also belongs here. However it was disappointing that few discussed fully the fact that Precious actually supports her father and the family, even when she is married, by sending the father money and parcels. Indeed when he receives something from her he remembers to remark that she is the "man" of the house. The significance of this role a daughter is shown playing in the film should have been recognized by audiences who were otherwise very perceptive. We suspect that they do not note this significance because they were still engrossed in overcoming the dominant concept in their minds

that the boy is the provider. As a result they did not see that the film had an important message to impart here.

Recognition and identification

Another factor that plays a part in the film's affect on audiences is what we refer to as the recognition and identification process, related to the social learning theory we have referred to above. The recognizable setting, characterization and depiction of familiar, everyday life and characters and the rhythms of life makes the audiences recognize themselves and their lives in the film. This recognition was observed in members of the audience during the viewing, when many made remarks on such mundane aspects as the appearance of the family's homestead and activities such as Tariro releasing the chickens from their coop before going to fetch water and then walking to school, while her mother sweeps the yard.

This recognition, plus their familiarity with events and experiences depicted in a story, elicits from audiences a greater degree of attention and emotional response. Through the film they are able to scrutinize their own lives and hopefully to review critically their beliefs and attitudes. Audiences also felt confident about discussing the film's contents. However the important question is whether they agreed with the intended meanings and whether this would lead to behaviour change.

Conclusions

THIS STUDY YIELDED some interesting insights on how rural audiences view and engage with films. Obviously more such studies are required in order to elaborate or modify these insights. One aspect of the film which remains inconclusive and, indeed, problematic is that concerning attitude and behaviour change. The film was made with the purpose of persuading and influencing rural people (especially males) to change their presumed attitude towards the education of girls. The film therefore belongs in the development communication category. Our argument, however, is that the discussion of audience responses above have underlined the problems (if not pitfalls) of interpreting the data available as proving (or not proving) that the film did lead to some change.

Looking back at the theoretical section in this paper, we want to suggest that the main reason behind this is that, in spite of the structure of the film and audiences' immediate response to it, there is still a need to pay attention to the social and cultural context in which the target receivers live and which has an effect on whatever influence such a film (or any other development material) may have.

Q: Do people change after seeing the film?

W: Some change because they understand but others think it's just a film.

Young woman at Domborembizi.

It is common knowledge that behavioural change is problematic. Since it is a long-term process and not an event it is doubtful that the mere viewing of a single film would bring about fundamental changes in people. In any case, as Chief Madziwa said, "awareness alone changes nothing". With this in mind, the first concern then is over the form and structure of the film and how it addresses the intended audience. We know that the making of the film followed procedures which are common and predictable in development communication: for example, interviews with key informants, understanding and incorporation of social and cultural factors and so on. The film as an end product, we have argued, is recognizable by the target audience in terms of setting, events, experiences, and characters. It appeals for justice, love and morality on the treatment of daughters.

In many ways, therefore, the film should positively influence parents to support the education of girls. However, in spite of the positive responses generated by the film, its overall impact is, to our mind, undermined by two structural weaknesses. The film conforms to a tradition of didactic development "infotainment" artistic works. These tend to overemphasize their "lessons" at the risk of depth of character and a rounded discussion of the issues. The nature of characterization, for example, may not have helped the film to achieve its goals. As we have indicated, males wished to distance themselves from Jumbe because he

is too crude and one dimensional. It is doubtful if the film made them search deeply into themselves before reacting as they did. It could, for example, be reasonably argued that the simple one- or two-dimensional characterization (in which some are delineated as saintly and others devilish) leads people to identify emotively with the more positive characters (or to be seen to do so publicly) since the film makes identifying with the devilish characters appear to be anti-social and unacceptable. But this identification is not grounded on a solid foundation of understanding and conversion which would lead to sustainable change. Hence, though our data seemed to show a massive consensus on the virtues of education and hard work and the evils of drunkenness, rape, and so on, there is reason to believe that there is a gap between what we were told and what is done on a day to day basis.

Apart from this the structure and organization of the film fail to address the more deeply-felt dilemmas people experience when making decisions over the change that is required (for example, in this case, whether to send boys, girls or both to school – and the monetary resources available). What values and principles shall inform the making of such decisions? What conflicts does a father go through when making decisions between “tradition” and the demands of the new times?). The significance of this point may be grasped when we consider that Jumbe, the father in the film, changes rather abruptly from a devil to saint. Further apparent affluence surfaces to allow the family to send their three children to school in sparkling new uniforms and full satchels – this in spite of our knowing that Jumbe has a heavy debt at Mudiwa’s shop, thanks to his drinking. In other words, notwithstanding the assumed weaknesses of rural audiences, some subtlety and depth can be, in the long run, effective ways of persuasion and change.

Some of the points raised above more or less explicitly challenge the development communicator to rethink their attitude towards a rural audience: does the communicator assume that they are *the* obstacle to development? Are they active or passive, objects or subjects in change? Are they to be patronized or not? Can they indeed understand the complexities of life and existence? Apart from such questions which are embodied in the structure of a message, there is the more problematic

question of how to enhance the participatory aspect especially when a "big" medium such as film is used.

The second concern is with the resources in the making and distribution of this and other films. Clearly in order for the film to be influential, there was a need for more follow-up films and other forms of representation, sending more or less the same messages and reinforcing each other. The fact that there is only one such film argues against long-term influences. This is more so when the mobile cinema units through which it is flighted take anything up to eight years (as had happened at one place) before they can revisit an area. Thus though people expressed positive responses to the film, there are clearly questions as to how far a single viewing of a film such as this is able to change people's behaviour in the long term. Indeed many viewers felt that the story told by the film is unfinished and asked for a sequel.

The third concern has to do with the social and cultural values which the target audience hold and which influence their responses to the film. Linked to the point about identification with characters made above, a related question is the depth of their cognition from this single viewing. Could it not be that they simply agree with the theme and narrative of the film in the first flush of the moment? What happens when, in time, the film's influence fades away as other realities become even more overriding? Such realities are firstly, the simple economic calculations and decisions which they have to make related to whether to send any or all of their children to school or only their sons. This material situation is very important in whatever decisions are being made. It is worth pointing out again that, in fact, material considerations and lack of enough money to send all children to school work together with and reinforce "tradition" because boys come to be favoured in such situations.

In any case the attitudes and forms of behaviour held by the audience before the viewing of the film would continue to exert influence. Needless to say, such attitudes derive from the wider social and cultural context. Audiences were in fact astute enough to recognize that lack of money was not the whole story. The example of Jumbe, the father, helped to underline the fact that there are social-cultural prejudices against

educating girls which some blamed on ignorance and a failure to change with the times. It has been recognized that there are still fathers who force their daughters to marry the man of their (the father's) choice. As one teacher at Hambe primary school said "it is cultural. Some fathers still do *yekuzvarira iya iya*" (the custom of pledging a young girl to a man). It was awareness of this aspect that led Chief Madziwa to suggest a drastic way of bringing about behavioural change – that of using legal force. He recommended that "the government should impose laws on chiefs that all children, both boys and girls, should go to school."

However, though it was not clear how extensive and among which specific groups change has come to be recognized as inevitable, there is obviously a strong undercurrent of awareness that times have changed and parents also have to change. There is therefore an environment in which new values could be nurtured in order to push out those of the old ones which may not be consistent with the changing times. The film *Mwanasikana* aims to reinforce the new values and ridicule the old ones and development workers should planning to reinforce such messages, precisely in order precisely to achieve this goal.

A fourth concern is how far such a once-off study as this one is able to really elicit the underlying forces shaping people's attitudes and behaviour and thus yield conclusive results. One disconcerting aspect of this study is that unlike those studies which have been done elsewhere, it seems that people in rural Zimbabwe almost always agree with the message that is intended by the maker of the film without much dissent. This is obviously an aspect that requires further research.

Regardless of these concerns, we recognize that the film serves an important function by providing entertainment and aesthetic satisfaction, especially for those who have little else in the way of entertainment. In the same way that audiences enjoy watching local fiction (entertainment) programmes on television, people enjoy watching *Mwanasikana* and other local films as a way of seeing themselves (especially when they are not always exposed to films and other forms of entertainment. We re-emphasize that audiences are hungry for films and are positively oriented to, and enjoy, the films shown by the mobile film units.

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