Exploring Community Radio Programming Practices to Inform Environmental Education at Livingstone Museum in Zambia

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study (Muloongo, 2010) that investigated how participatory radio programming might be used to inform and extend museum-based community engagement in environment and sustainability concerns. Preliminary research on museum education practices established that these are primarily expert-led and centred on exhibitions and outreach, with limited participation by the community. The study was initiated after a brief experience of working on community radio that revealed a contrasting approach, including the community in discussing locally relevant content that was followed by the addition of the knowledge of a mediating expert.

A collective case study (multi-site) design was used to probe educational programming practices used in community radio. The paper explores how community radio station programming engages listeners in community-generated education programmes that are produced through collaborative work with radio listener clubs. Research on three cases of community radio programming concludes that community radio provides opportunities for community-led social learning which the Livingstone Museum could make use of to extend and localise its engagement with the community in environmental learning.

Introduction

This paper is based on a study that looked at how community radio stations in Malawi and Zambia are working with communities through radio listener clubs to bring about community participation in addressing community concerns. The study considered how the Livingstone Museum could work with the community through community radio to undertake outreach education activities.

The research on participatory radio programming practices was undertaken at three sites. They were the Dzimwe Community Radio Station based in Monkey Bay in Malawi, and in Zambia research was conducted with two community radio stations, namely Chikuni Community Radio in the Monze District of southern Zambia and Radio Musi-o-Tunya in Livingstone, Zambia. Dzimwe Community Radio was set up by UNESCO as a community-managed initiative to address environmental concerns within the Lake Malawi National Park. Chikuni Community Radio is managed by a Catholic church development ministry and Radio Musi-o-Tunya is a community radio station with more mixed programming. All three stations broadcast mainly to the rural community and have community structures called radio listener clubs. By researching these three cases I wanted to learn how community radio used these structures to engage the community in environmental education programming. By using

social learning as the guiding principle (Glasser, 2007), I studied how the programming for social learning through community radio takes place, and how the Livingstone Museum at which I worked could use radio to enhance community participation in learning processes.

Research Methodology

The study of participatory programming at the radio stations was conducted as a qualitative case study within the interpretive tradition (Yin, 1993; Gillham, 2000; Gerring, 2007). It employed what Stake (2000) referred to as 'collective case study design' (multi-site qualitative research) where a researcher may study a phenomenon in diverse case contexts. In looking at the three community radio stations, I drew on Yin (2009:20), who states 'case studies can cover multiple cases and then draw a single set of "cross-case" conclusions'. In other words, lessons are drawn about a particular phenomenon from research across several cases.

The study focused on three questions:
1. How do current museum outreach practices engage the Livingstone community in environment and sustainability learning?
2. How does community radio currently engage listeners in social learning?
3. How can museum outreach and community radio programming be partnered in environment and sustainability learning?

To address these questions I worked with listener groups associated with community radio stations in order to understand how learning through radio takes place at group level. I also worked with managers of community radio stations and the Livingstone Museum to understand the community learning activities and approaches used by these institutions.

The first phase of data generation involved mainly face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The interviews were meant to obtain information about the experiences of education practitioners in both the museum and the radio stations. The recorded interviews were transcribed for easy analysis and to ensure that the interviewee expressions were correctly captured. The data was analysed thematically. The second phase involved a strategy workshop where participants from Radio Musi-o-Tunya and the Livingstone Museum were presented with the initial findings on education practices in the museum and community radio stations. The strategy workshop was meant to provide a participatory learning environment that empowers people through active sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences (Fleming, 1997). It was through the workshop that possible strategies were identified which would facilitate the Livingstone Museum's working together with community radio stations to produce educational programmes.

Research Findings and Discussion

Deliberation and networking through radio programming to engage communities
The community radio programming examined covered diverse issues. The practices were centred on engaging the local community to elicit stories and issues that are authentic and generated from within communities. Evidence from the environmental conservation radio

programme aired on Dzimwe Community Radio showed that the programme involved stories, poems and drama generated by the local community. The materials used to engage the community in deliberative learning were focused on local environmental concerns. Some of the topics discussed include concerns about reductions in fish stocks on Lake Malawi, and the need to promote tree planting to reduce the pressure on the high demand for firewood. The environmental issues opened up in materials from the radio listener clubs were then broadcast to engage the wider listeners with call-in discussions and expert commentary.

Similarly, radio listener clubs at Chikuni Community Radio (Zambia) identify community issues and record these for radio broadcasting. One of the issues that was discussed was the community concern about the proliferation of an invasive plant called *lantana camara* that some members of the community had been planting as a fencing hedge. The focus on how issues are being identified by the community allowed for the inclusion of local knowledge and experiences. This approach is supported by Dyball *et al.,* (2007), who argue for locally designed solutions to environmental problems. They remind us that 'attempting to solve local problems by "importing" solutions which have worked in a different context has met recurrent failure in terms of sustainability' (2007:182). Here, extending expert-generated exhibition practices into more direct work with locally generated environmental materials to address locally identified environmental problems may be much more likely to succeed. Working with the local community in environment and sustainability issues is also in line with the observations made by Janse van Rensburg (1996) which claim that to solve environmental issues we need to make changes to our social systems and actions. Once we work with communities to identify and address environmental concerns, the community will always address what is really important to them.

In the case of Radio Musi-o-Tunya in Livingstone (Zambia), the drama in the *Our Family* programme is not generated by the communities. However, the drama is designed in such a way that materials on social issues that are prevalent in the community are used to depict true-life situations which the community can relate to. The drama is scripted so that it does not prescribe any solutions, but raises questions and controversy to encourage debate among the listeners in the community. The scriptwriters noted that it is through debate that people have an opportunity to learn in ways that open up possible change practices. Wals (2007b:19) argues, '[i]n social learning, the learning goals are, at least in part, internally determined by the community of learners itself'. He further comments that social learning 'tends to refer to learning that takes place when divergent interests, norms, values and constructions of reality meet in an environment that is conducive to meaningful interaction' (2007a:39). In this case the locally informed scripting of the drama becomes a way of engaging a community of learners. This approach is significant for creating a platform conducive for engaging listeners in locally relevant environmental concerns.

Deliberation across ages and issues

Working with local stories engages both adults and the young, providing opportunities for learning interactions across a wide age range and associated topics of interest. In all the radio stations studied, my research interest was programming with a focus and discussion of issues

raised by the community. The programming involved deliberation at two stages. Firstly, at the stage of programme preparation when radio listener clubs discuss issues and secondly, by way of phone interactions during live radio programme presentations. One of the limitations of the community discussion approach is that established community perspectives can simply circulate without fostering change. This trend towards the prevailing conventional wisdom being sustained is addressed in community radio stations' programming where the station uses a 'magazine format' of programming by bringing in expert commentary that invites critical engagement.

In situations where one community listener club generated a subject for radio broadcast, the rest of the listeners in the radio's coverage area are also engaged and enter the discussion. Programming with one part of a listening community can thus open environmental challenges that are more widely engaged. This evidence led me to note that this mode of radio programming begins to create and operate across a network of learning communities (Wals, 2007b; Glasser, 2007; Wals & van der Leij, 2007). Here, since environment and sustainability issues require participation of the wider community to address them, working with a network of communities through radio provides opportunities for wider deliberation and participation in decision-making and action-taking, and increases the chances of suggested solutions to challenges being taken up in critical conversation by the community. It was evident that discussions bring about learning interactions as people share opinions and experiences about the issue at hand. According to Wals and Heymann (2004:9), 'in social learning the interactions between people [both in listener clubs and across the network] are viewed as possibilities or opportunities for meaningful learning'. In deliberation both within and following radio programmes, the social learning taking place appears to involve both dialogue on a topic and a meaning-making exchange of ideas and feelings, such that participants benefit by being part of a deliberative critical community engaging with local environmental concerns. The case evidence pointed to how community radio station programming practices can facilitate social learning, through work with the establishment of community structures (radio listener clubs) and wider deliberation and expert commentary both during and flowing from the radio programmes.

This case evidence agrees with Alumuku (2006:40), who observes that through community radio, 'specific problems can be analysed, remedies discussed, and those most affected – or who can help with the solution – mobilised to collective action'. The community-generated environmental issues are specific, and the process of deliberation allows for the identification of possible partners towards collective action.

Challenges and opportunities for extending and changing existing museum practices

The study of radio station programming and learning interactions revealed that the museum as a knowledge-rich institution is operating in a narrow 'delivery of the conservation message' perspective with declining community visitors coming in to learn from its exhibitions and with declining funds for outreach activities. School outings continue with a slight decline but the topics relate to the content and concepts of the school syllabus. The evidence suggests that the museum has been operating in a manner that sets it apart as a place of knowledge to which

the public must be attracted. To this effect Walsh (1992:60) challenges museum practitioners by stating that 'a "new museology" must concern itself with involving the public, not just during the visit to the museum through interactive displays, but also in the production of their own past'. Similarly, Hooper-Greenhill (1994) calls for an integration of the functions of the museum so that knowledge of collections is related to, and generated by, the knowledge of the audience. This, therefore, implies that in addressing environment and sustainability concerns, the approach to museum education and specifically to outreach activities needs to be reviewed to enable community participation and learning. The research allowed me to conclude that a museum must become both an encounter and an outreach space where audiences can participate in and co-define what is represented for them in relation to their environment and sustainability concerns.

Learning and change through participation with expert commentary

There are two main ways in which expert knowledge is used in community radio educational programming. Some programmes simply focus on the expert explaining issues for the listeners, usually through interviews with radio personnel, while other programming allows for more co-defining interaction between the community and the experts on specific subjects.

In programming that engaged the local communities, it was interesting to note that the bringing in of expert opinion was a significant part of the radio programmes, and that this stimulated further community responses and action-taking possibilities. This evidence allowed me to conclude that working with local issues identified by the community can be enriched with the addition of expert knowledge to mediate the prevailing perspectives on environmental issues in the community. This was evident in cases where the issues were directly generated by the community as in the case of environmental conservation programmes at Dzimwe Community Radio, as well as in the *Our Family* programme at Radio Musi-o-Tunya, where drama was used to set the context, followed by community discussion, then comments from specialised experts through the feedback programme.

During the recording of radio programmes, the community discusses the topic, identifying the challenge at hand, and suggests other concerned individuals and institutions to be involved in finding solutions. Sometimes, after hearing the community's concerns, the radio producers are able to identify other concerned individuals and institutions. The radio station producers invite experts to comment on or challenge or explain the phenomenon under discussion. This allows both the community and the expert to reflect upon the issues raised in the discussion. According to Dyball *et al.* (2007), the reflection on the value of what one knows and how one gets to know it leads to new understandings, and thus learning takes place.

The idea of working with the community to identify environment and sustainability issues within the community accords with the observation by Gough (1997) that in environmental education there is a growing recognition of the socially constructed nature of knowledge and support for situated learning. This approach to learning takes on board the learners' prior knowledge. Challenging established community perspectives allows further deliberation that can lead to community-led practice-change, a significant factor in addressing environment and sustainability concerns.

Museum and community radio can complement each other for education

Radio and the museum could work together in education programming to engage the community in environmental learning. Currently, the Livingstone Museum waits for people to visit the exhibitions within the museum building. On the other hand, community radio stations operate through community structures such as radio listener clubs. Working with the community in their locality encourages social learning processes as people interact with one another in addressing environmental issues. As Wals and Heymann (2004) observed, through social interactions, possibilities and opportunities for meaningful learning are created. The interactions are beneficial to education activities because they facilitate dialogue and exchange of experiences and ideas that may eventually influence practice-change.

The museum has professional staff that have access to technical knowledge on environmental issues, but they are unable to reach out to the community due to limitations of facilities and funds. Radio, however, has the facility (air-time) to reach out to the community, but may lack the technical knowledge in environment and sustainability issues. Therefore, the museum and radio stations could plan the basic environmental education programme layout so that it allows the community to raise issues, and then the technical staff at the museum would provide commentary to address the issues raised. The role of the radio staff would then be to transform the environmental education content into participatory radio programmes. This approach would ensure that the community becomes part of the process of constructing the environment and conservation messages to be broadcast to the wider community, a process that will create a 'sense of ownership' of the programme, and may add to the likelihood of the success of the implementation of that programme. This follows from O'Donoghue's (1993) suggestion that rather than continuing concentrating efforts on awareness through external messages and wildlife experiences, we need to support the structures and 'tools' for environmental problem-solving among participants at a local level. It also agrees with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) observation that 'sharing knowledge, linking different viewpoints, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding are essential for encouraging participation among stakeholders, and communication is central to this task' (FAO).

Both radio and museum education approaches are characterised by some form of social learning. In these approaches, social learning is important because it promotes 'situatedness' and community participation in learning activities to foster relevance towards addressing environment and sustainability concerns. As Glasser (2007) observed, social learning provides the opportunity to directly engage both a broad range of perspectives and the whole human being. It has the potential to promote effective environmental learning processes.

Community radio provides the mass communication tool which by design opens up a community-situated method of addressing issues (social learning) in a local situation. Patterns of participatory programming appear to increase the prospect of local engagement and responsiveness to community needs. The museum can use this to advance its mandate of fostering environmental learning in the community.

Conclusion

The research analysed how education programming in a museum (the Livingstone Museum) and community radio stations (Chikuni, Dzimwe and Musi-o-Tunya) unfolded to engage community audiences in environmental learning. The differences are stark but mutually beneficial compatibilities are apparent.

Historically and in simple terms, the Livingstone Museum education approach has been to represent environmental knowledge and to attract visitors to interact with exhibits so that they might think over the information to become aware of local environmental change and conservation concerns. Curators and education staff have been questioning this approach for some time and this has shaped outreach programmes that have had appeal but have been difficult to sustain. As I have worked on the education programming challenges in a museum, this study has led me to begin to redefine the museum environmental project by proposing that its knowledge strengths be more aligned with the co-engaged processes of community learning programming that are used in community radio. Community radio is characterised by active community participation both at the level of members of radio listener clubs and in engaging learning interactions between listeners and experts.

However, to effectively employ radio for environmental learning, one needs to carefully select programming and broadcasting approaches that are interactive and open to community contributions. In probing interactive programming and the mediating role of the expert, this study has opened up community radio programming as an exciting extension of current museum education practices. A strategy workshop followed the study and a working partnership between museums and community radio stations has been opened up. Further research will have to be done to probe how programming practices play out in local engagement in social learning around the pressing environmental issues of our times. At this stage all that the study can report is useful insights and the beginnings of an environment and sustainability education collaboration between a museum and its local community radio station.

Note on the Contributor

Henry Muloongo is a Curator of Ecology at The Copperbelt Museum in Zambia. His research draws attention to the many ways in which education can take place, and the significance of educational partnership building. His interest is the promotion of community participation in environment and sustainability learning through community radio. Email:: muloongoah@yahoo.com

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