

AUTUMN 2007

INFO BRIEFS

▶ **SOLOMON ISLANDS:**

When a deadly tsunami swept through the western region of the Solomon Islands in May, ADRA responded immediately, providing emergency supplies to help affected families rebuild their lives. ADRA worked with residents on Choiseul Island in nearly 40 villages to rehabilitate, rebuild, and assist in the redesign of homes..

▶ **NICARAGUA:** U.S.

Ambassador Paul Trivelli visited an ADRA food security project currently being implemented in one of Nicaragua's most impoverished regions. The project has changed the lives of more than 75,000 individuals since its inception in 2002. It is scheduled to run through September 2008.

▶ **TOGO:** ADRA is improving access to potable water for approximately 13,500 people in nine villages in Togo. The project will also create committees to manage the new water sources and educate beneficiaries on improved health and hygiene practices.

▶ **LIBERIA:** ADRA completed a project that helped rebuild the lives of post-war returnees by improving food availability for 3,300 returning households, by teaching farmers basic agricultural methods, as well as distributing farming equipment, seeds, and planting materials.

PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES

## Working With the Media

The media wields a major influence in shaping both national and international agendas on development issues. Media attention on a particular issue can dramatically affect the situation and encourage a response from the public and the government.

Many development organizations view the media as an enemy. Partnership *with* the media can be a powerful tool for change and have a real impact on issues. Unfortunately, many organizations do not know how to work with the media to get news about their good work into the public's hands.

The key to working effectively with the media lies in building relationships. Begin by finding out which local reporters write about the issues that relate to your work. Get to know them and find out what

sort of stories they are interested in. Then, when you have a story send it directly to them, and follow up with a phone call. Other tips:

- ▶ Most journalists are interested in stories of individuals' experiences. Avoid sending lengthy, dull reports and policy documents to them. Break down the content of reports and policy documents into interesting short stories focusing on the people involved.
- ▶ Limit press conferences, keep them short, and be very clear about the message you want to give. Avoid giving lengthy speeches about your organization.
- ▶ Press releases should be short and contain the most important information in the first paragraph.



**BEST PRACTICES, CONT.**

- ▶ Your organization should have a press officer or information officer on staff trained in communicating with and developing useful relationships with the media. As an alternative, a senior staff member should be trained in media relations.
- ▶ Take the initiative in sharing information, but avoid making constant demands for media attention: no unnecessary press conferences, media lunches, or cheap publicity stunts.
- ▶ Your organization should never pay to have stories about its good works printed or broadcast, nor should you shower journalists with gifts.

- ▶ Respond as quickly and as accurately as possible to queries from media outlets. Be honest.
- ▶ In difficult situations, don't be afraid to refuse to answer a journalist's question. However, try to avoid unhelpful responses such as "No comment." When in doubt, ask for time to provide a better and accurate response. Be firm, but polite.

Humanitarian organizations must understand that media organizations have their own vision and objectives, and will often have their own agenda on an issue. Whether these agendas are openly declared or hidden, they need to be clearly understood. If not, an

organization could become involved in a media relationship that, instead of supporting and promoting its work, could harm it.

With careful planning, organizations can learn to use the media strategically to share their objectives, visions, and goals with a larger audience, as well as draw attention and advocate humanitarian issues.

*Adapted from "Effective Communication: Working with the Media," by Babatope Akinwande. Published in Footsteps 71 (June 2007). Footsteps is a quarterly newsletter for health and development workers published by Tearfund International. Current and past issues are available online at [www.tearfund.org/tilz](http://www.tearfund.org/tilz).*

## Transitions and New Hires

**Jonathan Beagles**

Senior Financial Compliance Administrator. New staff member.

**Tricia Hayes**

Associate Director for Recruitment, Bureau for Human Resources. New staff member.

**Guillermo Lizarraga**

Assistant Director for Food Security, Bureau for Program Management. Former Project Director for ADRA Bolivia.

**Alison Young**

Executive Assistant to the President. Former Administrative Assistant to the Regional Director for ADRA Asia Regional Office.

**Sasha Ross**

Technical Assistant, Bureau for Emergency Management. Transitioning from Office Assistant, Bureau for Emergency Management.

**Joshua Poole**

ADRA Madagascar Programs Director.

**Brina Leroux**

ADRA France Country Director.

**John Ravelomanantsoa**

ADRA Madagascar Project Director.

**Vinod Nelson**

ADRA Afghanistan Country Director. Transitioning from Programs Director for ADRA Afghanistan.

**Linda Zhu**

ADRA China Country Director. Transitioning from Programs Director for ADRA China.

**Grant Hillier**

ADRA Laos Country Director. New staff member.

**Marcel Wagner**

ADRA Myanmar Country Director. Former Country Director for ADRA Afghanistan.

**Antony Jose**

ADRA Azerbaijan Country Director. Transitioning from Assistant Country Director for ADRA Azerbaijan.

**Wagner Herrman**

ADRA Ethiopia Country Director. Former ADRA Bangladesh Country Director.

**Claudio Sandoval**

ADRA Honduras Country Director; Former ADRA El Salvador Country Director.

**Adam Kis**

ADRA Sao Tome Project Director.

Note: The bureau for human resources of ADRA International provides the information for the Transitions and New Hires section of *First Monday*.

## T H I N K   A B O U T   I T

## The Journey of Good Writing

Beulah Manuel, PhD, English Teacher,  
Columbia Union College

If your dream is to be a writer, it can be achieved. Almost anyone can sit at a computer and write all day, every day, and many do. But if your dream is to become a *good* writer, then you have an added challenge. And if your dream is to become a *good, published* writer, you have a “steep hill” to climb.

If you look at writing as a journey, it’s the journey and not the destination that really matters. Unless you are some sort of a genius, it is a rare thing to wake up every morning feeling inspired to write. Writing is an experimental art as well as an experiential art. Remember, it is easy to get discouraged even when you are a successful writer because belief in yourself as a writer isn’t always easy to sustain. But the greatest failure is to not even try because of the fear of failure!

Learning how to write better reports, articles, and stories can be fun. Writing does not have to be a boring, tiresome and uncomfortable task you loathe to face each time a report or an article is due. The process of giving an idea or a thought an external reality and a physical existence has a great deal of power and can be a rewarding experience.

Here are some simple guidelines for effective writing:

- ▶ Decide on your purpose. What does your report or article aim

to do? Is it to inform, persuade, observe, evaluate or evoke an emotion? This is important because the writing style, tone, use of language need to be geared towards your purpose.

- ▶ Think of an attractive title. This is a real challenge. The title says it all. Create enough curiosity for your readers. This is the only way you can attract your reader’s attention to your writing.
- ▶ Focus on human interest. The feelings and emotions you put in the article or report are crucial. Think of writing a human-interest story.
- ▶ Provide accurate information. You can interpret, but not distort. The facts should be capable of being verified. Accurate information is essential for

effective communication and decision making.

- ▶ Be concise. Do not mistake brevity for conciseness. A report or article may be brief because it omits important information. A concise one, on the other hand, is short but contains all the essential details.
- ▶ Get the visuals right. If the photos and graphics are familiar, readers are more likely to understand that the message is for them. Images have a lot of power. Make sure they say what you mean, and not something you don’t.
- ▶ Make it easy to read. Write in a language familiar to your reader. Keep the sentences short and the vocabulary simple. Follow the KISS principle—keep it short stupid!



## MY TURN

## Lessons Learned: Project Close Downs

*Matthew Gameda, Senior Financial Compliance Administrator, ADRA International*

A great deal of effort goes into needs assessment, proposal writing, and securing funding for a project. When the project is funded, start up and launching activities drive a lot of adrenalin. Yet, the reality of close down looms, unavoidably resulting in scale down in project activities, termination notice to staff, and notification to the community and beneficiaries. The impact of closing down a project is especially significant in areas where the project has been a major employer and provider of services

to the beneficiaries. Without proper preparation, employees, beneficiaries, and the community may drift into denial and anger as the close down draws nearer.

How do you prepare employees, beneficiaries, the community for the inevitable fact of project close down? And what are the security risks involved?

Recently, after 10 years of implementation of Health and Food Security Projects in a rural setting, ADRA staff learned firsthand some valuable lessons in dealing with potentially volatile project close downs. Some of the most important lessons include:

**Provide Full Disclosure Upfront:** At the inception of the project, inform all stakeholders that the project is funded for a

specific period of time and that staff employment and services to beneficiaries will cease when the funding period ends.

**Build Relationships:**

Provide progress reports to all stakeholders, both in programmatic and financial activities. When this is done periodically and consistently, all stakeholders will gradually become sensitized to the project's closure.

**Be Transparent:** Share close-down plans and procedures with project personnel, the community, and beneficiaries at least six months in advance. Conduct meetings as needed to clearly communicate close-down activities, including disposal of project assets, donor rules, and compliance requirements in closing down operations. This helps



employees, beneficiaries, and the community understand the process and avoid unrealistic expectations.

**Build a Network of Human Intelligence:** From start up to completion, the impact of the project should be closely monitored. Monitor the pulse of the community and beneficiaries and any shift in employee behavior as the project progresses into close out. A network of human intelligence should be developed to gather, screen, interpret, and use information that does not necessarily show up in routine formal data collection. Spend 70 percent of the time in the field and 30 percent in the office to stay close to and abreast of the chatter that goes on in the community. This helps in contingency planning!

**Safeguard Assets and Premises:** In the course of project implementation, assets with various natures, uses, and values are provided to project employees. Administrative, finance, and program staff have access to and are in custody of project resources. Securing these resources and maintaining close control is vital as the project close out nears.

- ▶ Cash resources must be monitored and controlled on daily basis. Employees with access to cash may disappear when they realize that they will be out of a job in just a matter of days or weeks.
- ▶ Movement of inventory and other portable assets must be controlled. Such assets may begin disappearing slowly unless sufficient physical controls are in place. In cases where it is deemed necessary for the staff to use portable assets outside premises,

authorization and approval procedures must be implemented.

- ▶ Expenses such as fuel, repairs and maintenance, and medical claims must be monitored and controlled. Such expenses begin sky rocketing towards the end of a project.
- ▶ Premises must be secured. Security personnel must be instructed to register and screen visitors. Activities of security guards must also be monitored by project management staff.

**Trust, but Verify:** It is human nature to build relationships with co-workers, and it is certainly appropriate to build and maintain work relationships based on trust with office staff to promote a positive, healthy work environment.

However, keep in mind that local hires, especially those in communities with limited employment opportunities, have much at stake when the project closes out. When they realize their livelihoods are at stake, your own employees might turn against you and pose security risks. And these employees will have the sympathy of the local community, including law enforcement.

Therefore, trust your employees—with caution. Prepare contingency plan to prevent loss of cash, electronic data files, portable computers, and other assets. And, be very vigilant with disgruntled drivers, who might be tempted to steal agency-owned vehicles.

*(Technical Editors Note: In the final days of this project, community leaders and government authorities withdrew support and protection allowing staff to take advantage of their situation and the larger political unrest. ADRA leadership fled with little more than key records.)*



## Resources

### The Partnering Initiative

(<http://thepartneringinitiative.org>)

Offers a wide range of opportunities for greater understanding and analysis of the partnership paradigm. Provides the services that help to build capacity for effective collaboration for sustainable development.

### Peace and Collaborative Development Networking

(<http://internationalpeaceandconflict.ning.com>)

A free professional networking site to encourage interaction between individuals and organizations worldwide involved in development, peace, conflict resolution, and related fields.

### Famine Early Warning Systems Network

(<http://www.fews.net>)

FEWS NET is a USAID activity that collaborates with international, national, and regional partners to provide timely and rigorous early warning and vulnerability information on emerging or evolving food security issues.

TRENDS AND ISSUES

## A Ten Point Plan for Making Aid More Effective and Accountable.

*Making Aid Accountable and Effective: the Challenge for the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Accra, Ghana 2008.*

*Making Aid Accountable and Effective*, a report published in 2007 by ActionAid International, sets out a Ten Point Plan for achieving the necessary reform of aid at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to be held in Accra, Ghana, in September 2008. The report argues that if aid is to work effectively for poor people, both rich donor countries and southern governments will need to radically increase their levels of accountability and transparency.

The report calls on donors and southern governments to make the following ten changes to improve aid:

1 Organize real and substantive, not token, consultation processes for the Forum

2 Respect real ownership of the development process, support participation, and end economic policy conditionality.

3 Develop open, transparent mechanisms that allow citizens to hold their governments and donors to account for the use of aid.

4 Introduce agreed, transparent, binding contracts to govern aid relationships

5 Move the aid reform process to a more representative institution than the OECD

6 Improve international accountability through a UN aid commissioner and ombudsman

7 Ensure donors adhere to the highest standards of openness and transparency

8 Ensure technical assistance is truly demand-driven

9 Allocate aid in a fair and transparent way, according to need, and improve aid predictability

10 End the scandal of tiered aid

The centrality of women's rights to the aid-quality agenda is also highlighted and the authors suggest this should be a main focus.

The paper concludes that the meetings in Ghana should catalyze a fundamental overhaul of the aid system, which it argues is needed to help deliver on global promises to eradicate poverty, and make aid truly accountable to southern countries and citizens.

To download the Ten Point Plan in its entirety, please visit: [http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc\\_lib/making\\_aid\\_accountable\\_and\\_effective.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/making_aid_accountable_and_effective.pdf)

*Originally published by ActionAid International, 2007.*



## LEADERSHIP TIPS

## Keys to Effective Writing

Rachel Lambeth-Beagles, Technical Assistant, ADRA International

**I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.**

— Douglas Adams

**T**he sad truth? Most of us just aren't natural-born writers. You might be the exception, but the majority of us don't particularly relish writing the reports, proposals, or case studies often required in development work. Yet, the fact remains: there's no escaping the global-interconnectedness of ADRA's work that makes good writing skills essential. As part of civil society we have a message that can influence and motivate others. Written communication is one of the most effective methods of reaching ADRA's wide-ranging audience.

Below are several key elements of effective writing that just might help you find the right words for that project proposal, evaluation study, or *First Monday* article.

### Purpose

Before setting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, consider the reason why you are writing. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ Why is this document needed?
- ▶ What do I want this reader to think, learn or do after reading this document?

An effective document promotes thought and action. As a writer,

you must be careful to share information and ideas without losing objectivity. Unchecked emotion and unsupported claims are two of the quickest ways to destroy the intention of the document.

### Audience

Writing is most effective when the reader finds it useful. Think about who is going to use this information and tailor the language and style to fit the readers. Consider asking these questions as you write:

- ▶ Who is your audience? What or how much do they already know?
- ▶ What information is the audience anticipating from this document? Is there a common structure that a document of this type follows? For example, expected elements of a progress report usually include: a summary, progress to date, future activities, monitoring and evaluation, and financial analysis.
- ▶ Is the information relevant to the purpose or audience? Be analytical and concise, avoiding detail that will burden the reader.
- ▶ How will the audience best understand information and ideas? Is written form the best medium?

### Content and Readability

Some audiences will understand technical terms



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and others will get lost in the development lexicon, so adapt your word choices accordingly. No one will understand illogical statements created by contradictory information or gaps in information. Reread to find inconsistencies and then correct them. Use transitional phrases and sentences to improve the flow of your article and help prepare the reader for your next point. Having a new person read what you have written is often a good step to catch omissions and unclear sentences.

If you're not a native speaker of the language in which you are writing, chances are it will be noticed. Find a native speaker to review your draft to catch any garbled phrases. In general, stick to an average sentence length of 15-20 words to help keep the reader's attention.

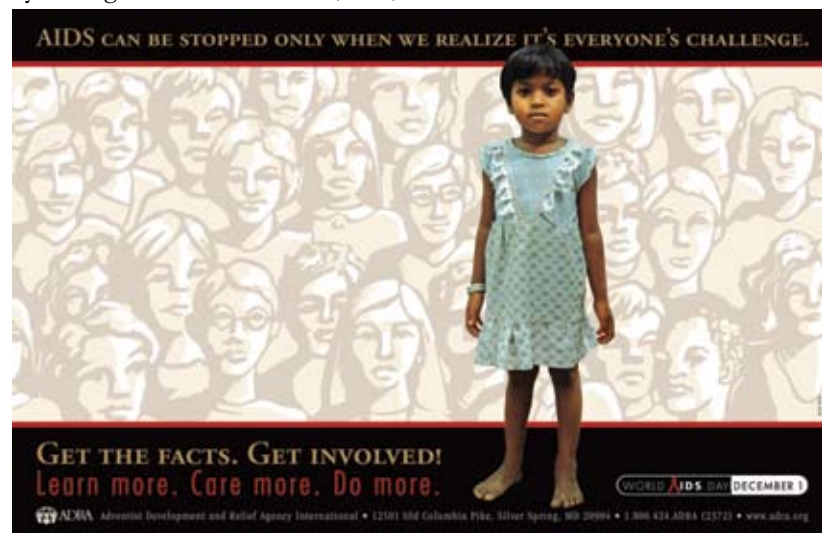
## ADRA's Awareness Kits

To raise awareness of two important global health issues, each year ADRA International produces resource kits for the World Health Organization **World No Tobacco Day** (May 31) and **World AIDS Day** (December 1). You'll find the kits helpful tools in planning awareness activities in churches, schools, and communities.

Available now, the 2007 World No Tobacco Day kit focuses on "Smoke-free Environments," and includes a commemorative poster, tobacco awareness activity guide, and more.

We also have extra 2006 World AIDS Day kits available, containing a poster, Adult Program Guide with a sermon outline, useful quotations, facts, and personal stories about AIDS; a Youth Discussion Guide with talking points and activity ideas for young people; and more. World AIDS Day kits for 2007 will be available in late October.

ADRA's awareness kits are useful year-round, and available free for download or by request at [www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org) (click on "Resources") or by calling 1.800.424.ADRA (2372).



## FirstMONDAY

*First Monday* is a quarterly network journal published by the bureau for marketing and development. Its mission is to inform, inspire and unite the global offices and staff of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). If you would like to be added to the distribution list, or your e-mail changed, please contact the Submission/Distribution Manager.

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07-087|08-07