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Report on Program Field Testing of *Designing By Dialogue* by Freedom from Hunger/Ghana and the Brakwa-Breman Rural Bank *Credit With Education* Program

Brakwa, Ghana: July-August 1996

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Introduction

This is a report to the Support for Analysis and Research in Africa (SARA) Project on the program field test of *Designing by Dialogue* in Ghana. The study was implemented in July–August 1996 by the program that is the result of a partnership between Freedom from Hunger/Ghana and the Brakwa-Breman Rural Bank.

The efficacy of the *Designing by Dialogue* process, especially the Trial of Improved Practices (TIPs), does not need to be tested. Already the process has a history of successful application as a research tool. This project was an opportunity to study the ease of adaptation and application to a field programmatic focus. It was also an opportunity to test a method to continue the problem identification, solution development, and implementation process used by *Credit with Education* practitioners, especially by applying the TIPs negotiation procedure.

Freedom from Hunger would like to thank the SARA project, especially Ellen Piwoz, for supporting this project, guiding its development and design in the early stages, and making it possible. Thanks also go to Kate Dickin, the consultant provided by SARA to the project in Ghana. Ms. Dickin did an artful job of responding to the needs and questions of the study while letting the process flow naturally. Her guidance and encouragement throughout the process were appreciated by all participants.

Additional thanks go to Mrs. Josephine Martei, Freedom from Hunger/Ghana, Training Coordinator, who served as the Research Director for the project and contributed her time and logistical support to the program. Mrs. Martei was assisted by Ms. Margaret Assan, Project Coordinator for the Brakwa-Breman Rural Bank *Credit with Education* program, who served as the Field Supervisor for the study. Thanks go to Ms. Assan and her team of field agents who implemented the study over a period of two months. And finally, thanks go to the twenty mothers who are members of Credit Associations, and who committed their time and energy to test the feeding recommendations that were the essence of the process.

The results of the actual training offered to the field agents and application of the TIPs are captured in a separate report attached to this one. What follows is a series of observations and recommendations about the application of the *Designing by Dialogue* manual to a field program situation.

Observations and Recommendations

1. The volume of the manual is intimidating. Both the Research Director and Field Supervisor admitted that the manual was overwhelming, and they only read the sections that were recommended as assigned. However, they also indicated that the

Observations and Recommendations

information was clear and the content very understandable when they read the chapter or section. In contrast, this writer found the document quite compelling in its content and presentation, and has read it cover-to-cover twice and referred to various sections on a need-to-review basis.

2. While it is not completely straightforward, it is not unreasonable to abstract from the research orientation to a field application for sustained program implementation. Freedom from Hunger plans to continue experimenting with the application of various phases of the process in the implementation of the *Credit with Education* program.

3. Exposure to the research methodology is an excellent basis for training field agents involved in a nutrition (or any behavior change) program. It helps the field agents develop comfort and ease with negotiation and counseling to encourage participants to overcome obstacles that prevent behavior change and the adoption of better practices.

4. Lack of nutrition expertise was a major problem. There was a need to develop specific food recommendations in response to the information gathered during the initial visit, which included a 24-hour diet recall and food frequency analysis. There was also a need to help field agents assess the adequacy of the amount of food offered to infants and children of the various age groups included in the study. These specific foods and servings recommendations formed the basis of the negotiations. It probably would have been difficult to find an "expert" in-country with the time to participate. Fortunately, the consultant provided by SARA had a practical orientation and reality-based understanding of the process. Perhaps a list of "experts" or resource persons (or tips on how to find one) could be included to guide users of the manual who lack a nutrition background, and who need specific nutrition information.

The manual notes the absence of specific nutrition information. It would be difficult to try to cover this aspect of the work in the manual, which is already quite large. However, with the help of Kate Dickin, the approximate energy estimate work she had carried out in Nigeria was built upon. Appendix E of the full report is the tool developed and used in Ghana. It was a very valuable tool that allowed the field agents to assess the nutrient quality of the diets being offered. SARA might consider recommending that a similar tool be developed for use in each application of the TIPs process.

5. Lack of research management experience and skills by the Field Supervisor led to some gaps in the process that would have strengthened the results. Most gaps were caused by lack of attention to details. There are tips and recommendations in the manual that cover these details, but they were not recognized and applied. This

was perhaps the result of a situation where there were no perceived problems and thus no need to search for the answers in the manual.

6. The tension between daily program maintenance activities and “extra” projects is a constant reality for ongoing field programs. It would be important for the program staff to make a full commitment to the extra project. The motivation might be a recognition of the long-term benefits to be gained in the new skills and processes that would increase the program impact for the participants.

7. The layout and step-by-step process defined in the manual is excellent. Both the Research Director and Field Supervisor commented on the helpful nature of the worksheets and task boxes for defining and organizing the information. The one additional summary that helped clarify the training and implementation plan was the overview of the steps abstracted from the manual that became the basis for the Ghana study implementation. (See page 2 of the Ghana report.) It was also agreed that the examples from the various other applications of the TIPs from around the world were helpful to clarify the concepts with concrete examples. Having the examples in boxes made it easy to skip the extra reading when the concept was clear and no support information was needed.

8. The TIPs are the core or centerpiece of the manual. It might be worthwhile to pull just the TIPs process out of the manual and offer it in a shorter, simplified document that would be more inviting for consideration by non-research, field-based programs. The power of the negotiations procedure in a step-by-step process toward ideal behavior would be an asset to enhance the skills of the staff of any health education program.

Conclusion

First, it is suggested that if this process were to take place again, either Ms. Vor der Bruegge or a consultant should participate in the nutrition analysis and recommendation development step that followed the initial visit. This is one of the trickier steps in the whole process. Unfortunately, in this instance, this type of participation was not possible because of the need to schedule additional time to obtain the husbands' permission for the all-male field agent team to visit the mothers in their homes. A little additional guidance to the field team at this point in the study would have strengthened the results.

Second, the process was immensely helpful to the field staff and will continue to enhance their work. All members of the field team indicated a deeper understanding of nutrition issues and appreciation of the challenges that face mothers trying to feed their families, and especially young children. There is no doubt that participation in the study will continue to influence the work of the field agents.

Conclusion

Finally, it was striking to see the excitement of the mothers and field agents who participated in the study that resulted from trying the recommended practices. The long list of motivations cited by mothers as reasons to *continue* the practices is amazing testimony of the possibilities of the process. Willingness to compromise, negotiate, and take many small steps around the obstacles that block the acceptance of the ideal practices appears to be a more likely process than expecting major behavior change. It is a more likely path to achieve the ideal by helping participants make realistic and manageable choices to change their health and nutrition status.