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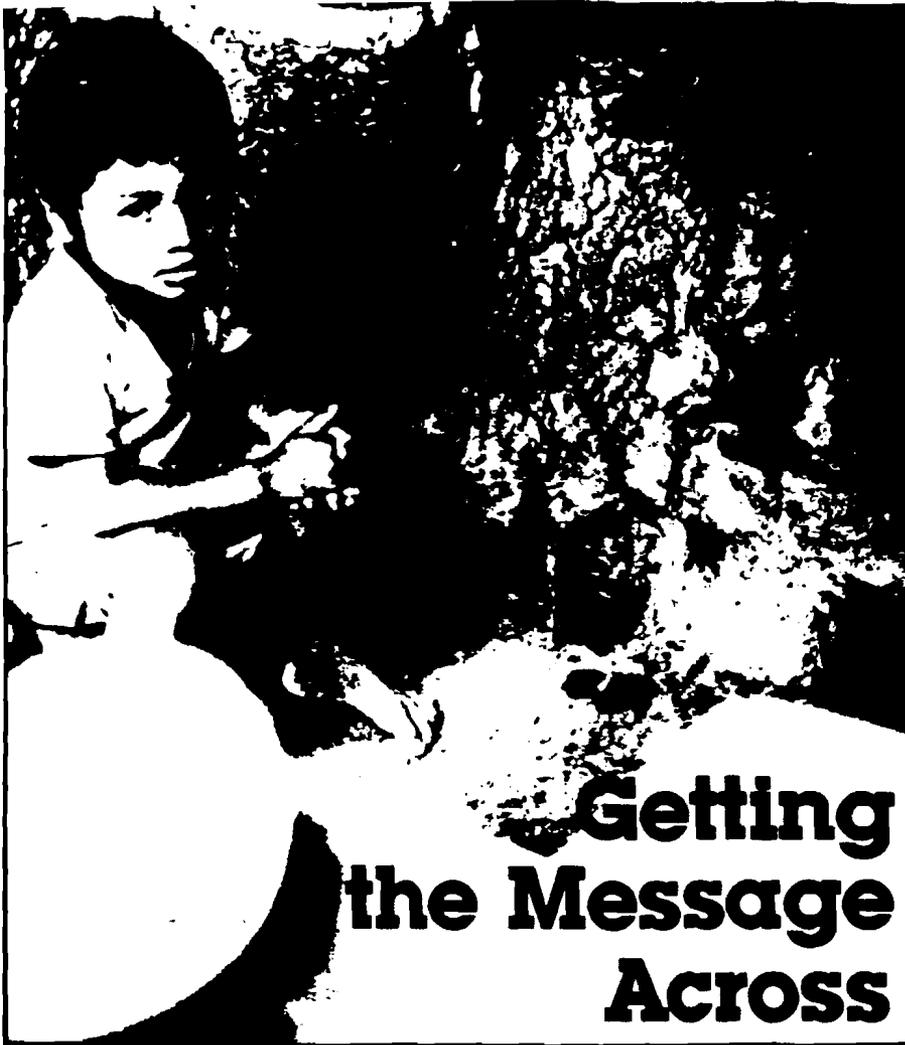
Save the Children Quarterly Magazine VOL. 5 NO. 2 SPRING 1986



Children Die Needlessly Every Day

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

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Getting the Message Across

In a small adobe house perched on the side of a mountain, a young Honduran woman wearily lights the morning fire.

She's been up all night with her youngest child, Tito, who has diarrhea. She knows he is too dry because his eyes look sunken and he won't eat. But this mother also knows how to mix Litrosol — an oral rehydration solution. She first learned about it when two village women talked on the radio about how well Litrosol had worked for their children. Now Tito's mother will prepare that same solution for him, and perhaps Tito will live to see another day.

Today there are proven methods to help children survive their early, most vulnerable years. These methods, like the Litrosol Tito's mother used, are reliable and relatively easy to administer. However, making sure that they are available to rural women, and that those rural women know how to use them properly, presents some very special challenges.

In 1978, the U.S. Agency for International Development began to explore how creative use of communications could help reach women — even in remote villages —

with effective health messages. Through agreement with the governments of Honduras and other countries, communications campaigns were launched, focusing first on oral rehydration therapy [ORT] and the control of diarrhea, later on a variety of other child survival technologies including immunization, nutrition, growth monitoring and child-spacing.

The program, known as Communication for Child Survival or HEALTHCOM, will assist as many as 17 countries over the next five years to use social marketing, mass communication and behavioral design strategies. The object: to draw more and more families to child survival programs.

HEALTHCOM has two special roles to play: First, the communications can increase the demand for child survival products and services. Second, they can contribute directly to the service delivery system by using the fundamental organizing principles of marketing.

The success of health communications campaigns depends on their ability to change what people do, as well as what they believe. This requires a sensitive understanding of how people are affected

by Elayne Clift and
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by specific health problems. And this understanding must be followed by the careful crafting of products and educational messages that are both useful and practical. A coordinated distribution network then gets the message out.

Who is the audience? How can their beliefs be incorporated, even reflected in the strategy? These important questions and others are part of a preliminary study that is essential to any campaign. Findings are then reflected in the message design. In Honduras, for example, the belief in the medicinal value of a worm sack called "La Bolsa" became a humorous part of a radio campaign. By using gentle humor the message thus avoided physician criticism, yet identified Litrosol with a strongly-held traditional belief.

Marketing, behavioral analysis and anthropology. All are important in the success of health communications campaigns. Marketing provides the framework upon which to build a comprehensive program. Behavior analysis focuses on actual village practices. And anthropological investigation gives meaning to the behavior observed.

Over the years the field of health communications has grown more and more sophisticated. Now in country after country, broadcast and print are helping train health workers, with increasing effectiveness. Radio programs are used in conjunction with simple printed flyers to teach ORT in the home. Television is demonstrating how to prepare the ORT salts. Songs like "We are the World" are being produced by local artists, and printed pieces are being created and designed around loving, caring themes to carry important messages about child survival.

In Honduras, and around the world, mothers agree, these are messages worth hearing. ■

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