
A WORKSHOP ON RURAL REPRESSION

Earlier this year, a workshop on rural repression was held by service groups. It was attended by many groups from rural communities who do not have easy access to lawyers, doctors and journalists operating in towns and cities. The following is a report of this workshop and of the way in which certain survival skills were taught and learnt.

Aims of the workshop

The aims of the workshop were:

- to publicise the problems faced by rural people
- to provide resources for people from rural areas, in the form of skills training, contact with resource people and written material
- to build up links between people from different parts of the country

Legal advice

In the first session, a lawyer talked about the basic legal rights for rural communities. He looked at topics such as:

- what to do when a person is arrested
- how to take statements from a person maltreated by the police and how to build up a dossier of events that could be useful in legal action
- the role of witnesses and ways in which the community could handle crises on its own when there was no lawyer
- what to do when a person has been assaulted, the importance of record-keeping on assault victims, and the importance of knowing that there are stipulated times during which assaulted people could lay charges against the police.
- the benefits and dangers of laying a charge
- what the Emergency regulations say - that police and SADF do not have the right to assault people - the only right they have is to arrest them.

Emergency first aid

In the session on health care in emergency situations, members of a health group based in the Cape showed a video on first aid with special focus on unrest victims. The video showed how to give first aid to people who have:

- bleeding wounds
- broken limbs
- wounds from buckshot, birdshot and rubber bullets - how to identify wounds caused by each of these burns
- problems with tear gas

The video also showed how to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and external cardiac massage.

Two doctors demonstrated first aid in a crisis situation and talked about resources needed to cope with a medical crisis.

They demonstrated how to:

- stop bleeding and how to bandage
- assess various levels of unconsciousness
- keep a clear airway on an unconscious person
- make a detailed check on an unconscious person so as to identify the injured parts.

After the demonstration of first aid on a bleeding person, workshop participants practised how to stop bleeding and how to bandage.

This was followed by a demonstration of a First Aid Kit. A discussion was then held on how communities could forge links with progressive doctors and nursing staff in their areas. Crisis centres have been set up in various areas and sympathetic doctors volunteer to be on stand-by during crisis periods.

Media

The next item on the programme was a workshop on how to prepare press statements, how to contact journalists and how to publicise news from rural areas.

Two journalists pointed out problems faced by journalists working for commercial newspapers. These problems were a result of the nature/structure and interests/aims of the newspaper industry. They cited the following major problems:

PROFITS - Commercial newspapers are firstly geared to sell at a profit. To pay for the costs of production, the newspaper agency tries to get companies to advertise in the newspapers. These companies have a great influence in shaping the contents of a newspaper.

DEADLINES - Newspapers have to set deadlines and if they fail to keep them, circulation is affected. This in turn affects profits. Deadlines are a problem especially for people in rural areas where communication links are difficult. Telephones are often out of order, which means news from these areas is often old by the time it reaches daily newspapers.

CENSORSHIP - Laws affecting the newspaper industry are major constraints in both gathering and publishing information. These laws are broadly defined and vague which makes it very difficult to know when a published story constitutes an offence. These laws are:

- The Police Act
- Prisons Act
- Internal Security Act and laws affecting detainees

The State of Emergency was mentioned as one of the laws that affected news gathering. According to the Emergency regulations:

- newspapers are not allowed to publish names of detainees until they have been confirmed by police

Workshops

- no pictures can be taken in areas in which a State of Emergency has been declared
- newspapers are not allowed to report on the movements of the SADF

New Emergency regulations

Under the new Emergency regulations passed in June this year, restrictions are even tighter. As far as gathering and distributing news is concerned, the following new regulations apply in addition to those already mentioned:

- Any person who makes, possesses, distributes, displays or utters subversive statements will be guilty of an offence.
- The Minister or any authorised person can seize one or all copies of a publication which, in his opinion, contains a subversive statement or any other information which is or may be detrimental to public safety, order, or the ending of the State of Emergency. Offenders include people who make, write, import, print, publish or distribute such publications.
- It is prohibited to publish any utterance by any office-bearer of 118 specified organisations in six Cape magisterial districts. (Organisations include the UDF, AZAPO, COSATU, DPSC, ECC, NUSAS and RMC)

Relationship with press

Communities and organisations firstly have to decide whether they want publicity for a specific event. Secondly, they have to decide on the target readership - in other words whom they want to inform:

- the local community - make contact with local newspaper
- national - make contact with national weeklies
- international - make contact with foreign journalists

If the local community was the main target-readership, it would be best to make contact with the local newspaper. If this was not possible for source reasons, the community would try and print pamphlets and circulate them in the community.

Contacts with other groupings could also be important. Such groupings could include:

- church
- Red Cross
- Amnesty International and others

Press statements

People were divided into groups according to areas they came from, to prepare press statements about important issues in their areas. The groups were concerned with the following issues:

- Communities threatened with removals and incorporation into Bantustans.
- Election disputes
- Education crisis

- Police harassment/State of Emergency
- Chiefs and witchcraft
- Use of vigilantes

Some of the groups read out their press statements for comments and to check if they were detailed enough.

Comments on the workshop

The workshop was a success in that it met all of its objectives. It provided people from different organisations with enough information and skills to arrange such workshops in their own areas with the view of transferring the skills and information to people who need them most.

The workshop itself created a link between different organisations.

CRITICAL HEALTH will supply, on request, the names and addresses of service organisations who were involved in this workshop, or of any organisations working in the broad field of health, education, and social welfare.

If you need the contact address of any such organisation, write to:

CRITICAL HEALTH

P.O. Box 16250

Doornfontein

2028



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