

An Experience Workshop

The Making of *Yellow Card*

Steve and Sally Smith (USA), founders of the film production company Media for Development International, discussed the making of their recently released Zimbabwean film *Yellow Card* (produced and directed by John Riber). The Smiths have been working as film producers for more than 15 years and have been engaged in several EE projects in Africa. They are normally responsible for the logistical and administrative aspects of the productions while employees in Africa do the creative work. In the workshop, the Smiths showed a 20-minute video, *The Making of Yellow Card*, which contains clips from the film and interviews with the actors and the producer.

The themes of *Yellow Card*—teenage pregnancy and teenage responsibility—are told through the lives of the three main characters: one boy, Tiyane, and two girls, Linda and Juliet. In the beginning of the film, Tiyane, a young and ambitious soccer player, has a sexual relationship with Linda. Later on he falls in love with Juliet, but in the meantime, Linda has discovered that she is carrying Tiyane's baby. In the video, *The Making of Yellow Card*, producer-director John Riber states that the approach of the filmmakers was "not so much to try to prescribe solutions to the problems young people face, but rather to provoke reflection."

The aim of producing for the African market was to build a local film industry. For that reason, most of the people involved in the production hail from Zimbabwe. Only the director

of photography and the sound engineer of *Yellow Card* were from abroad.

Lessons Learned

From the discussion in the workshop after the viewing of the film, a number of lessons can be learned for other EE projects. These include fundraising, the role of research in production, processes of distribution, advertising, and the controversy of story lines.

The international donor agency, Pathfinder, coordinated the fundraising for the film, raising \$1.2 million. The producers knew from the start that it would not be possible to make a profit with an African film like this, except perhaps in a more robust economy, such as in South Africa. Yet, profit making is a goal because, as a partici-

"Sometimes donors want to get 'a message-a-minute.' That offends people and then they turn off. It doesn't matter how good your video is, it's how many people have seen it, and valued it."

Steve Smith



pant remarked, it is a prerequisite for attracting corporate sponsorship to such ventures.

One way of getting the most out of a film is to release it via different media. First, the film is shown in the cinemas. In the case of *Yellow Card*,

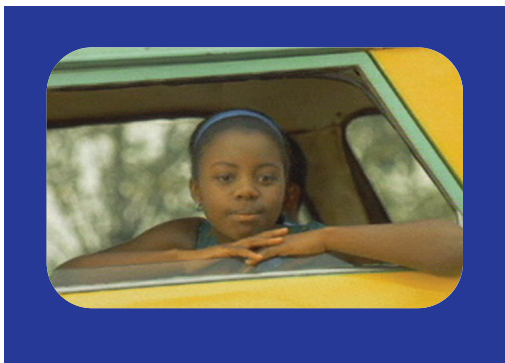
the Smiths said it would be distributed to other countries than Zimbabwe. The film is due to be released in five other African countries. In addition, five versions in other languages, such as French and Swahili are to be made soon.

Originally, there were plans to make the film in a local language of Zimbabwe, but pre-production research showed that most of the target group preferred English.

The film was heavily promoted, with advertisements appearing in newspaper, radio, and television. An important strategy for promoting the film was to “bring out the stars.” The three main

characters of the film are now famous in their own country. The premiere in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, was a Hollywood-like happening.

In the pre-production process, several studies were performed to guide the filmmakers. The main methods were focus groups, interviewing of key informants, and reviews of the relevant literature. The research took about one year, and only after this was complete was the script written. After the film was shot, the rough cut was shown to 1,000 young people. Unfortunately, there was not any money left for evaluation research.



Yellow Card has received a great deal of attention from the press.

The film won the People's Choice Award at the Zanzibar International Film Festival.

