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13th March 1990

Professor Horst Rittel
College of Environmental Design
232 Wurster Hall
Berkeley
California 94720
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Dear Professor Rittel,

Use of Issue-Based Methods in Africa

It was good to hear your voice on the phone the other day, after I left the note in your mail box about our work in Africa. I attended your course while I was also teaching ED3 in 1972, with James Prestini. You may remember that I wrote up a set of notes on that course, which I later sent to you via Jean-Pierre Protzen. I also used them to develop a course I taught at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada, 1973-5. This course was then used as one of the bases for integrating a sector of the curriculum dealing with method and called "Planning / Design / Management" and later "Intervention".

I returned to Africa in 1975 with my husband, who comes from Kenya, and we set up a non-profit institute dealing with environment and development issues affecting low-income people. We have flexibly adapted the issue-based method as a kind of "agenda sheet" for meetings which bring together interest groups to argue about action. We have also used it in a similar way for evaluations. You can read about that in the enclosed volume, which was the first time we used it for evaluation. There is a similar publication on an evaluation in Tanzania. Each of these studies continued over one year. When we used a similar method for a policy study with a lot of groups involved in woodfuel energy in Kenya, we only took three months. The result was more conflict during the meetings as issues had not been worked through so thoroughly. (There is always some conflict of course).

We have also used the method in research, as you can read in the enclosed article about our study of the informal transport system in Nairobi. It is from "African Cities in Crisis", R. Stren and R. White, eds., Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1989. We involved vehicle operators, the police and others in a couple of workshops that had a wide impact, including on legislation. Recently, we used issues again as the basis for a major research on urban subsistence food production in Kenya. This is published but workshops not yet held. They should basically involve local governments. We like to use issues as the framework for collecting data, and not hypotheses. This sometimes causes problems with social scientists. Our method is also explained in an article in Planning Processes in Developing Countries, W D Cook and T E Kuhn, eds, TIMS Studies in the Management Sciences, North Holland Publishing Co., 1982, pp. 135-159. This is about monitoring and evaluation methods for low income housing and, by the way, refers to your method as a source.

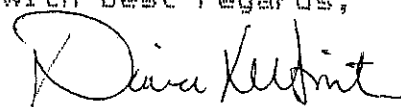
Finally, you might be interested to know that we run several

improve information flows in developing countries. I edit two of them - one on self-help settlements in Africa and the other on women and shelter which is global. Davinder, my husband, edits one called "Issue Based Indian Ocean Network - IBION".

Please let us know if you want to know more about any of this. We do not often visit the West Coast, although Davinder will mail this packet while visiting Vancouver. However, we are sometimes in touch with Prof Mel Webber.

We are not using computerised issue-based methods, partly because of cultural bias towards face-to-face consensus building, and partly because of poverty of resources. We use computers for doing reports, finance and management, and simple data processing. Still, we would be interested in hearing more about your current work on this aspect, if you have something short and descriptive you could send.

With best regards,



Diana Lee-Smith

enc. article on Matatus
Ethiopia Evaluation volume