So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;
It shall not return to me empty,
But it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
And prosper in the thing for which I sent it.
*Isaiah, 55, v11*

One of the problems with the written word is that it tends towards an illusion of completeness—especially when it is sealed up in all the seriousness of a printed book. Because of this, the last chapter can give the mistaken impression of being the last word on a subject. But books are bound and published when the ideas in them are still developing and the experiences they describe are changing daily with new discoveries and fresh interpretations. It would therefore be quite wrong to think that because this book finishes here, we have dealt with all the issues involved in collecting and applying people's oral testimony in the development process. On the contrary, our purpose has been to serve as an introduction to the many different ways in which people are attempting to speak and listen to each other in development work today.

We hope, therefore, that *Listening for a Change* will be treated as an open book. Like the more organic forms of oral artistry, we hope people will change, correct, develop and add to the techniques and experiences outlined in these chapters—and we would be interested to hear about such developments. In the meantime, we have attempted to provide a good cross-section of the experience to date and raise some of the main practical, conceptual and ethical issues which confront people engaged in oral testimony work. The result, however, is in no way intended to be a complete guide. There will be some types of
oral testimony work that we have missed and some practical and conceptual considerations which we may have overlooked or not have covered in depth.

As development agencies take more time to listen to people, an increasing amount is being learnt about the methods involved, the subtleties of interpretation, the effectiveness of presentation and the ethics of attribution. It is our hope that this book will start a process which recognises the wealth of experience being gained in oral testimony work around the world, and that this experience will continue to be recorded and exchanged by communities and practitioners through workshops, journals, information networks and, of course, by word of mouth.

Finally, the written word can also make things seem much easier than they actually are in practice. Some of the preceding pages may appear to do this and it may be wise to quote one last piece of oral testimony as a foil to such idealism. At a workshop in Addis Ababa in September 1993, the Ethiopian health educator, Ahmed Mohammed, presented a paper on the use of focus group discussions. In his talk he gave a frank account of the many difficulties involved in bringing people together in such groups and encouraging them to talk. And afterwards, at question time, he uttered a cautionary admonishment to the writers of books such as this one:

*Those people who designed it [focus group methodology], they must have just sat in their office and wrote it. They do not know about the problems in the field. It is not as easy as it is on paper.*

These words apply equally well to all the other methods we have described in the previous chapters. Collecting, interpreting and disseminating oral testimony is certainly not as easy as it may appear on paper. But, despite the practical and conceptual challenges involved, we hope that we have emphasised the importance of oral testimony to development and shown that much can be gained from it by listener and narrator alike. Above all, oral testimony work serves to amplify the voices of those living on the “underside of development”, ensuring that they are heard and become increasingly influential in the shaping of development.
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FURTHER READING

For background reading on the practice of oral testimony collection, we especially recommend the following (for full bibliographical details, see References):

Gluck, S and Patai, D (eds), *Women’s Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*: includes especially frank discussions on the ethical and practical problems of socially committed research on women.

Thompson, P, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*: an overview of the philosophy and practice of life story and oral history work, including an extensive bibliography.

Vansina, J, *Oral Traditions as History*: the classic call for the serious use of African oral tradition in history.

In addition:


CONTACT POINTS

It would be impossible to give all the addresses of the many development and community organisations we contacted in the course of researching this book. The References contain details of certain publications and institutions mentioned in the text, and the following are some additional key contact points and sources of information. For details on other organisations mentioned in the book, please contact Olivia Bennett at Panos.

**BRITAIN**
British Library National Sound Archive and National Life Story Collection, 29 Exhibition Road, London SW7 2AS. Tel: 071-412 7405. Fax: 071-412 7416. Curator in Oral History: Rob Perks
HelpAge International, St James Walk, London EC1R OBE. Tel: 071-253 0253 Fax: 071-253 4814
International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H. Tel: 071-388 2117 Fax: 071-388 2826
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**UNESCO**
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**UNITED STATES**
Oral History Association, 1093 Broxton Avenue, No 720, Los Angeles, California 90024. Tel: 310-825 0597. Fax: 310-206 1864. Richard Candida Smith
REFERENCES

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2
2. In all these various forms, oral history has grown rapidly in the North over the last 20 years. It now has its own societies and journals in several countries, such as *Oral History* in Britain, *Bios* in Germany, *Oral History Review* in the USA and *Historia y Fuente Oral* in Spain, and a new *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories* as well as regular international conferences. These developments have certainly not been confined to the North. There are regional international oral history journals funded by UNESCO in the Spanish Caribbean and in Southern Africa, as well as academics practising oral history in many Latin American and African countries, and some in the Far East. A number of African countries have state-funded oral archives, as do Indonesia, Malaysia and, most generously of all, Singapore—a model programme for both North and South.
5. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3


12. Ibid., pp4 and 6.


20. Panos is currently working with development and other organisations in some eight countries, collecting interviews to explore the wider impacts of conflict on women, as part of its Oral Testimony Information Programme.

21. Africa Watch’s 1990 report, Somalia, A Government at War With its Own People: testimonies about the killings and the conflict in the north, is an example of the approach which mixes extensive oral
testimony and individual histories with a wider legal and political analysis. See also Ardill, N and Cross, N, *Undocumented Lives*, Runnymede Trust, 1988, for which immigrant workers in the UK were interviewed, as part of a campaign to influence the Immigration Bill.


25. For a more detailed discussion, see For a more detailed discussion, see For a more detailed discussion, see For a more detailed discussion, see *Forced to Move: large development projects and forced resitement*, Panos Media Briefing No 5, Panos, London, 1993.


29. Wilson, K, op. cit.


32. Mavro, A, op. cit.


36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.


39. Ibid. The full findings can be consulted in volumes 16-17 of the transcripts of the Northern Pipeline Agency’s 1979 hearings.
40. Ibid., pp146-7.
41. Ibid., p148.
42. Ibid., p175.
43. Ibid., pp176-7.
44. Ibid., p148.

CHAPTER 4

Notes, No 9, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, August 1990.


CHAPTER 5

Case Study 1


2. LaFond, A, “A study of immunisation acceptability in Somalia”, Save the Children Fund (UK), April 1990. This report and the paper cited above are the source for all the information and quotes in this case study.
Case Study 2
2. Belmiro de Santana.
3. Lurdes Grzybowski.
5. I owe a special debt to Ana Dourado, not only for first drawing my interest to the Recife community projects during her year at the University of Essex, but also for her generous practical help, encouragement and hospitality during my two visits to Recife. I also wish to thank Antonio Montenegro, Têda Ventura and Moisés de Melho for all the information and help which they gave me on Casa Amarela. Lastly, I am grateful to both the British Council and HelpAge International for their contributions to my travel costs.

Case Study 3

Case Study 4
2. The quotes in this case study are taken from the interviews gathered in the SOHP, an edited selection of which are contained in Cross, N and Barker, R (eds), At The Desert’s Edge, op. cit.
3. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see the introduction, Cross, N and Barker, R (eds), At The Desert’s Edge, op. cit.
5. Cross, N and Barker, R (eds), At The Desert’s Edge, op. cit.
6. The PEP has prepared a glossary and annotated bibliography on participatory methods, with special reference to monitoring and evaluation (available from SOS Sahel).
CHAPTER 6


11. The interviewing was undertaken as part of a Panos oral testimony project into “Women and Conflict”, to be completed and published in 1994.

12. Daphne Patai has written particularly graphically about her unease in this sense when working with women in Brazilian favelas. See Gluck, S and Patai, D (eds), *Women’s Words*, op. cit.


END PIECE


2. A phrase adapted from the writings of the liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, who refers to those living on “the underside of history”.

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