

# RICE FIELDS

JOURNAL

Volume IV No.1

November 1991

## Editorial

### Change is not all bad...

**A**s you will have noticed *Ricefields Journal* is in the process of changing. While you may feel you are being short changed on the number of pages in this issue you are also getting a lot more since it is being sent out together with the ICMC newsletter - to a much wider group than the *RFJ* readership alone. To new readers we say 'Welcome! and happy reading!' To older readers 'Fear not! All is not lost!'

So what is happening? The long silence since the last issue may have caused you grey hairs. Some of you were encouraging enough to write - so at least we know you missed receiving it! Let me explain...

Since last writing a number of significant changes have taken place. For me personally the greatest change has been that of location as we moved from the Philippines back to England, incurring the wrath of Mt. Pinatubo in the process. Now my office is located in a safe, uneventful, English town called Wimborne - a far cry from Asia, but nevertheless still a part of the real world.

More to the point, the RICE networkers have met and Radio In Church-planting Evangelism (RICE) is no more. It has now been reconstituted as International Communications Research for Evangelism (ICRE), the significance of which will be explained in these pages.

Coupled with this - and even more to the point - the funding for *RFJ* dried up leaving only enough for this one final issue.

Beginning with its next issue the new ICMC newsletter *Catalyst* will contain pages set aside for *RFJ* and it will be published quarterly.

As we have talked with the leadership of ICMC during their recent conference in Sheffield, we are convinced that we can accomplish more together through this merger. Practically, expensive printing and mailing costs are reduced, while a wider body of Christian media workers are serviced. As ICMC Director, Bill Thatcher, has said "We want ICMC to become an umbrella for groups like ICRE."

As readers are aware *RFJ* has advocated an integrated approach to evangelism, emphasising the roles of the various media and ministries while seeking ways in which they might complement each other and the ministry of the local church. By joining up with ICMC in this way we are putting our words into action.

In future issues we expect the range of content to be much the same as before though there will be a shift towards research - but not exclusively. Radio will also be the main focus of attention but related media will not be excluded. Manuscripts are invited from any of our readership.

We hope you agree that this change is for the

# Why RICE > ICRE?

Six years ago the Radio in Church-planting Evangelism (RICE) group was in the process of forming. It was born out of a conviction that radio could play a more effective role in missions. More than that - as the name suggests - the ultimate purpose of Christian radio broadcasting was seen as encouraging the planting and subsequent growth of churches.

Today the original commitment and vision of RICE has not changed, but as time has gone by, and other initiatives such as *World By 2000* have developed, it has been necessary to do some fine-tuning, re-examining our distinctives, and seeking to determine - in real terms - what our contribution really is.

## Course Correction

In September 1990 the informal RICE network met in England to rethink our purpose and mode of operation. The thought was expressed by some that our name conveyed a false impression, by implying that radio could plant churches on its own where others had failed. (RICE had, in fact always promoted the concept of an integrated approach to ministry). *World By 2000* had also focussed on the specific aspect of language groups that were being by-passed in the global radio outreach.

More specifically we looked at what we as a group could *realistically* expect to accomplish. It was felt that hitherto our best accomplishment had been in the area of research. Looking into the future, our best contribution to the Christian radio scene would be through research which would bring about greater accountability. This would in turn provide by-products of great benefit to the broadcasters and other ancillary ministries.

At the end of our discussions the decision was taken to transform RICE into ICRE - International Communications Research for Evangelism. In this name we come closer to describing the true nature of our mission.

## Accountability through Research

It has been said - no doubt with a considerable degree of truth - that if Christian broadcasters had been in the business of making money they would have been out of business long ago. The correctness of their theology may not be so much an issue, but the ability of their programmes to hold a listening audience is often far short of the mark.

It is no secret that 'research' for many Christians is a naughty word. While it may be dismissed on so-called spiritual grounds, the plain fact is that knowing the truth about audience size can hurt. With research all is revealed. Broadcasters become vulnerable, they face the risk of supporters becoming turned off, and programme sponsors going elsewhere.

Happily the situation is changing. With economic constraints forced on Christian ministry, and a number of media scandals in the USA rocking the camp, there is a greater realisation on the part of management of the need to demonstrate accountability. There is a greater need for making the right decisions as cutbacks are called for. Changing the terminology helps, too. 'Informed decision-making' carries with it much greater appeal than cold 'research'. Although the two cannot be equated it is recognised that research on its own is not the solution.

It is clear that there are a number of aspects to broadcast research which interest us as Christians:-

- \* **Audience Research** - How many are listening to what stations and when?
- \* **Programme Effectiveness** - What effect are various programmes having on the audience?
- \* **Language Service Analysis** - Who is broadcasting in what language, when?, what mb and time? What languages have no radio outreach?
- \* **Mail Analysis** - Who is writing letters? What questions are they asking? How can these questions become clues to better broadcasting?
- \* **Contribution made by radio to growth of the Church** - studying to better understand the role played by radio in establishing and encouraging growth of the local churches.

There are also many other creative areas of research that we can get into. For example, an invitation recently given Chinese listeners to write on the subject "Why I am not a Christian" brought a very interesting and useful response - good for programmes and research alike.

A primary interest of ICRE will be in the area of Audience Research. This is normally the most expensive form of research - especially in the international context - and consequently one which Christian broadcasters have largely stayed away from, though not exclusively so. At the

come to terms with how they rank against their competitors, and how many regular listeners they *really* have.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is already a recognised leader in this field, conducting tens of international surveys each year. Thanks to the understanding help of Dr. Graham Mytton of the BBC Christian broadcasters are now being given the opportunity to 'buy into' BBC research. For this reason ICRE is forming a Consortium which will purchase a number of BBC research studies each year. (See the article by John Wheatley, *Affordable Audience Research*, in this issue of *RFJ*).

While these audience surveys will focus on radio listenership we also expect to learn about other media habits in the listening audiences. With TV viewing on the increase and video fast becoming a worldwide phenomenon we also need to keep track of these trends and stay abreast of a rapidly changing situation. Levels of literacy will also be probed along with other dimensions of social life. This means that data will be of wider interest than to broadcasters alone.

Since its inception RICE has been developing a database of Christian broadcasting worldwide. While records of international broadcasts are fairly complete and up-to-date considerable work still remains in identifying Christian radio broadcasts at the local level. (If any readers can help provide details of language, station, time frequency, etc. this would be greatly appreciated). This research continues under ICRE in conjunction with *World By 2000* research on non-broadcast languages.

FEBC is also in the midst of a mail analysis project which lays the foundations for a better understanding of how radio has been contributing to the growth of the Chinese church.

Dr. Viggo Sogaard of United Bible Societies is also anxious that ICRE sponsor various applied research studies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This too, would be in line with our general objectives.

## And What Else?

As announced in the editorial *Ricefields Journal* will cease to exist in its own right after this issue, while continuing as a separate section within the *ICMC Catalyst*. Its articles will remain basically the same though there will be a slight shift in emphasis towards research and its implications.

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# Affordable Audience Research

by John Wheatley

In recent years broadcasting agencies and their programme production partners have engaged in increasing collaboration. Among other things this has included audience research to determine the size and nature of radio audiences and evaluate the effectiveness of current programming. But such collaboration has been limited.

The limitation has largely been due to the high cost involved. Audience research is expensive - but now we have a solution to this.

ICRE is establishing the first international audience research consortium and has negotiated unusually favourable terms with International Broadcasting Audience Research (IBAR) of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), to purchase research data on an economical shared-cost basis. As a result of these arrangements, the Consortium will have access to BBC-developed research and will be able to make this data available to international Christian broadcasting agencies and their partner programme producers.

Like many other sectors of the Church, broadcasters are dealing with rising costs of operation, serious economic pressures in many of the supporting countries, and a desire for improved stewardship. Therefore, research that measures the size of actual and potential audiences, optimum broadcasting times, impact of TV, language preferences, reading habits, etc., is essential for informed decision-making.

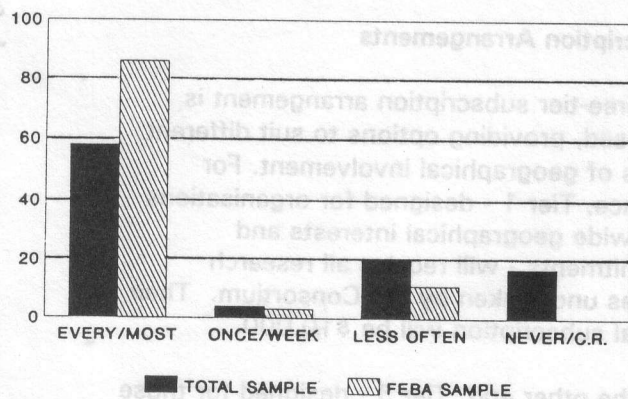
If the existing programme services in 230 languages are to be properly evaluated, this research initiative is crucial. Frequency-hours are a limited resource, and a close examination of priority of their utilisation is essential, if the remaining major language groups where there is no witness are to be

## The Main Features

1. The BBC researches over 20 countries or regions per year. Out of these surveys the ICRE Consortium Steering Committee will select studies in approximately ten countries/language groups. Typically, each study consists of a random sample interview survey, carried out either nationally or regionally in the country being researched.

2. Detailed analysis on these countries/language groups will be done by Dr. Robert Fortner, an authority in the field of broadcast research. These analyses will delve into the implications of the data for Christian broadcasting. Examples are shown of some of the data graphs resulting from a recent survey in East Africa.

## FREQUENCY OF RADIO LISTENING Total Sample vs. FEBA Sample



3. The data provided will also include a set of analytical data tables, and raw data on computer disc for custom analysis and further investigation by the subscriber.

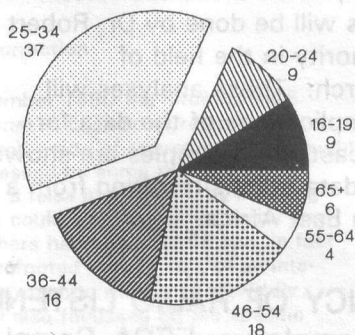
4. The Consortium will also provide an opportunity for review of the data by relevant broadcasters in any given region to consider existing and planned strategies, investment plans, and cooperative ventures.

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The value of the data is not limited to radio. As the research deals with media use habits (what media are being used, how often, by whom, in what locations, etc), the research has broad ministry implications. Other media (literature, audio-visual, and other "on the ground" ministries) would have the option of sharing in this information. There would be much value to the Kingdom in extending the impact of this investment.

The BBC's external services research department (IBAR) is not only the largest but is the most widely-respected agency in the world of international broadcasting, counting dozens of other governments as clients for its information. In a number of earlier research projects, members of ICRE have collaborated with BBC's research staff.

### AGES OF FEBA LISTENERS Kiswahili, in Percentages

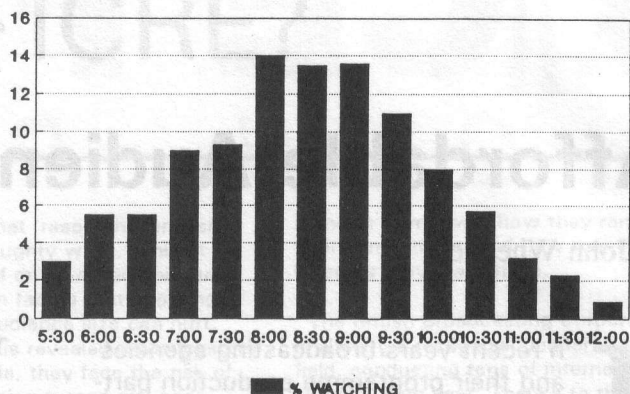


### Subscription Arrangements

A three-tier subscription arrangement is proposed, providing options to suit different scales of geographical involvement. For instance, Tier 1 - designed for organisations with wide geographical interests and commitments - will receive all research studies undertaken by the Consortium. Their annual subscription will be \$10,000.

At the other end, Tier 3 - designed for those organisations with a restricted geographical interest - is basically an affiliation fee of \$100 annually. This entitles the organisation to receive the circulated information on research studies available, with the right to purchase individual research studies from a price-list and to attend the annual meeting of subscribers.

### TV & VIDEO WATCHING Total Sample



In between there is Tier 2 - with an annual subscription of \$3000. This will entitle the subscriber to receive \$4000-worth of research studies from the price-list. Prices vary with the complexity of the study, but average \$2000 each.

Subscribers in Tiers 1 and 2 will form a Steering Committee this December to select the research studies for purchase. Those interested in subscribing should contact the ICRE Research office without delay (FAX +44-903-205294, MCI-MAIL 341-8572). Membership of the Consortium is open to all who are members of ICMC. The Consortium will become a reality from 1st January 1992.

John Wheatley is the General Director of FEBA Radio based in Worthing, England. He also is chairman of the ICRE working committee responsible for setting up the Research Consortium.

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It was intimated earlier that research as an end in itself avails little. It is not of much use if separated from the realities of daily operations and management. The two need to work hand in hand.

More than that, research findings need to be brought down to the practical level and implications drawn. Research needs to be applied if it is to be of value. We need to know that the Gospel is being got across to a sizeable audience in a way which they will understand - and hopefully enjoy.

The continuation of RFJ in its new form will therefore serve as a mouthpiece for the ICRE Research Consortium and other forms of research which are undertaken. We will also be willing to report on other research studies which will benefit our readers.

Under the new setup we also want these pages to be a channel of feedback which is open to our readers. Share new insights that you have gained through research or new methods you have successfully developed which have resulted in better communication of the Gospel.