

Science Communication Conference 24 and 25 May 2004

Workshop 1 – An NGO perspective

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Charlie began the workshop with a short history of Greenpeace, highlighting how the organisation has shifted from campaigning to other forms of political engagement. The most recent shift was deliberative methods – with Greenpeace undertaking a Citizen's Jury project with Unilever, the Consumer Association and the Co-op – the first event of its kind for the organisation. The study was conducted as a counterbalance and complement to the GM Nation debate. The Jury facilitated - by PEALS - gave the public the opportunity to discuss such issues arising from GM crop technology through a review of expert witnesses. While the results did not support Greenpeace's stance for a total ban on GM crops, Charlie noted that the process had helped him learn more about why and how people form their opinions on this issue.

The discussion brought up the following points:

The tension between campaigning and deliberation

- Non-negotiable stances and the spirit of deliberation
- Effect on Greenpeace membership
- Tactical and strategic choices of how to win the wider argument

What is expert status?

- The public is a valuable resource
- Citizen Jury's and other similar exercises should include non scientists
- All stakeholders should be equal

Learning from how NGOs engage with the public

- Agenda setting and shock tactics
- Should adopt a wide range of approaches
- Create sense of agency with the public
- Difference of single campaign issues

Transparency

- Identify and be more honest about desired outcomes when conducting consultations
- Need to clear about assumptions made and interests of stakeholders

Role of NGOs and others

- Their campaigns create political space in which to have a debate
- Their will be a growing role for NGOs, Industry and Government in participatory processes

The five key points for industry to facilitate change were considered to be

- Participatory processes are likely to have increasing importance in NGO activities
- These form part of a portfolio of communication tactics – other sector can learn from this
- Good to voice the interests of different actors – public are able to make judgements about different validity claims
- Need clear objectives and be tactical about what you do