

# Facilitating dialogue, learning and participation in natural resource management\*

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## FOREWORD

This thematic paper presents conceptual and methodological issues related to the use of communication to facilitate participation among stakeholders in natural resource management (NRM) initiatives. It also introduces a collection of papers that focus on participatory development communication (PDC) and NRM, particularly in Asia and Africa. These papers will be published in a single volume following the IDRC–FAO peer-review workshop and this UN Roundtable on Development Communication.

There are many approaches and practices in development communication, and most of them have been implemented in the field of environment and NRM. We could have adopted a comprehensive global view of these approaches, but we made a deliberate choice to focus on PDC because of its potential to influence communication practices at the community level in NRM.

Even when considering participatory approaches in NRM, communication is often limited to information dissemination activities that mainly use printed materials, radio programmes and educational videos to send messages, explain technologies, or illustrate activities. These approaches, with their strengths and weaknesses, have been well documented.

PDC takes another perspective. This form of communication facilitates participation in a development initiative identified and selected by a community, with or without the external assistance of other stakeholders. The terminology has been used in the past by a number of scholars<sup>1</sup> to stress the participatory approach of communication in contrast with its more traditional diffusion approach. Others refer to similar approaches as *participatory communication for development*, *participatory communication* or *communication for social change*.

In this paper, PDC is considered to be a planned activity that is based on participatory processes and on media and interpersonal communication. This communication facilitates dialogue among different stakeholders around a common development problem or goal. The objective is to develop and implement a set of activities that contribute to a solution to the problem, or the realization of the goal, and which support and accompany this initiative.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular White, Shirley A, K. Sadanandan Nair, and Joseph Ascroft, 1994. *Participatory Communication, Working for Change and Development*. Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, and Sage Publications, London; Servaes, J. T. L. Jacobson and S.A. White, 1996, *Participatory communication and social change*. Sage Publications, New Delhi.

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<sup>2</sup> See Bessette, G. 2004. *Involving the Community: A Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Development Communication*. IDRC, Ottawa, and Southbound, Penang.

This kind of communication requires moving from a focus on information and persuasion to facilitating exchanges between different stakeholders to address a common problem, explore possible solutions and identify the partnerships, knowledge and materials needed to support these solutions.

This paper is also part of a process. First, practitioners from Asia and Africa have been invited to submit papers that offer examples and illustrations of applying PDC to NRM. Second, a peer-review workshop has been organized, in preparation for the Roundtable on Development Communication, to discuss and review these papers. During the roundtable, we expect that the work done within the Communication and Natural Resource Management group will provide new ideas and feedback, which will contribute to the final version of this paper.

These steps will lead to the preparation of a publication that we hope will play a role in both promoting participatory approaches to development communication in the field of environment and NRM and in sharing the points of views of practitioners from Asia and Africa.

### **1. POVERTY ALLEVIATION, FOOD SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION**

Poverty alleviation, food security and environmental sustainability are closely linked and represent major development challenges for all actors involved in the field of NRM. Poverty alleviation requires sustained economic growth, but it must also ensure that the poor benefit. Efforts must also be made to increase food security, not only through an increase in productivity but also by ensuring that appropriate conditions are in place for people to be able to access food and share it equitably<sup>3</sup>.

Environmental sustainability is predicated upon the achievement of challenging goals such as an end to land degradation, desertification and deforestation, and effective management of water resources and biodiversity.

Strategies to achieve these goals and to address the three interlinked development challenges of poverty alleviation, food security and environmental sustainability must be designed and implemented with the active participation of those families and communities who are struggling to ensure their livelihoods in changing and unfavourable environments. But they must also include other stakeholders such as government technical services, NGOs, development projects, rural media, community organizations and research teams. Finally, local and national authorities, policymakers, and service providers must also be involved in shaping the regulatory environment in which the required changes will take place.

Best practices in NRM research and development point to situations in which community members, research or development team members and other stakeholders jointly identify research or development parameters and participate in decision making. This process goes beyond community consultation or participation in activities identified by researchers or programme managers. In the best scenarios, the research or development process itself generates a situation of empowerment in which participants transform their vision of reality and are able to take effective action.

PDC reinforces this process. It empowers local communities to discuss and address NRM practices and problems, and to engage other stakeholders in the building of an improved policy environment.

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<sup>3</sup> According to FAO, "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

But what about the issues involved in applying PDC to NRM practices and research? What are the challenges and the difficulties linked to such an approach? What insights and lessons can we learn from our practices in the field? This paper offers a reflection on these practices and suggests orientations to further reinforce NRM practices and research through participation and communication.

## **2. MOVING FROM INFORMATION DISSEMINATION TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Traditionally, in the context of environment and natural resources management, many communication efforts focused on the dissemination of technical packages and their adoption by end users. Researchers wanted to “push” their products to communities and development practitioners to receive “buy-in.” Not only did these practices have little impact, but they also ignored the need to address conflicts or policies.

PDC takes a different approach. It suggests shifting from informing people to try to change their behaviour or attitudes to focussing instead on facilitating exchanges between various stakeholders.

The focus is not put on the information to be transmitted by experts, but on horizontal communication that both enables local communities to identify their development needs and establishes a dialogue with all stakeholders. The main objective is to ensure that the end users gather enough information and knowledge to carry out their own development initiatives and evaluate their actions.

Such a communication process includes objectives related to increasing the community knowledge-base (both indigenous and modern); modifying or reinforcing common practices related to natural resource management; building and reinforcing community assets; and approaching local and national authorities, policymakers, and service providers. Appropriate communication approaches should also be set up to implement the required initiatives, monitor and evaluate their impact, and plan for future action.

With PDC, researchers and practitioners become facilitators in a process that involves local communities and other stakeholders in the resolution of a problem or the realization of a common goal. This, of course, requires a change of attitude. Acting as a facilitator does not come automatically. One must learn to listen to people, to help them express their views and to assist them in building consensus for action. For many NRM researchers and practitioners, this is a new role for which they have not been prepared. How can they initiate the process of using communication to facilitate participation and the sharing of knowledge?

Some of the papers presented here describe this process in action. In the first paper from Africa, Konate *et al* describe how such an approach was developed in the context of desertification. Communication strategies used to put the accent on information dissemination, mobilization, and persuasion, but they had little impact. An experiment in participatory communication was used to support various local initiatives designed to fight desertification in the Sahel and to facilitate community participation.

The process included four main phases — training, planning, experimentation and evaluation. Training and planning were the foundation because they mobilized all actors to discuss the process of action-research and how communication would be used to facilitate participation. This process facilitated community participation and generated a synergy between different development structures.

These initiatives were successful because the all stakeholders were involved in the decision-making process. The project also demonstrated that halting desertification, like other development challenges, demands community participation and synergy between different development actors. It cannot be programmed in a top-down way.

From Uganda, Odoi tells the story of how the shift was made to implement communication for participation in the context of action-research with banana growers. The banana research programme of NARO (Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organization) wanted to develop a two-way communication strategy to enhance farmer participation in experiments with different banana improvement technologies and foster farmer-to-farmer training using communication tools that were developed in a participatory manner. This research used PDC as a tool to foster the participation of the community in the identification and solution of their NRM problems.

Researchers encouraged farmers to form farmers' groups. They then helped the representatives of the farmers' groups to identify and prioritize their NRM problems within their banana gardens as well as the causes and potential solutions to these problems. The researchers also worked with the farmers to identify their communication needs and objectives regarding the identified problems, activities to alleviate these problems, and communication tools to assist the farmers to share their new knowledge with their groups.

As a result of the research activities, plots of land that farmers had previously abandoned were now yielding good bananas. Farmers also grew confident enough to share their knowledge with other farmers of their community. They learned to use communication tools such as photographs, posters, brochures, songs and dances. The community also created a formal farmers' association through which they could search, access, and share relevant information and services about community problems. As a result of these activities, the farmers have become proactive instead of passively waiting for external assistance.

A research-action project in the basin of the Nakanbe River in Burkina Faso (Collectif Kuma and Sanon) is another example of a participatory communication approach that brought all of the stakeholders together to manage community conflicts related to water.

Approaches to water-resource management are often centralized and allow little participation by the local populations that are actually affected by water issues. Field research conducted in this basin revealed that 50 percent of modern water sources (hand pumps and new wells) that had been established by different projects were non-functional as a result of lack of involvement and ownership by beneficiaries. The participatory communication approach used by the research team emphasized dialogue among the different stakeholders. The approach also focused on local capacity building for organization and decision-making in water-resource management and conflict resolution and in establishing or reinforcing local water-management committees.

Once again, participatory communication was helpful in identifying solutions to conflict situations in the villages and for setting up or reinforcing social institutions such as the water-management committee. It also built the confidence of community members to address their own problems and seek their own solutions. In this case, it also recognized the central role played by women in the management of water resources.

Another case from Vietnam (Le Van *et al*) describes how a participatory communication approach was used to reinforce community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) research with upland communities. The research started after new policies were put in place by the government to protect forests in the uplands. However, following these measures, only one percent of the land was left for agricultural production. Local communities, who used to practice *swidden* agriculture, had to change their practices and move to sedentary farming. This research project tried to help them improve their livelihood in this new context.

Due to these forced changes in their farming system, and to limited access to assets and natural resources, production was low and there were few opportunities for income generation. Participatory communication was used to foster enable local communities identify needs, priorities and ways to improve their livelihoods. For the first time groups of farmers who shared common characteristics and interests were asked what problems they wanted to start working on and what they solutions they wanted to experiment with.

The question of reaching the poor and most disadvantaged groups in the community was a major preoccupation, because these people received few opportunities to participate in research or development programmes. Emphasis was put on the participation of poor farmers and of women. Improving the capacity of leaders and community organizations also helped them to apply participatory approaches so that all stakeholders could contribute to community plans and activities.

### **3. The NRM practitioner as a communication actor and facilitator**

#### **Establishing Relationships**

As soon as a researcher or NRM practitioner first contacts a local community to establish a working relationship, that person becomes a communication actor. The way the researcher or NRM practitioner approaches the local community, understands and discusses the issues, and collects and shares information involves communication. The way in which that communication is established and nurtured affects the way in which people will feel involved and participate in the research or development initiatives.

Within this framework, it seems important to promote a multi-directional communication process. The research team or the development workers approach the community through the community leaders and community groups. The community groups define their relationship with the new resource people, other associated stakeholders and other community groups.

Many researchers still perceive community members as beneficiaries and future end users of research results. Even if most people recognize that the one-way delivery of technologies to end users simply has little impact, the shift in attitudes and practices is not easy. For this shift to happen, one must recognize that community members are stakeholders in the research and development process. Therefore, approaching a community also means involving people and thinking in terms of stakeholder participation. Building mutual trust and understanding is a major challenge at this stage and will continue to be so during the entire period of interaction between researchers or practitioners and the community.

#### **Negotiating Mandate**

Researchers do not come to a community without their own mandate and agenda. At the same time, communities also want their needs and problems addressed. They will not distinguish between NRM problems, difficulties in obtaining credit or health issues, because these are part of their reality.

Researchers and practitioners should explain and discuss the scope and limitations of their mandate with community members at the outset. In some cases, compromises can be found. For example, it may be possible to involve other resource organizations that could contribute to the resolution of problems that are outside the mandate of the researchers or practitioners. This can often be the case with the issue of credit facilities.

#### **Power Relations and Gender**

The management of natural resources is clearly linked to the distribution of power in a community and to its sociopolitical environment. It is also closely associated with

gender roles. This is why social and gender analyses are useful tools for examining the dynamics of power in a community. Failure to use these tools may turn the participatory process into a manipulation process or make it selective of only a few individuals or groups.

The paper on communication and sustainable development (Ouattara and Ouattara), refers to a situation in which a traditional healer had unquestioned authority and used the participatory communication process to reinforce this. The members of the intervention team, who were not used to such behaviour, were *de facto* manipulated by the situation. What kind of participation was then possible?

This situation is not exceptional and can only be prevented by identifying the principal actors in a community before any process is launched. Social analysis, such as gender analysis and identification of local communication systems, tools, and channels, should take place before any intervention.

### **Understanding the Local Setting: Collecting Data or Co-producing Knowledge?**

This attitude change has its corollary in methodology. Researchers have been trained in data collection, which emphasizes an extractive mode that does not facilitate participation. PDC, however, suggests that researchers or practitioners collaborate with community members and other stakeholders to assemble and share baseline information. This points to a process of co-producing knowledge that draws on the strengths of the different stakeholders.

Participatory research appraisal (PRA) and related techniques have been widely adopted in the field of ENRM to assemble baseline information in record time and to facilitate the participation of community members. However, we often find situations in which techniques such as collective mapping of the area, transect walks, problem ranking and development of a timeline are still used in an extractive mode. The information is principally used for the researcher's or the project designer's benefits and little consideration is given to the information needs of the community or to any sharing of results.

In these cases, even with the "participatory" label, these techniques can reinforce a process guided from the outside. PDC stresses the need to adapt attitudes as well as techniques. Co-producing knowledge is different from simply collecting data, and it can play an essential role in facilitating participation in the decision-making processes that is involved in a research or development project.

### **Understanding the Communication Context**

Who are the different groups that comprise the local community? What are the main customs and beliefs regarding the management of natural resources, and how do people communicate among themselves on these issues? What are the effective interpersonal channels of communication? What views are expressed by different stakeholders in specific places? What local associations and institutions do people use to exchange information and points of views? What modern and traditional media does the community use?

Here again, we find value in integrating the biophysical, social, and communication aspects in an integrated effort to understand the local setting. In the same way that they collect general information and conduct PRA activities to gather more specific information, researchers and development practitioners should seek to understand, with the help of the community, its communication channels, tools and contexts.

### **Identifying and Using Local Knowledge**

Identification of the local knowledge that is associated with NRM practices is part of the process of co-producing knowledge. It should also be linked with two other



issues: the validation of that knowledge and the identification of modern and scientific knowledge that could reinforce local knowledge.

Specific local knowledge or practices may be well suited to certain contexts. In other contexts, it may be incomplete or have little real value. Sometimes, specific practices may have been appropriate for previous conditions, but these conditions may have changed. This emphasizes the importance of validating common local knowledge against scientific evidence and through discussions with local experts or elders as well as community members. It may also prove useful to combine modern knowledge with local practices to render the latter more effective or more suited to local needs. Three papers discuss issues related to participatory communication and local knowledge.

A first paper from Mali (Sanou) describes research that based improvements on local knowledge. This research looked closely at the harvesting rules and practices surrounding *karite* (shea nut) and *nere*, two important fruits for Sahelian people. Sanou also studied perceptions of both men and women farmers with regard to these agroforestry species (e.g., quality of trees and fruits, classification criteria of trees, harvesting time, and organization). This work, based on local community knowledge, has proposed solutions to the aging of trees and to the slow regeneration of the parks, as well as filled gaps in the identification of genetic resources.

A second paper (Collectif Kuma) stresses the importance of ensuring transparency during the process of collecting local knowledge. Community members and holders of knowledge must understand how their knowledge will be used. It is equally important to guarantee that a significant part of any benefits from the use of that knowledge should come back to the community. Guarantees must also be given that the information will not be used against the community, which has happened with information relating to land rights.

This paper also raises the issue of women's knowledge, which has long been ignored. In the research conducted by Ouattara and Ouattara on communication and sustainable development, women from the community were trained as facilitators, and separate meetings were conducted for men and women. The facilitators always explained to the women the importance of their knowledge in the search for solutions to a specific problem.

A modern solution to a given problem will also have more chance of being adopted if a similar practice already exists in the community. For example, in the Sahel, the use of rocks to protect fields against erosion found easy acceptance because the people already used dead branches to stop water from invading their fields.

In a third paper, Diarra reports on a case from Mali in which ancient knowledge was used to improve agricultural production and the well being of the community. An old woman in the village could predict years of good rain and drought and direct farmers to cultivate either on higher ground or by the side of the river according to her forecasts. For this reason each family had two plots of land, one by the side of the river and the other in the tablelands. Her well protected secret was that she could make these predictions by observing the height at which sparrows built their nests in the trees near the river.

After her death, and with the permission of the village authorities, her story was told to motivate the community to protect the river from erosion. The villagers agreed to participate in such activities to protect the birds and the knowledge they brought with them each year.

### **Involving the Local Community in Diagnosis and Planning**

PDC also requires that the local community is involved in identifying a development problem (or a common goal), discovering its many dimensions, identifying potential

solutions, and taking a decision on a concrete set of actions to experiment with or implement. It also means facilitating interaction and collaborative action with other stakeholders.

Traditionally, many researchers and practitioners identified a problem in a community and experimented with solutions with the collaboration of local people. With PDC, the researcher or development practitioner becomes a facilitator of a process that involves local communities and other stakeholders in the identification and resolution of a problem or the realization of a common goal.

The communication process should help people to identify a specific problem; discuss and understand its causes; outline possible solutions; and decide on a set of activities with which to experiment. It is useful to stress that this does not happen during the course of a single meeting - time must be allowed for this process to mature.

In some cases the point of departure is not a specific problem but a common goal that a community gives itself. As with the problem-oriented process, the community will decide on a set of actions to achieve that goal.

Ideally, development and research objectives should strengthen and accompany the chosen community initiative. In general, however, these objectives have already been identified in a research and development proposal conceived before the consultation process was undertaken with the community. One solution to this problem is to plan a revision of the initial objectives with the community at the start of the research or development project. But ideally the administrative rules of donor organizations, as well as the research methodology, should be modified to facilitate community participation at the identification phase of a potential initiative.

### **Developing Partnerships at the Local Level**

The concept of developing partnerships between all development stakeholders involved with local communities is central to PDC.

We often find situations in which a research or development initiative is conducted with a local community, but without consideration for other initiatives that may be trying to engage the same community in other participatory processes. This situation can lead to participation fatigue in the communities. Identifying other ongoing initiatives, communicating with them and looking for opportunities for collaboration should be part of the methodology.

These activities with a local community also allow researchers and practitioners to identify possible partners that could be involved in the research or development process. It could be a rural radio, a theatre group or an NGO working with the same community. By establishing contacts at the onset of the project, these groups will feel they can play a useful role in the design of the research project instead of perceiving themselves as mere service providers.

This issue of collaboration is not an easy one. One of the African papers (Collectif Kuma) raises the issue of collaboration with the technicians from governmental services, and more specifically the problem of combining participatory and non-participatory approaches. Technicians are accustomed to executing and implementing programmes already identified by government authorities. Their mandate often consists in making people adopt their recommendations, which contradicts the principles of PDC. Therefore, there is a need to plan for training in PDC for potential partners.

### **Constraints and Challenges**

Constraints and challenges to PDC are sometimes overwhelming. El Dabi gives an example from Egypt in which participatory communication could not be introduced. The project he describes aimed to identify and modify barriers to community participation in a development project in the south of the country. Local authorities were to be



trained in participatory planning and PDC, a communication audit was planned to cover all stakeholders and support was to be given in designing community-level PDC strategies.

However, several obstacles hindered the implementation of this plan. First, participation was perceived as a process to allow stakeholders to voice grievances, not as a mechanism for them to look for ways to overcome these problems. Second, the project did not allow sufficient time for a communication audit or to conduct the training in a participatory way. Third, but not least, insufficient resources were allocated for the institutionalization of participatory approaches. As a result, participatory communication could not be introduced in the context of this project.

Adjibade provides examples of some of the practical difficulties faced when implementing participatory communication, particularly in a rural context. This paper also notes the importance of prior knowledge of local language and communication channels and tools; of negotiating with men to identify conditions for women's participation; of acknowledging time and distance considerations; of the development of partnerships with local organizations; of consideration of local authorities (traditional, administrative and family); and of harmonizing the understanding of participatory communication among all those involved.

Adjibade also reminds us that participatory communication activities usually lead to the expression of the need for material and financial support to implement the solution identified during the process. Provision must be made somewhere to answer these needs, whether in the project itself or through partnerships. The paper also shows that it is not useful to separate participatory communication from development activities, and that resources must be planned to support these two complementary processes.

Another paper presents the experience of introducing communication within a participatory NRM project in the Tonle Sap region of Cambodia (Thompson). The project applied a wide range of tools and methodologies to inform, educate, and promote participation. However, in the absence of a global communication plan, these efforts remained limited. PDC approaches can identify the best-suited community interventions and the management options for each community to ensure community-based NRM. However, the different communication activities must be integrated within a strategic plan to achieve their potential effectiveness.

#### **4. SUPPORTING NRM THROUGH COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TOOLS**

With PDC, communication strategies are developed around an initiative that has been identified by the community to tackle a specific problem or achieve a common goal.

After community members have gone through the process of identifying a concrete initiative they want to carry out, the next step is to identify both the various categories of people who are most affected by this NRM problem and the groups that might be able to contribute to the solution.

Addressing a general audience such as "the community" or "the farmers" does not really help involve people in communication. Various sub-groups make up any given community. They can be defined in many ways, including by age, gender, ethnic origin, language, occupation, and social and economic conditions. Each sub-group has its own way of perceiving a problem and its solution, and its own way of taking actions.

Communication needs will vary considerably within each specific community group or stakeholder category. In all cases, however, it is important to pay particular attention to the question of gender and of age. These variables are usually critical in determining rights and responsibilities, access to resources and participation in decision-making.

#### **Communication Needs and Objectives**

Development needs can be categorized broadly into material needs and communication needs. Any given development problem, and the attempt to resolve it, will present

needs related to material resources. However, there are complementary needs that involve communication - for sharing information; influencing policies; mediating conflicts; raising awareness; facilitating learning; and supporting decision-making and collaborative action. Clearly, these material and communication aspects should be addressed in a systemic way by any research or development effort.

This being said, PDC puts a greater focus on the second category of needs as identified by all stakeholders, which are then addressed by a series of actions. In the context of NRM, these actions are linked to one or another of the following communication activities: raising awareness; sharing information; facilitating learning; supporting participation, decision-making, and collaborative action; mediating conflicts; and influencing the policy environment.

### **Using Communication Tools in a Participatory Way**

We often find situations in which researchers or practitioners who want to use communication in their activities will want to produce a video, a radio programme, or a play without first trying to identify how it will contribute to the research or development initiative. The expression "communication tools" itself implies that they are not the "product" or the "output" of the communication activities.

PDC takes another perspective. It leads participants through a planning process, which starts with the identification of the specific groups as well as their communication needs and objectives. The research or development team, together with stakeholders, then identify the appropriate communication activities and tools that are needed to reach these objectives.

PDC also put traditional or modern media on the same level as interpersonal communication and learning experiences, like field visits or farmers' schools. The importance of using these communication tools in a way that will support communication must of course be clearly stated at the onset of the project.

Three criteria seem particularly useful in selecting communication tools - their actual use by the community, the cost and constraints of their use and the versatility of their uses. Whenever possible, we should first consider the communication tools already used by the local community, although considerations of cost and sustainability and of different kinds of use should also be examined before taking a decision.

The papers in this publication place specific attention to community discussions, participatory theatre, radio, farmer field schools, videos, photography, posters and brochures.

### **Community Discussions**

Community discussions are considered to be an important communication tool by almost everyone. But these discussions also imply a process and some specific attitudes on the part of the facilitator. A paper from Collectif Kuma gives us two examples of facilitators and the processes that are at work when using this tool.

Thiamobiga, in his paper, describes a case in which community discussions were instrumental in managing bush fires and preserving the natural environment. He stresses the link between participatory communication and the *palabre*, a traditional way to address issues and problems at the community level.

### **Participatory Theatre**

Participatory theatre also appears to be a favourite communication tool. Papers by Collectif Kuma and Thiamobiga discuss how women farmers used theatre-debate as a participatory communication and empowerment tool. Theatre-debate is a tool which uses the format of a play based on a problem followed by a discussion.

Thiamobiga describes how the women farmers used the format to address both the issue of soil fertility and their own status within the community. There is a traditional

ceremony performed in time of drought, when women are allowed to disguise themselves as men to call for rain and the men are not allowed to take offence at the parodying of their gendered behaviour. The women wanted to refer to that ceremony, so that they could bring forward topics that could be addressed directly by the men of the community.

By expressing themselves as (male) actors in a play the women not only articulated the issue of the unequal soil fertility of women's plots, they also gained confidence in themselves and became more assertive. The impact on the community was also stronger because community members were addressing other community members about common issues, rather than development actors from the outside introducing a debate and promoting solutions.

At the same time, such involvement from community members, in this case women farmers, raised expectations that could not be met after the completion of the intervention. There was no direct follow-up, and although the experience was empowering for the participants, there was little impact at a broader level. This issue addresses the importance of planning at the very beginning of the planning phase.

### **Radio and Participatory Communication**

Another paper from Collectif Kuma reminds us that radio is the most popular media in rural Africa, but also that it is still underdeveloped as a participatory communication tool.

His paper describes a project in which radio was used as part of a strategy based on "endogenous" communicators. The programmes were designed on the basis of interviews and discussions with community members and a team that included a radio producer, a farmer, and a representative from a development project.

Other activities were then introduced to complement the media approach and reinforce community participation. The identification of NRM problems and potential solutions was done through discussion groups of women, young people and men. Village-level communication committees were set up to define activities that could respond to prioritized needs. These field activities were then used in the production of radio programmes broadcast by the local rural radio station. Specialists would also comment on these questions and participate in a dialogue with community members.

These activities have opened up a space for dialogue about NRM, while promoting synergy between different development actors intervening in the same locality. This process has engaged community members in a search for solutions instead of waiting for external assistance - they have been able to destroy a pest infesting orange trees, resume a dialogue between farmers and pastoralists and by enable women to have a voice at community meetings.

Nevertheless the paper also highlights the dangers of raising expectations without the possibility of addressing the identified needs. For example, after prioritizing the lack of access to drinking water in the locality, community members and the intervention team did not have many solutions to offer because the communication intervention was neither associated with any specific development action nor equipped with a structure that had the technical and financial resources to address those needs.

A paper from Radio Ada (Larweh) describes a situation in which a community was confronted with a decision to either migrate or renew their waterway, which was choked by weeds, trees and debris, and in fact no longer existed for most of the year. The community radio was part of a process in which the community discussed the situation and decided to clear 40 years of accumulated debris. Neighbouring communities joined in and four years later the river could be used for irrigation and navigation.

### **Farmer Field Schools**

A paper from Zimbabwe (Mhere) presents the case of a farmer field school (FFS) in which the farmers developed the curriculum themselves. FFSs expose farmers to a learning process in which they are gradually presented with new technologies, new ideas, new situations and new ways of responding to problems. The farmers can then adapt their existing technologies and practices and improve their production. But the farmers are not "beneficiaries," they are fully engaged in the development of this communication tool.

A mix of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques and methods is deployed to seek the views of community members on farming operations, problems and possible solutions. A curriculum is designed on the basis of this information and presented and discussed with the stakeholders, and modules are developed for use by the field staff in their daily interaction with farmers.

### **Video, Photography, Posters and Brochures**

In other situations, especially those oriented toward empowerment, community members will take the lead in using or designing communication tools. This is well documented in the Uganda paper (Odoi) on the adoption by rural communities of video production, photography and the making of posters and brochures

This paper tells how farmers were asked to review a video produced by a research team to and instead they rejected it. Convinced that they could do a better job of delivering their own messages and experiences, the farmers decided who should show what and how, fixed a date for the new recording, and signalled to the researchers when they were ready. Such a thing would have never happened if the researchers had not undertaken a process of participatory communication with the farmers. This was a clear manifestation of their empowerment.

The same thing happened with photographs and posters. In fact, after examining a poster depicting proper water and sanitation practices, farmers said it was teaching someone how to write. Clearly, that tool was not adapted to this specific community.

Tools should also be considered from the point of view of their usage. In a case from Lebanon (Hamadeh *et al*) local user networks, which were inspired by a traditional way of communicating and resolving issues, and video were used to manage conflicts and to facilitate the expression of views by marginalized people.

This research was focused on understanding changes in resource management systems in an isolated highland village and on improving prospects for sustainable community development. Community members were involved during different phases, and capacity building was sought through the establishment of a local users' network.

This network acted as a medium to bring together the different stakeholders and used a traditional way of communicating and resolving dilemmas called *majlis*, in which issues are brought up within the community. As the network grew, so did the understanding by the researchers of communication principles and the need to develop specialized sub-networks. Three sub-networks were developed, two dealing with the main production sectors in the village (livestock and fruit growing) and a third addressing women's needs.

Tools and practices were mainly interpersonal - roundtable meetings, community outreach by students, joint field implementation of good NRM practices, and workshops on different NRM themes. Short video documentaries were also produced to involve the community in conflict resolution. Marginal groups, including women, could express their points of view and the images helped shed light on aspects of conflict and dissent. Separate video screenings to different groups were followed by

discussions that were also filmed and documented. A revised video that included the earlier discussions was then shown to the whole village until a positive dialogue started to emerge from the audience.

## 5. INFLUENCING OR IMPLEMENTING POLICY

Promoting poverty alleviation, food security and environmental sustainability also requires changes to the institutional and legislative environment. Local and national authorities, policymakers and service providers are active in shaping and enforcing the regulatory environment in which the required changes must take place. It is therefore important to facilitate dialogue at that level to support community initiatives.

Two papers from Cambodia (Kimhy and Pinreak) give examples of how participatory communication can influence policy and help in its implementation.

A first paper shares the experiences of indigenous communities who evaluated an NRM project implemented by the government and presented their findings to government officials. The presentation also included recommendations to the government in a context in which government representatives usually tell communities what they should do. In this activity, evaluation was used both as an empowerment tool for community members and as also an advocacy tool for influencing the government.

The second paper describes a situation in which a project team was visiting villages to inform them of a new legislation on land rights. Transferring information across cultural and language barriers is difficult, but it is much more difficult when some of the concepts do not even exist in the vocabulary of one of the parties to the dialogue. This was the case in this situation because concepts such as land title did not exist within the indigenous communities described in the paper. At the same time communication of these concepts was crucial because powerful interests were threatening community lands and resources.

None of the project team members spoke any of the indigenous languages and they had prepared information materials without consulting any one from any of the communities. At first their attempts at communication failed. They then experimented with a participatory communication approach, involved community members in the preparation of the sessions and communication materials. They also included indigenous people as full members in their land rights extension team.

It is interesting to note that the team also used the "livelihood" framework in the course of their discussions with the communities. They presented ideas expressed by the community in pictures that were painted and then revised by the community. The visuals in this case greatly assisted in the discussions and expressions of different points of views.

A paper from the Philippines (Torres) tells how participatory communication helped to implement CBNRM among indigenous communities. When community-based forest management was adopted as a national strategy in the Philippines, issues emerged with regard to the readiness and capacity of communities to handle the tasks and functions.

In the case of the Bayagong Association for Community Development, an upland people's organization, the organization was able to assert, legitimize and sustain control over a piece of forestland they had been *de facto* occupying for years. To do so, community members underwent a year-long process of participatory resource management planning.

This experience helped participants to obtain a better grasp of their resource, to assess their own capacities and weaknesses, and to identify internal and external threats and how these could be handled. It enabled them to gain knowledge, attitudes, and skills to develop rational approaches to forest management. But they also learned to become more open and assertive about their rights.

PDC played a critical role in tempering the socio-political environment so that a climate favourable to the community's take over of the forestland was created. However, success was not only due to communication. Other factors such as social capital, policy presence and external assistance also played a role. What is unique is that participatory communication enabled the evolution of a "participation-as-engagement" process veering away from the usual "participation-as-involvement" process.

A paper from Indonesia (Jahi) tells of a research project that originated from a question researchers asked themselves while they were doing a baseline study in a remote rural area. The researchers wondered whether poor farmers and landless farm labourers could participate in the management of a strip of public land that stretched out along a river and thus be able to derive benefits from that activity.

By law farming activities were prohibited on that land. Only grass and tree cultivation that would help stabilize that strip was permitted (the riverbanks were raised to prevent flooding of the area). At the same time, regardless of the rules, landless farmers continued their farming activities on the riverbanks. Officials of the department of public works would enforce the rules and eradicate their crops. A consensus was developed.

The farmers could continue their activities provided they grew grass on at least the first metre from the river's edge and sheep rearing was encouraged.

The researchers established links between university researchers, local government officials, extension services, village governments and local communities. Communication materials such as slide shows, posters and a comic book were developed and tested with farmers and extension workers. Different topics were developed for different audiences. For example, presentations on the potential of raising sheep were prepared for local policymakers, and aspects of sheep production and rural family budgets were covered in products for extension workers and farmers.

Capacity building for livestock extension workers and farmer leaders was then offered. In-kind loans in the form of sheep were provided to the farmers, who agreed to return a certain number of the offspring to the project. Supervision and backstopping activities were also provided to farmer leaders, who agreed to share the information with other farmers after they had acquired enough experience.

Farmer-to-farmer communication was encouraged and supported and was found to be a more efficient way to raise farmers' interests than what researchers or extension workers used to do. The experience also raised public and private interest in supporting such economic activities as sheep rearing in the district. Fifteen years after the beginning of the project, livestock production in the district has developed significantly, and small farmers can still earn their living with this activity.

Another policy issue is when participatory communication coexists with bad policies. In a paper presenting the case of the Kahusi-Biega National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Mumbu), we find a situation in which a conservation measure (the creation of a park to protect an unique ecosystem and a population of mountain gorillas) was implemented in a top-down way. The local population was excluded from the management of natural resources, and consequently did not participate in supporting the new unpopular measure.

An alternative plan had to be developed. Using environmental communication, the project began to develop, in collaboration with the populations living in the area, community-development activities that were in harmony with the conservation of the park and its natural resources. These activities soon evolved into the development of mechanisms of participatory management. Soon, some 200 "village parliaments" were set up to facilitate the process. Not only have opinions changed toward the park, but the communities started taking charge of its protection.



The promotion of policies goes hand in hand with collective action. One of the papers (Ouoba) illustrates the daily life of a rural woman of the African Sahel and depicts her difficulties with regard to natural resources - lack of access to water and fuel wood; problems of soil fertility; and lack of land-title recognition. It also tells of the efforts of a rural women's association to find collective answers to these individual problems. Solutions to NRM problems experienced by rural women must come from their own efforts, a process that can be facilitated by participatory communication.

In another related paper, Ouoba shares her experiences in elaborating an action plan in NRM with rural women in West Africa. We can see that such initiatives are part of an empowerment process in which marginalized people, who are not used to expressing themselves, develop confidence and learn to voice their difficulties and needs and to formulate specific actions to address these needs.

## 6. CAPACITY BUILDING

PDC, and more broadly the use of communication in the context of participatory development or participatory research, has to be appropriated by NRM researchers and practitioners. It should also be the subject of exchanges and discussions with the other stakeholders, such as community members, who participate in these activities.

Five papers (Adandedjan; Caballero and Cadiz; Kaumba and Kamlongera; Velasco and Matulac; and Quiamco) discuss the implementation of Isang Bagsak, a learning and research programme in PDC. The expression "Isang Bagsak" comes from the Philippines and means: *arriving at a consensus, an agreement*. Because it refers to communication as a participatory process, it has become the working title for this initiative.

The programme seeks to increase the capacity of development practitioners and researchers active in the field of environment and natural resources management, to use PDC to work more effectively with local communities and stakeholders. It pursues the objectives of improving the capacities of practitioners and researchers to communicate with local communities and other stakeholders and to enable them to plan communication strategies that support community-development initiatives.

The programme combines face-to-face activities with a distance-learning strategy and web-based technology. With the distance component, the programme can answer the needs of researchers and practitioners who could not easily leave work. It is presently implemented in Southeast Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa, and is being planned for the African Sahel.

In Southeast Asia, Isang Bagsak is implemented by the College of Development Communication, the University of the Philippines at Los Banos. It works in the Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam.

In the Philippines, the programme is implemented in partnership of PANLIPI, an NGO devoted to legal assistance to indigenous Filipinos. In Vietnam, capacity building in PDC aims to improve approaches to coastal resources management, understand how to influence local policies and form a national network in community-based coastal resources management. Furthermore, a Vietnamese version of the Isang Bagsak, Vong Tay Lon, is being prepared.

In Cambodia, participants come from the new Forest Administration department. This national body is responsible for formulating and implementing forest policies, which affect more than half of the country's total land area. By the end of 2004, it will conclude its statement on National Forest Policy, which will be based on a consultative process that will include all stakeholders in national forestry policy formulation.

In Southern and Eastern Africa, the programme is implemented in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Uganda by the SADC Centre of Communication for Development (SADC-CCD). By building capacity in PDC, the programme aims to facilitate collaboration among decision-makers, planners, development agents and communities to improve the management of both the environment and natural resources and research and

development initiatives. The programme works in partnership with the National Agriculture Research Organization in Uganda, the Desert Margins Initiative in Malawi, and the Department of Agricultural Research and Extension in Zimbabwe.

Another programme is being prepared for an agroforestry network in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali, which will be led by The International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) Sahel Programme (ICRAF-Sahel). In the Sahel, the starting point for implementing Isang Bagsak is the realization that new agroforestry technologies that should improve lives are not widely adopted in spite of all the efforts made in this direction. The objective of the programme is to reinforce the capacities of the different actors so that they can co-produce and co-disseminate new knowledge.

The issue of capacity building is also discussed in three other papers. Diop suggests that capacity building in PDC should focus on three areas - planning by objectives; the methodology of "observant participation" (endogenous version of participatory observation, a traditional tool of action research); and communication tools.

El Hadidy addresses the issue of capacity building in the context of the Arab region, but situates PDC within the larger framework of participatory development. This paper advocates that practitioners should engage in a critical reflection on their practices. It states that the "delivery of resources" mode of operation in the form of transfer of know-how and skills is not sufficient in itself. It also indirectly implies that resources are transferred from those who have them to those who do not, instead of recognizing that every practitioner has skills and abilities that need to be brought to the surface.

Unlike capacity building that requires a "how-to" approach such as proposal writing or business planning, capacity building in PDC should focus on recognizing that communication is an innate process. It advocates an approach for "facilitation of resourcefulness" rather than "providing resources." This process goes hand in hand with the documentation and discussion of local participatory practices.

The third paper, which is from FAO (Acunzo and Thompson), presents a national capacity-building effort in Cambodia that was designed to help an interministerial communication team design and implement targeted interventions to support plans and efforts made by local communities for NRM. The strategy was based on implementing information and communication strategies at the field level and providing in-service training at the pilot sites. The learning process included participatory analysis, training of villagers, material design and production, and monitoring and evaluation for the improvement of agricultural and fishing practices.

The paper describes the constraints and lessons learned during the course of this initiative. Among the challenges, the authors mention that the lack of operational budgets makes it difficult for the newly trained communication team to apply their new skills. Similar trends have also been observed in other capacity building initiatives. We need to address this situation as part of capacity building efforts and examine how these efforts can be better integrated into the operational plans of targeted institutions.

Finally, capacity building and co-learning efforts should also document and promote a systematic use of participatory development communication to NRM.

First, it is important to state that there is no single, all-purpose recipe to start a participatory development communication process. Each time we must look for the best way to establish the communication among different stakeholders, and use it to facilitate and support participation in a community-driven initiative.

However, participation in the planning process is important and using PDC demands a change of attitude. Traditionally, the way many research teams and practitioners work is to identify a problem in a community and to experiment solutions with the collaboration of the local people. On the communication side, the trend is to create awareness of the many dimensions of that problem and the solution community members should implement (from an expert point of view).

Working with PDC means involving the local community in identifying the development problem (or a common goal), discovering its many dimensions, identifying potential solutions (or a set of actions) and taking a decision on a set of actions to experiment or implement. It is no longer the sole responsibility of the researcher or the development practitioner, and their organizations.

PDC supports a participatory development or research for development process. We usually represent such a process through four main phases, which of course are not separated and flow into one another - problem identification, planning, implementation, and monitoring & evaluation. At the end there is a decision to either return to the beginning of the process (problem identification) and start another cycle or move to a revision of the planning phase, or to scale up efforts, starting another planning, implementation and evaluation cycle. In an NRM context the process looks like this: <sup>4</sup>

- Step 1: Establishing a relationship with a local community and understanding the local setting;
- Step 2: Involving the community in the identification of a problem, potential solutions, and in a decision to carry out an initiative;
- Step 3: Identifying the different community groups and other stakeholders concerned by the identified problem (or goal) and initiative;
- Step 4: Identifying communication needs, objectives and activities;
- Step 5: Identifying appropriate communication tools;
- Step 6: Preparing and pre-testing communication content and materials;
- Step 7: Facilitating the building of partnerships;
- Step 8: Producing an implementation plan;
- Step 9: Monitoring and evaluating the communication strategy and documenting the development or research process;
- Step 10: Planning the sharing and utilization of results.

This process however is not sequential. Some of those steps can be done in parallel or in a different order. They can also be defined differently depending on the context. But they can guide the NRM researcher or practitioner in supporting participatory development or research through the use of communication.

## 7. INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

Implementing PDC faces the same constraints as the participatory development process it supports. It demands time, resources and practical modalities that can only come from a negotiation with donor organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> See Bessette, G. 2004. *Involving the Community: A Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Development Communication*. IDRC, Ottawa, and Southbound, Penang.

### **Beginning the process**

In the traditional development culture, financial support often comes after revision and acceptance of a formal proposal. In order to go through the different levels of revision and acceptance, the development problem or goal must be clearly identified and justified, the objectives outlined with precision and all the activities detailed. The full budget must figure in the proposal with all its budget notes.

Although some organizations are rethinking this process and promoting a programme instead of a project orientation, most are not. It is important to put this issue on the agenda of donor organizations and to demand the revision of such a process. If we want to develop a participatory development process and have community members and other stakeholders have their say at all phases, starting with project identification and planning, this means that we need time and resources to do so.

In the meantime, we can identify two modalities that can be proposed to the donor organization. The first one consists in putting together a pre-proposal that will seek to identify and plan the project with all stakeholders. The second modality - a second choice, in case the first one is not possible - consists in building the proposal in a way that will permit its revision with community members and other stakeholders.

### **Changes during implementation**

Participation brings changes. A participatory development or research process cannot be planned like the construction of a road; as participation is facilitated and more feedback is gathered, more consensuses are developed and decisions made, things change. This is why it is always an iterative process and we must have the possibility of changing plans as we go along in order.

The length of the activities is another problem we face. Often proposals have to be developed on a two or three year timeframe. This is inadequate for a PDC process, but we can design projects so that we can identify research and development indicators to justify continued support. This underlines also the importance of a continuous evaluation mechanism set up during implementation of the process.

## **8. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

Two papers, from Africa and Asia, examine PDC from a regional perspective.

In Asia, Quebral, who was the first to use the term "development communication" more than 30 years ago, retraces the evolution of participatory approaches to development communication. The paper situates this evolution in the context of the communication units, departments and colleges in Asian universities and from the perspective of a fight against poverty and hunger. She notes that development communication does not identify itself with technology *per se*, but with people, particularly the disadvantaged in rural areas. PDC uses the tools and methods of communication to give people the capacity and information they need to make their own decisions.

The paper outlines the beginnings of development communication and confirms the need to build on what has been done. Older models retain their validity in certain situations and can still be used when appropriate. It also presents lessons and observations learned through this Asian experience.

In the context of NRM, Quebral insists on the importance of a balance between technology and the empowerment of people, and on how PDC can help people zero in on their problems and choose the technologies with which they wish to experiment.

Offering another regional perspective, Boafo describes and analyses the application of PDC in Africa and stresses the linkages between communication and the different dimensions of development in the continent. Since the 1960's and 1970's development communication approaches have been employed in numerous development programmes and projects. However much more remain to be done to address the constraints that

confront PDC, particularly in the context of rural and marginalized communities where the majority of the populations in most African countries reside.

In such a context, notes Bofo, community communication access points and traditional media are of particular importance. Effective applications of PDC approaches and strategies at the grassroots and community level should necessarily involve the use and harnessing of these communication resources. With their horizontal and participatory approaches, they can contribute effectively to enhance participation in cultural, social and political change, as well as agricultural, economic, health and community development programmes.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In the field of NRM, PDC is a tool that reinforces the processes of participatory research and development and encourages the sharing of knowledge needed in these processes. It integrates communication, research and action in an integrated framework and it involves all stakeholders in the different phases of the development process. But, most importantly, PDC points out that NRM must be directly linked to the agenda of communities and seek to reinforce their efforts in fighting poverty and improving their living conditions.

For communication to be effective in addressing the three interlinked development challenges of poverty alleviation, food security, and environmental sustainability, it must fulfill the following functions: ensure the appropriation by local communities of any NRM research or development initiative; support the learning needed to realize the initiative and facilitate the circulation of relevant knowledge; facilitate the building of partnerships and synergies with different development actors working with the same communities; and influence policy and decision-making processes at all levels (family, community, local, and national).

To achieve these objectives, a major effort is required in capacity building — or more exactly, participatory learning — for practitioners in the field of NRM. Development workers, NGOs, researchers, extension workers, and governmental agents responsible for technical services need appropriate communication skills. The ability to work with local communities in a gender sensitive and participatory way, to support learning processes, to develop partnerships with other development stakeholders, and to affect the policy environment should be recognized as being as important as the knowledge needed to address technical issues in NRM.

At the same time, field practitioners, researchers, and community members who are involved in NRM initiatives have experience in using communication within participatory research and development initiatives. There is no recipe that can be used in all situations, but there is much to learn from sharing, discussing and reflecting on experiences. As advocated in the paper by El Hadidy, we should use an approach that *facilitates resourcefulness* rather than *provides resources*.

Of course, such a process goes hand in hand with the documentation and discussion of our NRM-PDC practices. This is why initiatives such as the Isang Bagsak programme and the FAO initiative in Cambodia should be developed, supported and multiplied in various contexts and situations. This is also why participatory learning in PDC for both practitioners and stakeholders should be on the agenda of every organization supporting NRM research and development initiatives. It is only through such efforts that we can make participatory development happen, not only at the level of our discourses but in the field. It is also only through such efforts that we can make sure that local actions can have a global impact, by influencing the policy environment and making the knowledge available to those who really need it.

Finally, it is through such efforts that we can promote and cultivate the values that are at the core of our work, including the one that states that people should be able to participate fully in their own development. In a recent paper, Nora C. Quebral insists

that, "We now need to explicate those values more finely and cultivate them more rigorously in our actions. Our training procedures may have overly stressed skills at the expense of values. We need to make values more explicit, to deliberately pair them with the corresponding skills if necessary. My first challenge, then, to development communicators, is to make development communication values more pronounced in their practice."<sup>5</sup>

The same challenge can be extended to NRM practitioners and researchers. We need to make participatory development happen if we are to support communities and governments in their efforts to address the three interlinked development challenges of poverty alleviation, food security, and environmental sustainability. Participatory development values, local and modern knowledge in NRM, and communication skills needed for this.

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<sup>6</sup> The papers cited as "Collectif Kuma" were written by Kadiatou Ouattara and Souylemane Ouattara on the basis of discussions carried out in June 2003 among four NRM research projects that had been using PDC.



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# Communication for isolated and marginalized groups

## *Blending the old and the new*

*Silvia Balit*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

International development goals now place high priority on addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor, and with the advent of the Information Age, communication is increasingly recognized as essential to achieving these goals. However, information, communication and knowledge are essential but not sufficient elements to address poverty. Marginal communities do not exist in isolation from wider contexts of social, political and economic forces and unequal power structures. These constraints need to be taken into account, and it must be recognized that information and communication cannot substitute for structural changes.

There have been many changes since the discipline of communication for development began some 50 years ago. Business as usual is no longer possible. There is need for new directions to respond to a changing environment, the effects of globalization, new social actors and the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies. At the same time, there is a wealth of lessons learned from years of experience working with disadvantaged groups, and a variety of participatory approaches developed in the past are still valid. The paper suggests that there is need to blend the old with the new.

Although there are no- one size fits all – rules, based on what has worked in the past, the paper describes some principles which are still valid as guidelines on how participatory communication can best be used to work with isolated and marginalized groups . The paper also analyses different media and approaches, which are suitable for working at community level. It analyses the potential and limitations of new information and communication technologies for working with the poor and identifies areas for improving local access and appropriation by marginal groups. It concludes that communication practitioners must learn to adapt to the new information age, and select the most appropriate communication channels, making use of all the tools in their toolbox. An essential element for successful and sustainable efforts with the disadvantaged will continue to be dialogue, ownership on the part of communities and integration with existing indigenous communication systems.

As a basis for discussion, the paper asks: Why is it that after so many years of experience there are still few participatory communication processes in programs to alleviate poverty and improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups? A number of constraints and possible reasons are suggested. The paper also proposes ideas for action, which could help to overcome some of the constraints and improve the effectiveness of communication with isolated and marginalized groups . These include:

#### **For Governments:**

- To establish regulatory frameworks and an enabling policy environment for communication with the poor, involving all stakeholders.
- To respect the identities, languages, cultural diversity and traditions of minorities.

**For Donors and Development Agencies:**

- To plan for strategic communication in poverty alleviation programs, with adequate timeframes and resources.
- To establish units with professional staff in communication for development.
- To provide time and personnel in projects for participatory research, monitoring and evaluation.
- To establish partnerships to promote local access to ICTs for the poor, and ensure meaningful use and social appropriation.

**For Communication Practitioners:**

- To train communication professionals at all levels, with a focus on participatory approaches for social change.
- To advocate with decision makers for the inclusion of communication in poverty alleviation programs.
- To identify new instruments and indicators for monitoring and evaluation of participatory communication processes with disadvantaged groups.
- To address the issue of sustainability.
- To share more information and experiences of successful participatory communication approaches with marginalized people.

**1. SETTING THE SCENE****1.1. Challenges and opportunities**

We are living in an era of radical transformation, which presents new challenges as well as opportunities for communication for development practitioners. The images of the attack on the New York Trade towers on 11 September 2001, and the aftermath of the Madrid train bombings on 11 March 2004 reached the remotest corners of the globe in real time. The constant flow of information and images of the War on Terror are there to remind us of the power and potential of the new information age. But how much of this potential is directed towards improving the quality of lives of the poorest? **How is the global information society affecting communication for isolated and marginalized groups?**

**1.2. New scenarios**

Governments and traditional institutions have withdrawn from certain functions that are now being taken over by civil society and the private sector. Globalisation is shaping the world economy, and privatisation of public services, free markets and international trade agreements have created new scenarios for development with serious effects on governments, local communities and marginalized groups. In addition, globalisation without social justice has created new and dramatic tensions. Political, social, cultural and economic disparities are the root cause of current international problems such as poverty, ethnic conflicts, wars, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, migrations, and Diasporas.

**1.3. The communication age**

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) have created the so-called information and knowledge society. Communication technologies are becoming more appropriate for developing countries, and experiments with ICTs are demonstrating that the benefits of the information revolution can have positive repercussions for economic and social development. **But infrastructure, access and use are still limited for vulnerable groups in the rural areas of developing countries. They are on the wrong side of the digital divide, and risk further marginalization.**

At the same time, processes of democratisation, decentralisation and pluralism have paved the way for community-based ownership of various communication media such as newspapers, radio, and video and in some cases even the Internet. Thus, horizontal people to people processes are emerging alongside dominant structures and vertical lines of communication. But global media markets are now dominated by a mere handful of multinationals, and **the globalisation of communication is threatening cultural diversity and the traditional values of minorities.**

#### **1.4. Human development**

There has been a shift in development thinking from top down approaches based on economic growth and transfer of technology to people centred development, at least on paper. The participation of rural and urban communities in decision-making about their own lives, gender analysis, equity, social factors, holistic approaches and respect for indigenous knowledge are becoming elements of many development programs. **There is more emphasis on the cultural and local dimensions of development. It is also more widely accepted that human development requires dialogue, interaction and sharing of ideas for social change and innovation to occur.**

#### **1.5. International policy**

Most major issues on the development agenda in the last decades still remain as challenges facing the world in the new millennium, and are addressed in the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000. These reflect the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and the needs of the poorest and traditionally marginalized groups. They include extreme poverty, low incomes and hunger, lack of primary education, gender inequality, high child and maternal mortality, poor health conditions as shown by the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and the lack of environmental sustainability. These are all challenges, which will benefit from participatory processes of social change. Thus, the importance of communication as an essential element in tackling these issues.

With the emphasis on the poorest, the international community recognises that special measures are required to address the needs of vulnerable groups and minorities. For example, a number of initiatives are being promoted for indigenous people, who are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people in the world today. In 1994, the United Nations launched the International Decade for the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004) to promote and protect the rights of indigenous people worldwide. Within the framework of this Decade, in 2000 the UN Economic and Social Council created the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, with indigenous participation and membership. The Forum has a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. It provides advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN; raises awareness and promotes coordination and integration of activities within the UN system; and disseminates information related to indigenous issues. During its last session in May 2004 the Forum adopted recommendations concerning the education of indigenous people. During the discussions the use of communication and appropriate community media were also raised.

Also within the framework of the Decade, The UN Commission on Human Rights is discussing a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Article 17 deals specifically with communication and states: "Indigenous people have the right to establish their own media in their own languages. They also have the right to equal access to all forms of non-indigenous media. States should take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity."

The most recent international conference, the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in 2003 and to be followed up in Tunis in 2005, was devoted to putting the potential of knowledge and ICTs at the service of development, and to promote the use of information and knowledge for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. The Plan of Action stressed the importance of promoting access and use for all, with emphasis on the special requirements of women and girls, indigenous people, older peoples, persons with disabilities, disadvantaged children, and other vulnerable groups. It called upon Governments and other stakeholders to establish sustainable and multipurpose community public access points, providing affordable or free of charge access to the Internet. It emphasized the importance of socially meaningful content in ICTs to empower local communities. The Plan of Action also called upon Governments to create policies that enhance and promote respect for different cultures, languages and traditions. It urged them to give support to media based in local communities, combining the use of traditional media and new technologies to facilitate the use of local languages, to preserve local heritage and nomadic communities. It invited Governments to respect indigenous knowledge and traditions, to enhance the capacity of indigenous people to develop content in their own languages and to enable them to use and benefit from their traditional knowledge in the information society.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.6. Isolated and marginalized groups

International development goals now place high priority on reaching the poorest of the poor. Who are they? Small subsistence farmers, women, youth in urban and rural areas, indigenous people, nomads, mountain people, refugees, landless labourers, rural artisans, small fishermen, inhabitants of small islands, to mention just a few. In recent years the international environment has created new social actors such as migrant workers, Diasporas, victims of AIDS, the disabled, and victims of war and conflict situations.

The information revolution has also created a new category: **The information poor and the computer illiterates.** (Saik Yoon 2000). Isolated and marginalized groups face particular constraints with regard to access to information and communication, and thus have limited participation and voice in the public sphere and in decision-making processes affecting their lives. They belong to the culture of silence. They are on the wrong side of the digital divide, unable to participate in the Information Society and thus risk further marginalization, politically, socially and economically.

What is their profile?

- They are poor, with practically no or little money to spend on access to communication technology.
- They live in isolated rural areas, or in slums in large cities, or in mountain terrains, or on distant small islands, often without electricity, and telephones.
- They are unemployed, or work as unskilled labour or self-employed subsistence farmers or unskilled agricultural labour.
- They are illiterate or semi-literate, with little access to education and training.
- They are part of minority ethno-linguistic groups.
- They often have social, economic, cultural and political customs that are distinct from those of the dominant societies.

<sup>1</sup> "Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs", the Declaration approved by civil society representatives at the Conference, placed emphasis on people centred development and communication as a process for social change. The Declaration also stressed participatory use of communication and ensuring the involvement of diverse social and linguistic groups, cultures and peoples, rural and urban populations without exclusion, in decision making.



- They are powerless, suffer from social discrimination, and lack recognition of their identities and ways of life.
- They are victims of violence, drugs, wars and new pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.
- In the majority of cases they speak minority languages.

Their communication systems include alternative and small media such as video and audio visuals, popular theatre, local and community radio, poetry, proverbs, storytellers, popular songs and music, loudspeakers, in addition to informal meetings in the street, in the market place and at ritual celebrations. They belong primarily to oral cultures.

At the same time, globalisation and new information technologies have created new identities, which go beyond the boundaries of the state or geographical communities and traditional institutions. Thus, **social movements representing minority and disadvantaged groups make use of new communication networks and information flows to express their concerns, share common interests, and promote social change and action for collective rights.** They have created transnational public spheres without boundaries of time and space. These movements are usually based on common issues and interests such as human rights, the environment, labour standards and gender. Examples include women's associations, human rights groups, ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, migrant workers, Diasporas, religious movements, victims of AIDS, environmental activists, and Dalits.

ICTs have been used successfully to give women a voice and to build up networks for social and political advocacy. Examples include global networks such as Women's Net and ISIS International, and regional networks such as Femnet, SANGONet and APC-Africa-Women in Africa; Depth News and Women's Feature Service in Asia; DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a new Era) and CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action) in the Caribbean.

The Indigenous Media Network brings together indigenous journalists from all parts of the world to disseminate information from an indigenous perspective and to use as a tool to campaign for the rights of indigenous people worldwide. Transnational networks linking small grass root groups were fundamental in co-ordinating actions to dispute water policies in Bolivia, in challenging Brazilian deforestation policies and drug prices in Africa. (Huesca 2001). And, it is well known that the indigenous Zapatista movement in Chiapas was able to survive and promote its agenda thanks to the international backing received through the use of Internet and other media.

These social movements and their networks make use of the Internet, bulletins, pamphlets, cartoons, video, street theatre, graffiti, radio and any other media available to them.

### 1.7. Information, Knowledge and Communication

It has been demonstrated that economic and technological inputs will go under-utilised without knowledge, and it is for the sharing of knowledge that communication is indispensable. However, knowledge and communication are essential but not sufficient elements to address poverty. **Marginal communities do not exist in isolation from wider contexts of social, political, economic forces and unequal power structures that are barriers to social change. These constraints need to be taken into account. Information and communication can never substitute for structural changes.** For example, the extent to which subsistence farmers can benefit from information will vary according to other factors such as ownership of land, proximity of markets, available means of transportation, and their productive resources to respond to the opportunities information sources might provide. (Curtain, 2004). In addition, collecting and disseminating information are not the same as knowledge sharing and communication. Communication is a two way process, and

true knowledge is more than information. Knowledge is the meaning that people make of information. And, for societies the world over making sense of information depends on their ability to discuss and debate it. For social change to occur there must be opportunities for dialogue. Only when information helps people communicate, participate and allows them to make informed choices does that information become knowledge. (Panos 1998)

### 1.8. Need for new and better directions

As communication practitioners our mission has always been to make life better for the poor, and those at risk. The ultimate test of communication for development will continue to be what impact it has on improving the quality of lives of marginal and vulnerable groups. Yet, there have been many changes since the discipline of communication for development began some 50 years ago. There is need for new directions to respond to a changing environment and new social actors. **There is need to create an alternative framework for communication interventions, that is truly people and participation oriented, and not only on paper. It must involve them in assessing the nature of the problem, defining priorities, formulating solutions and managing the processes of change.**

At the same time, we also have lessons learned from years of experience and practice, and a variety of approaches developed in the past are still valid. We need to blend the old with the new. The questions this Roundtable should examine are whether current strategies, experience and knowledge are appropriate for working with marginal and vulnerable groups, and how they should be modified or expanded.

#### A new approach to HIV/AIDS Communication

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is the most serious public health issue facing developing countries, creating new vulnerable and marginalized individuals. The epidemic is both a cause and an effect of underdevelopment and the spread of HIV/AIDS is linked to issues of gender inequality, discrimination, poverty and marginalization. The fight against AIDS has become a top international priority, and has brought communication in the forefront as a critical tool for influencing behaviour and life styles. Apart from a few notable successes, the record of tackling this new development challenge has been poor, and the pandemic continues to spread. There has been overemphasis on short-term results, while AIDS is a long term and complex problem. Past strategies to bring about behaviour change – formulating and disseminating messages to persuade people to be abstinent, faithful or to use a condom – have not been always successful. Thus, while information dissemination and health messages are essential, they are not sufficient and new approaches and strategies are required.

The Eighth UN Roundtable on Communication for Development held in Nicaragua in 2001 focused on HIV/AIDS and the communication challenges it presents. It concluded that broader and longer term strategies, with a series of complementary and multisectoral approaches were required to address the social, cultural, political and gender aspects of AIDS. Approaches should move from putting out messages to fostering an environment where the voices of those most affected by the pandemic can be heard, and where dialogue and discussion can flourish. Consultation and negotiation to identify the best way forward in a partnership process should be applied rather than trying to persuade people to change behaviours.

(Source: Report of Inter-Agency Roundtable 2001)

## 2. SOME LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

Based on what has worked in the past, the following are some principles, which are still valid as guidelines on how participatory communication for social change can best be used to work with marginal and vulnerable groups:

### 2.1. Communication as process

The Challenge for Change Program's work with the Fogo Islanders in the 1960s has often been seen as a turning point in the development of participatory communication processes. The Fogo Process was one of the first examples of filmmaking and video as a process to obtain social change in a disadvantaged community. It included a series of working practices that have influenced many participatory communication programs throughout the world and that are still very valid. Key ingredients included:

- Communication as a process for empowerment, for conflict resolution, and to negotiate with decision makers to modify policy.
- Communication technology and media only as tools to facilitate the process.
- Programmes planned and produced with and by the poor themselves, about their social problems, and not just produced by outsiders.
- The professional quality of the product becomes secondary to content and process.
- The importance of interpersonal communication and the role of a facilitator, a community worker or a social animator.
- Community input into the editing of the material, and dialogue with decision makers.

The Fogo Process provides evidence of how local communities who have been marginalized by economic and political structures can become empowered through communication to transform conditions of uneven development. (Crocker, 2003)

### 2.2. Starting with the People

**Listening to people, learning about their perceived needs and taking into account their knowledge and culture is another essential prerequisite for successful communication with marginal groups.** Listening, the capacity to read reality through the ear is an important skill developed by oral cultures. People develop listening skills acutely when they rely exclusively on oral communication. Dialogue also requires the capacity to listen and to be silent. Dialogue only takes place where silence is respected (Hamelink, 2004). Listening goes beyond a simple appraisal of needs. It involves listening to what people already know, what they aspire to, what they perceive as possible and desirable and what they feel they can sustain.

Today, compared to many years ago, there are several participatory research methods which have been developed to enable outsiders and communities rapidly to share experiences and learn together about their realities. For example, the SADC Centre of Communication for Development based in Harare, Zimbabwe, has developed a methodology of participatory rural communication appraisal (PRCA). PRCA enables development workers to involve community members in identifying problems and proposing solutions that will be adopted by the community. Research for the design and production of communication programs becomes an interactive process, allowing the community to express its problems and learn about itself. This ensures that the development processes initiated will reflect the perceptions and realities of the rural community, thus encouraging the sustainability of the development innovation. (Anyaeibunam, Mefalopoulos and Moetsabi 1998).

### 2.3. Preserving indigenous knowledge and culture

Another basic concept underlying participatory communication is **respect for the knowledge, values and culture of indigenous people**. Far away from global information highways marginal communities in rural areas contain a wealth of indigenous knowledge and traditional cultural resources, a rich but fragile heritage which risks to be lost with the advent of modern technology.

"The essence of involving rural people in the process of their own development lies in the sharing of knowledge... the outcome of useful sharing of knowledge is not so much the replacement of traditional techniques by modern ones, as a merging of modern and traditional systems to produce a more appropriate hybrid, one that befits the economic and technical capacities of rural populations as well as their cultural values."(FAO, 1987)

Traditional subsistence farmers in many cases have known better than the agricultural experts what cultivation methods were appropriate in their own environment. Indigenous groups have access to a large volume of traditional knowledge about their environment and are highly efficient users of available resources that have been crucial for their survival. In Arctic Canada, for example, perceptions on climate change have been essential for the survival of aboriginal groups and they have contributed their traditional knowledge and local observations to scientists and decision makers. (Neil Ford, 2000)

The Proderith rural communication system in Mexico has often been cited as an example of communication approaches for participatory planning, peasant empowerment and sharing of knowledge with indigenous people. Respect for their traditional knowledge system, their local culture and indigenous language was an essential ingredient.

#### Mayan values

"Proderith staff had little idea of how to spark a dialogue among and with the indigenous, Mayan speaking people. The ingenious solution proved to be video recordings with Don Clotilde Cob, an 82-year-old man who could talk about the problems. He was a proud, ex-revolutionary, who had learned Spanish and taught himself how to read and write as an adult. He was articulate and lucid in both Mayan and Spanish. This charismatic old man, with his white hair and neat beard, sat cross-legged in front of a video camera for hours on end. He held forth about the past, about the revolution, about the greatness of Mayan culture, and about life today. He deplored the decline of such Mayan traditions as the family vegetable plot, explained how he cultivated his own maize, and complained that today's young people did not even know to do that properly. He accused the young of abandoning all that had been good in Mayan culture; they would sell eggs to buy cigarettes and soft drinks, and so it was no wonder that diets were worse than they were in his youth.

Scores of people sat in attentive silence in the villages as these tapes were played. In the evening, under a tree, the words in Mayan flowed from the screen, and the old man's eloquent voice and emphatic gestures spread their spell. For many, it was the first time they had ever heard anyone talk about the practical values of their culture. It was also the first time they had seen themselves on "television", and talking their own language. They frequently asked that the tapes be played again and again. The desired effect was achieved: the people began to take stock of their situation and think seriously about their values, and so the ground was prepared for when Proderith began to discuss development plans to eradicate malnutrition and promote food security."

Source: Colin Fraser and Sonia Restrepo-Estrada "Communication for Rural Development in Mexico: in Good Times and in Bad" in *Communicating for Development*, 1998

### The Knowledge Systems of Pastoralists

"Human Survival has been based entirely on knowledge systems and, while most have changed beyond recognition or perished altogether, some remain and continue to thrive. Pastoralism is one of these, a way of life based on its own indigenous knowledge system, which is highly successful in the practices of preserving the environment, in livestock production, in animal health and in the art of predicting and handling natural disasters.

Many advocates of modernisation do not consider these to be knowledge systems – instead they are described as "backward" or "primitive", as falling outside the prism of a certain production and social system. And when pastoralists accept the offer to be "civilised", neither governments nor business communities in the South have been able to harness modernisation for their benefit. So, neither are pastoralists allowed to live as they wish, nor do those who want them to change come up with a meaningful alternative...Knowledge systems other than the dominant discourse need to be recognised not just as knowledge systems per se, but as things that could be pivotal to the preservation of the environment and ensuring means of existence for the great many people who live on the edges of a rapidly modernising world."

Source: Melakou Tegegn, Director Panos Eastern Africa, in Panos Paper – Information, Knowledge and Development, 1998

Communication and culture are closely interwoven. Communication is a product of culture and culture determines the code, structure, meaning and context of the communication that takes place. Culture and history also play an important role in the social development of a community. For generations, rural populations living in isolated villages without access to modern means of communication have relied on the spoken word and traditional forms of communication as a means of transmitting culture, knowledge, history and customs. "The wealth of proverbs, songs, stories, and other entertaining forms have a special function in an oral culture. Eloquence and subtlety are valued; a well-phrased statement is remembered. People listen for hours to a good storyteller. Elders use proverbs to comment on the happenings of the day, and proverbs are devices for communicating the insights and experiences of the past." (Fugelsang 1987)

New information and communication technologies may be used to enhance cultural self-expression or stifle it through what has been variously labelled as cultural imperialism, cultural invasion, cultural synchronisation or cultural homogenisation. (Ansah 2000). One of the effects of digitalisation is the growing concentration of ownership of different media within a very small number of large multinational corporations. The trend now is for powerful multinationals to buy up newspapers, books and magazines, publishing houses, radio and television networks, telecommunication companies and satellite relay facilities. The result is the reduction of communication content, cultural diversity and opportunities for local traditional systems of communication. Large corporations strive to maximise profits and pursue economies of scale by reducing the varieties in their media offerings and trimming back small-scale community services that are rarely viable within large-scale operations. The mega corporations fall back on the models tested in their home markets – invariably an American, western model. The result is the displacement of local programmes with foreign ones, and a narrowing of rich cultural diversity. (Saik Yoon, 2000)

How strong are indigenous communication systems? How fragile? Is cultural diversity threatened by technology? Already we see young people in both urban and rural environments throughout the developing world embracing western models and abandoning pride in the cultural roots of their parents. In today's global world cultures are no longer isolated. They interact and influence each other. Thus, we witness the

emergence of new cultural and knowledge systems which blend rural with urban, local with global, traditional with modern customs and values and which generate "hybrid" cultures and practices. (Servaes 2003) "Glocalisation" is the term now used to define the integration of the global with the local.

**To be successful, communication efforts must take into account the cultural values of marginal groups as an avenue for their participation, rather than borrowing communication strategies from outside that promote change without due consideration for culture. Preserving cultural diversity, local languages and traditional systems of communication in the face of globalisation is one of the major challenges for communication practitioners in this Information Age.**

### **3. MEDIA AND APPROACHES**

In the past communication specialists relied almost exclusively on alternative media for activities at community level. We must not forget the lessons learned through their experience. But, the advent of new technologies and their convergence now means that new mixes and matches can be made for more effective communication programs with disadvantaged groups. **Communication initiatives should make use of all media channels available, both modern and traditional, and there is merit in combining electronic media with other media that people already like, use and know how to control** (Ramirez 2003).

#### **3.1. Traditional communication systems**

**The preservation of traditional forms of communication and social change are not mutually exclusive.** Traditional communication systems can be important channels for facilitating learning, people's participation and dialogue for development purposes. Indigenous media have been successfully adopted to promote issues of relevance to marginal groups. Popular theatre, puppet shows, music and dance have been used, for instance in health care, to discuss family size, female genital mutilation, teenage pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, and unsettling life styles. They have also been applied in literacy programs, environmental protection and in introducing agricultural practices. Traditional forms of communication can also be integrated with other media such as radio, television, video and audiocassettes. What is important is that they should not be produced only by outsiders. The participation of local artists, storytellers, performers and musicians in the production and use of traditional media ensures respect for traditional values, symbols and realities and, at the same time, ensures that such media productions appeal to communities. It also increases the credibility of media programs and thus their effectiveness as vehicles to share knowledge and bring about social change. (Balit 1999)

An offshoot from traditional and popular media, and the popular culture of telenovelas in Latin America, is the use of melodramatic soap operas for radio and television, which use real or fictional "social models" to promote changes in life styles. These programs are adapted to local cultural contexts and integrate entertainment with awareness raising and education (Edutainment). Educational messages and best practices are woven into the fictional narrative, thereby communicating to the audiences how they can tackle specific issues, often health issues, in their everyday life. (Tuft 2003) The experience of Soul City in South Africa is a well-known successful example of this approach, which among other themes, has focused on HIV/AIDS. The radio and television series have been complemented with interpersonal communication, printed materials and educational training packages.



### **Yasarekomo: Self evaluation of a communication experience by indigenous people in Bolivia**

In 1994, with assistance from FAO, the Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní (APG), the main Guaraní organization in Bolivia, established a rural communication unit the *Unidad de Comunicación Guaraní (UCG)*, in the Chaco region of Bolivia. The goal of the unit was to improve the quality of life of isolated and marginalized native communities and support indigenous development initiatives. With training from FAO, the Guaraní villagers applied intercultural communication approaches to share knowledge and information using video training packages and community radio. The UCG received assistance from FAO for three years, and then continued independently for an additional six years, generating income by producing intercultural communication materials and implementing communication for development plans agreed with APG and co-funded by the Government, Municipalities and NGOs. The UCG then decided to carry out a self- evaluation in collaboration with the APG and other indigenous organizations of Bolivia. For the first time, indigenous people themselves documented and analyzed in a systematic manner the use of participatory communication media and messages produced by and for Guaraní communities, based on the blending of traditional knowledge and customs with modern knowledge and communication techniques. The results of the self-evaluation confirmed the validity of the participatory and intercultural communication approaches applied to advisory services. The study however underlined problems for the future sustainability of the Uni, these included: The need for continued efforts to strengthen the communication capacity of the APG and other indigenous organizations; the importance of "appropriating" new media and acquiring additional equipment and; the need for a national policy recognizing the right of indigenous people to access and provide information and communication services, with financing from local institutions.

Source: FAO, 2004. Yasarekomo, Una experiencia de comunicación indígena en Bolivia.

### **3.2. Video**

**Video has for many years been successfully used for participatory planning, empowerment and sharing of knowledge with disadvantaged individuals and communities.** Visual images are powerful tools for communicating with illiterate audiences. Cheaper, easy to use video and audio equipment has enabled communities to master production skills thus giving them access to and control over the tools for information and communication generation and exchange. Video Sewa in Ahmedabad, India is a classic example of the use of participatory video for the empowerment of illiterate rural women. Video programmes produced by rural women associated with SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) have been used for income generation, occupational health, wage negotiations, legal interventions, teaching new skills and advocating for policy change. Video based approaches can now take advantage of the digitalisation of video coupled with Internet to facilitate production processes and improve networking and sharing of knowledge and information.

### **3.3. Radio**

**Radio remains the most widely available and affordable mass medium for disadvantaged groups.** In rural areas, it is often the only mass medium available. It can reach large numbers of isolated populations over widespread and geographical areas. In some rural areas it is the only source of information about agricultural innovations, weather and market prices. It is oral and thus corresponds to the culture of poverty, making it more adaptable to many indigenous cultures. Because of low production and distribution costs it can be local. Community radio enables neglected communities, such as women, to be heard and to participate in democratic processes within societies. It reflects their interests, and plays an important role in reinforcing cultural expressions and identity as well as local languages. It can provide timely and

relevant information on development issues, opportunities, experiences, skills and public interests. It thus has the ability to involve rural communities, indigenous people and underprivileged sectors of urban societies in an interactive social communication process. (UNESCO, 2000)

### **Training Community radio workers for empowerment**

A training approach developed in Ghana for community radio workers takes its name from the Kente traditional hand woven cloth of the Ashanti people. The Kente approach is based on the belief that community radio is a different kind of radio and represents a different theoretical and operational model from public and commercial radio. This implies that community radio requires a new kind of "professional" – a community worker with a specific set of values, skills and standards that are focussed on community empowerment. Thus, the training of community workers is woven into the culture of the community and the process of empowerment. It is a practical hand on approach that integrates theory (development communication, communication and culture, management, etc.) with experience and the practice of broadcasting as it applies to community radio, but context based. The four elements/modules of the course include: Knowing self; Knowing the community; Knowing development and Knowing media. The empowerment of the trainees is seen as part of the process of community empowerment, which is itself the end-goal of the training. The approach was initially developed for Radio Ada, the first full-fledged radio station in Ghana, but presently has been extended to other member stations of the Ghana Community Radio Network and to Ethiopia.

Source: Wilna W. Quarmyne, "A Kente Approach to Community Radio Training: Weaving Training into the Community Empowerment Process."

**One of the most interesting developments for communication with marginalized people in recent years has been the convergence of local radio with the Internet, creating new models with potential for providing relevant information and knowledge to the poor.** The merging of the two technologies presents many opportunities: Radio can deliver information to many listeners, but the Internet enables them to send back information, to ask questions, to request and seek information, and to communicate with specialists. The Internet enables access to information from both national and international sources, while radio can localise, repackage and translate that knowledge to local audiences. (Bennett, 2003). Experiments have been carried out in Asia, Latin America and Africa. These include projects in different environments and seeking to address different sets of problems: To support radio networking and exchanges, community intermediary projects, and projects that link migrants to their home communities. (Bruce Girard, 2003)

**Migrant communities are on the increase,** and their financial remittances as well as the experience gained abroad are an important contribution to the development of their native communities. **Radio can play an important role in linking the migrant communities with their native communities, language and cultures.** The Internet, radio and telephone combined can extend communication and enable communities to keep in touch despite migration. Stations in the home country will broadcast news from the migrant communities. The airwave messages coming from abroad can include simple greetings, information about money transfers and emergency alerts. The messages inform people who remain in the region about relatives who have left, and for migrants they are a means to keep in touch with their place of origin. In some cases migrant communities have obtained a few hours a week on multi-lingual stations in their new home country and broadcast programs with news and cultural content from home mixed with content related to the new environment. They have become an important tool for preserving culture. (Bruce Girard, 2003).

### Selling a buffalo through hybrid radio

In the western part of Nepal, a farmer in Madanpokhara village, located 8 hours drive from Kathmandu, needed to sell his buffalo. There was no better means to market his buffalo than to make an announcement through a community radio station in his village by paying a very nominal fee. The farmer made the announcement and sold his buffalo. Radio Madapokhara is a hybrid community radio serving to give a voice to the community, through local radio but also having access to new ICTs. Programs are centred on topics that affect the everyday life of the community. The station is now also using computers, digital recording and editing hardware and software. It uses satellite technology for distributing and receiving audio data and files through its satellite audio channels. It receives news and other development content programs everyday from Radio Sagarmatha, the central hub of a network based in Kathmandu, and distributes its programs to other radio stations in the network through the satellite system. The radio had received support from UNESCO, Panos and the Media Development Loan Fund of the Czech Republic.

Source: Kishor Pradhan, Panos 2004

### 3.4. ICTs: Potential and limitations

With the arrival of the Information Revolution, ICTs are getting most of the attention. Governments have adopted national IT policies and liberalised the telecommunication sector to attract investment. Significant sums are being invested by donors, intergovernmental agencies and NGOs to wire the developing world and provide access to computers and the Internet for alleviation of poverty.

There is a vast literature on the benefits and potential of computerised communication to enhance people's daily lives. Experiments with the use of Internet and computers have proven to have positive results in various applications: Improved access to education opportunities, increased transparency and efficiency in government services, increased trade and marketing opportunities for marginalized communities, increased community empowerment through access to information, improved networking and opportunities for women, access to medical information for isolated communities and new employment opportunities are only a few of the examples that have bolstered the belief that these technologies have a key role to play in development.

However people engaged in development work have mixed feelings about the impact of these technologies on the alleviation of poverty. The initial enthusiasm is now being replaced by more critical and cautious perspectives, as lessons are drawn from the first years of experience in the field. It is clear, for example, that although the Internet is a powerful tool for sharing information and knowledge, and thus for human development, it is not a remedy for all development problems. Poverty cannot be divorced from the underlying social, economic and political issues as well as existing power structures. **The emphasis on access to the technologies, though important, must be shifted to the more important issues of meaningful use and social appropriation. Deploying these technologies in ways that benefit the poor requires regulatory frameworks and enabling policy environments, which reflect the needs of all sectors of society.**

### Social Dimensions of ICTs

The use of ICTs can also transform the local power structures within communities and disrupt community life. For instance, in Guyana indigenous women were so successful trading their hammocks on the Web, that the power structures were transformed providing women economic independence from their husbands. The impact on the community was so strong that the indigenous women were forced by the male community members to end the trading of the hammocks through the web. This case demonstrates clearly that ICTs also can have negative impacts on communities if their use is not managed properly and the key stakeholders are not supporting their use.

Source: Bjorn-Soren Gigler, World Bank, 2004

### 3.5. ICTs and the poor

In some areas the ICT revolution has served only to widen existing economic and social gaps, as new information gaps threaten to further marginalize the poor. The bulk of information resources and technologies are in the developed countries. By conservative estimates, at least 80 per cent of the world's population still lack the most basic communication technologies to enter the Internet global village. Although Internet growth is accelerating faster in developing countries than anywhere else, it will continue to be available only to a tiny proportion of people in the poorest countries for many years to come.

The situation is even more serious for rural areas. The Information Revolution has completely bypassed nearly one billion people. They are the rural poor, who constitute 75 percent of the people who live on less than one dollar a day. In many ways the digital divide just reflects all other inequalities: Disparities between urban and rural communities, men and women and between successful farmers and subsistence farmers. In addition, some argue that poor countries cannot afford the cost of telecommunication infrastructure. Money is scarce for economies crippled by external debt and trying to cut back on social sector spending. It is argued that these countries should address instead basic needs such as education, water, health and roads.

### 3.6. Barriers for the poor

What are the barriers for poor rural people to access new technologies, and the Internet in particular?

- The rural poor lack infrastructure (electricity, telecommunications). ICTs depend on national policies and regulation for telecommunications and broadcasting licences. ICTs require initial capital investment for hardware and software. ICTs also depend on the skills and capacity necessary to use, manage and maintain the technology effectively.
- The rural poor are probably illiterate or semi-literate, with low levels of education. They would not find much in their local language on the Internet.
- They would not find much information relevant to their daily lives.
- They are not usually offered the opportunity to input their own local knowledge. The Web offers them almost no opportunities for local wealth creation.
- They cannot afford the cost of Internet access, and they cannot afford their own computer.

### 3.7. Public access points

There is a movement in the development community pushing for **the widespread rollout of public access points as a means of extending access to the Internet**

**and bringing it closer to disadvantaged communities** and the intermediary organisations that provide services to these communities.

**Multi-media community centres, or telecentres are a typical example.** They are usually established in rural areas where individual access is unavailable or unaffordable. They provide a range of information services that are relevant to the needs of the communities and often training. They can be used by communities to create and share their information with outside audiences. The services are free, or subsidised by governments, NGOs and donors. Cybercafés instead are privately owned commercial operations that focus primarily on providing customers with access to the Internet and the World Wide Web. Their clients tend to be more urban, more educated and able to pay for their services. They are an important tool for minority groups in urban societies such as youth, women, migrant workers and Diasporas.

While both cybercafés and telecentres might offer training in computer skills and web use, the telecentre is more likely to offer other kinds of training, including non formal education and distance learning in agriculture, health, education, entrepreneurship and other fields related to community development and poverty alleviation. But, bridging the last mile of connectivity with rural communities still needs to be carried out by development workers, using more traditional forms of communication such as radio. (Colle and Roman 2001)

Among the problems faced by telecentres for alleviation of poverty has been their lack of sustainability. Often they have been parachuted from outside and not adopted from within. Research on the needs of the communities has not been carried out and they do not provide relevant and useful local content. Often information is not translated into local dialects. Socio-cultural issues have been ignored. Training in communication and management skills has not always been provided to local personnel, who must act as information intermediaries. Participation on the part of marginalized sectors of the communities has been lacking. And finally, financial sustainability has not been achieved.

According to Charles Kenny, "while there is a continued (perhaps growing) role for donors to improve access to a range of ICTs in developing countries, that role probably should not extend to the widespread provision of internet access – at least in the poorer regions of the least developed countries. The nature of extreme poverty in Less Developed Countries - very low incomes, subsistence and unskilled wage labour as the dominant income source, food as the dominant consumption good, low education and high illiteracy, minority language group status and rural location – points to an unsustainably high cost and relatively low benefit of direct internet service provision through telecentres to the very poor. This might suggest that the push for universal Internet access as a tool for poverty relief is misplaced. Instead the paper argues that access programs focused on the telephone and radio might have a higher benefit-cost ratio and lower overall cost as alternatives to and intermediaries for the Internet in poverty alleviation programs." (Kenny, 2002)

### **3.8. The Mobile Phone**

The development of **the mobile phone as a relatively cheap and powerful tool has enabled communities, even in remote rural areas to spontaneously and locally appropriate it for use.** Mobile and satellite telephony are bringing telecommunications within reach not only of the small entrepreneur in developing countries but also of the rural farmer. The Village Pay Phone sponsored by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is a classical example of a scheme promoting income-generating activities for the rural poor. It enables illiterate rural women to earn income by renting out mobile phones to members of the community for a fee. A Canadian evaluation

of the program showed that the income derived by operators was on average 24 per cent of their household income – and in some cases it was as high as 40 per cent of household income.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.9. Local Appropriation and Impact

FAO has compiled two studies of the ICT scene to identify whether poor communities and groups had taken ownership of ICTs for their own use: (“Discovering the Magic Box: Local Appropriation of ICTs” and “Revisiting the Magic Box”). The basis for both papers was to identify examples of community driven and local appropriation of ICTs, to identify what worked and what didn’t work, and to contribute to the on-going debate on impact. The studies identify some analytical tools and guiding principles to foster local appropriation of ICTs:

1. Despite an increase in case studies **there is still a need for more empirical evidence to demonstrate impact and understand more about how communities make use of ICTs.** Few projects have paid attention to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, with the result that there is little data to assess the actual impact of these technologies on the poor and therefore little sound evidence to merit further project investment. Donors have failed to devote resources to research outcomes in any depth. And, more qualitative indicators are required.

According to UNDP, “There has also been a desire to hide failures on the part of those involved, in many cases. Although many ICT for development initiatives have failed, few failures have been documented. This is due to the lack of incentives in the development system to encourage project managers, development agencies or implementing partners to critically report and make public project shortfalls or failures”(UNDP 2000).

However, donors and development organisations are now beginning to query approaches based only on access to technology, and wish to address how best to use ICTs to achieve development objectives. It is important to note that some valuable studies do exist and these provide an important basis for developing criteria for assessing what is good practice.<sup>3</sup>

2. In the rush to “wire” developing countries, **little attention has been paid to an ICT conceptual framework or guidelines for ICT utilisation.** The design of ICT programs for the poor must take into account the lessons learned over the years by communication for development efforts.
3. **There needs to be a focus on the needs of communities and the benefits of the new technologies rather than the quantity of technologies available.** The emphasis must be on the use of new technologies as a means of improving the living conditions of the poor, rather than becoming an end in themselves. The real needs of communities must be identified with them and addressed. Successful examples of local appropriation have been those in which ICTs support the priorities and goals of communities, such as increased incomes or

<sup>2</sup> Richardson D., Ramirez R. and Haq M. 2000. “Grameen Telecom’s Village Pay Phone Programme: A Multi-Media Case Study”. CIDA.

<sup>3</sup> These studies are examples of how donors are rethinking their approach to ICTs, and searching for new strategies: UNDP Evaluation Office, 2001. “Information Communications Technology for Development, Essentials: Synthesis of Lessons Learned”, N.5.

R. Heeks, 2003. “Failure, success and improvisation of information systems projects in developing countries” , Paper N. 11, Development Informatics Working Paper Series, Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

Batchelor S, Norrish P, Scott N, Webb M, 2003. “ Sustainable Case Histories Project: Technical Report”.

R. Curtain, “Information and Communication Technologies and Development: Help or Hindrance” 2004., a study commissioned by Australian Aid (Aus Aid).



capacity building in business management and marketing, improved agricultural productivity or increased employment opportunities. Or where they strengthen existing traditional communication systems to promote networking and advocacy for social change.

4. **Local content and languages are critical** to enable the poor to have access to the benefits of the information revolution. The creation of local content requires building on existing and trusted traditional communication systems and methods for collecting and sharing information. These include established community media such as radio, which can be enhanced through connection with the Internet. In addition there are new technologies such as digital video that can also be appropriated for the production of local content. To be effective, external content has to be adapted and translated into vernacular languages, before local audiences can understand it. There is therefore a growing need also to develop the capacity for locally based professionals to download and transform global content for local consumption.

### 3.10. The role of donors and development agencies

There are dozens of new initiatives to promote digital opportunities, but co-ordination between these initiatives is poorly developed and efforts may be duplicated. **There is much greater scope for co-ordination and common effective strategies.** Opinions differ on what donor organisations should be doing to support the growth and use of the Internet and other information technologies in developing countries. It is argued that the spread of ICTs is best left to the private sector, since the proliferation of fax machines and mobiles phones, for example, has not come about through a targeted development intervention. If the market is ensuring that access is spreading in terms of physical availability, then **donors and NGOs should shift their focus to ensuring an appropriate use of the technologies, that the benefits are maximised and that marginalization is minimised.** What is clear is that whereas Internet growth is independent of donor support, access for disadvantaged groups will not grow without support from donors and subsidies from Governments. **Without a specific focus by donors on poor, rural and marginal groups, the digital age will bypass these non-profitable sectors.**

#### A partnership for community multimedia centres

A number of UN agencies such as ECA, FAO, the ITU, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank as well as development agencies such as APC, AMARC, One World, ORBICOM, and VITA are working with UNESCO on a programme to establish Community Multimedia Centres in order to overcome some of the initial limitations of the first generation of telecentres.

The new Community Multimedia Centres combine local media such as community radio produced by local people in their own languages, with ICT applications in a wide range of social, economic and cultural areas. Radio is the bridge that brings the new technologies into people's lives, ensuring that they can participate in identifying, discussing and exchanging information relevant to their needs, without literacy levels or language usage posing barriers. Listeners get access to online information through their radio presenter who explains the contents of web pages of interest to the community directly in the local language. They may then become tempted to come into the Centre, maybe to send an e-mail, dictating it to a facilitator if they are illiterate, or to search for information on the web or on a CD Rom. Currently some 40 pilot CMS are operating in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean with thousands of people from poor and marginalized communities using these facilities to fight social exclusion and improve their livelihoods.

Source: UNESCO, 2004.

### 3.11. Experimenting with new approaches

So, probably in the coming years we will continue to witness a number of experiments, which will marry new information and communication technologies with old and more traditional approaches. ICTs simply provide a number of new tools for the toolbox. **Communication practitioners must learn to adapt to the new information age, to a changing environment and select the most appropriate communication channels.** They must experiment with new approaches, and learn when it is right to use them. Most likely as one element in a blended communication strategy. **What is important is to apply the lessons learned in participatory communication programs in the past. An essential element for successful and sustainable efforts will continue to be dialogue, ownership on the part of communities and integration with existing indigenous communication systems.**

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1. Constraints for participatory communication

Experience over the years has confirmed that participatory approaches are essential for communication with marginal and vulnerable groups. **Although there is no unique recipe or model for participatory communication we have learned what are the ingredients for successful programs:** Listening, dialogue, ownership on the part of communities, respect for traditional knowledge, languages and culture as well as integration with local communication systems are some of the essential elements. Where participatory communication processes have been applied they have demonstrated to be a transforming process. For rural and urban communities marginalized by poverty, gender, language, ethnicity and physical isolation, to have a voice and to share control of their communication means has had an empowering effect. The recovery of language and tradition through participation with others has rebuilt pride and strengthened communities. As a result of the ability to make their voices heard, they have no longer been just passive recipients, but become active partners in a collective democratic process and started to promote their own development. (Vidal Hall, 2004) The Fogo Island experience is a classical example.

However, **notwithstanding the emphasis on poverty alleviation and people oriented paradigms, the international community still does not consider communication as an essential ingredient in development programs for the poor, at least when it comes to planning and providing resources. What is the problem? Why is it that after so many years of experience, there are still few participatory communication processes in programs to alleviate poverty and improve the livelihoods of the disadvantaged?**

- Critics say that **process and facilitative communication programs cannot be scaled up** and carried out at national level. **Is this correct or because of their nature should their validity remain at the local level?**
- **Participatory processes are costly and take time.** Participatory processes are difficult to implement within the rigid time frames of project and donor requirements for quick results. Indicators for impact are not quantitative, and thus it is difficult for communication practitioners to demonstrate the value of participatory processes to decision makers and donors. **Can practitioners identify new qualitative indicators and demonstrate the value of participatory processes?**
- **Participatory processes require new facilitative skills,** which often communication practitioners lack. **This raises the question of training.**
- Participatory communication, when dealing with political and social injustices, **can only take place if there is a political will on the part of governments and local authorities.** Authentic participation directly addresses power and its

distribution in society, and usually authorities do not want to upset the status quo, even if they pay lip service to participation. **Does this mean that true participation is utopian? Or simply that one has to be careful in selecting when participatory communication can be usefully applied.**

- **Participation in activities for social change can raise conflicts** within the community, thus methods must be found to engage people meaningfully, while providing adequate protection and conflict management measures. This again relates to the question of the **training of a new communication professional.**

#### 4.2. Notes for an Agenda

The following are some ideas for an agenda, which could help to overcome some of the above constraints and improve the effectiveness of communication with isolated and marginalized communities.

##### 4.2.1. For Governments:

Governments should create **regulatory frameworks and an enabling policy environment for communication with the poor.** Legislation and equitable policies are essential if communication is to become a real tool for poverty alleviation. They should guarantee the right to communicate for marginalized people. Women, refugees, displaced persons, migrant workers, indigenous people should be empowered to express themselves. And policy makers must listen to them. National communication policies should take into account the needs of all sectors of society, including the poorest. All stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector should be involved in policy planning and implementation. Access to new information and communication technologies is insufficient without regulatory frameworks to ensure that they have meaningful use and can be socially appropriated by disadvantaged groups. **The identities, languages, cultural heritage and traditions of minorities should be recognised, preserved and respected.**

##### 4.2.2. For donors and development agencies:

Strategic communication should become **an integral component of programs for the alleviation of poverty. Sufficient time, inputs and resources should be allocated,** recognizing the need for long term and complex interventions. Processes of social change require time, much more than provided for in a typical five-year period. Successful FAO communication projects for marginal communities have had duration of seven to ten years. And World Bank staff goes even further when suggesting that support to extension systems should be designed with a long-term perspective of 15 years. (Coldevin 2003).

Donors and development agencies **should establish units with professional staff in communication for development.** The design of successful communication components also requires participation and inputs from local communities and field based staff. How many organizations have well staffed units, not to mention outposted staff at regional and country levels?

Resources for communication programs should include **time and personnel for participatory research, monitoring and evaluation.** Research and evaluation of what has worked and not worked using ICTs with marginal groups is a new and challenging field, particularly with regard to appropriation and use. The results should form the basis of any new intervention.

Bridging the digital divide requires much more than wiring developing countries. The support of donors should be more focused on ensuring **access for the poor, appropriate use of technologies, that the benefits for disadvantaged groups are maximised and that marginalization is minimized.** It should be recognized

that access for the poor cannot take place without support from donors and subsidies from Governments on a long-term basis. There is need for **more co-ordination and partnerships among donors**, development agencies and NGOs in the planning and implementation of common effective strategies. The program and partnership created by UNESCO for the establishment of community multimedia centres is a good example.

#### **4.2.3. For Communication Professionals:**

Communication professionals should adapt to a changing environment and new social actors. They should **assess whether current strategies, experience and knowledge are appropriate for working with marginal and vulnerable groups, and how they should be modified or expanded**. A good example is the recognition of the need to modify approaches for working with individuals and communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

##### **a) Training the new communicator**

A shortage of people trained in new functions is another constraint for designing and implementing participatory communication programs. Communication has become a specialised field of development and the profile of the communicator has changed as the role of communication has evolved. (Dagron 2001) The communication specialist now needs to be much more of a facilitator, a mediator and an information intermediary in participatory processes of social change.

**Curricula should embrace a wide range of topics with inputs from various fields.** They should include new subjects in addition to the social sciences, development, and the art and craft of communication media and technology. Topics such as cross-cultural communication, participatory diagnostic research and problem identification, strategic planning, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches, participatory monitoring and evaluation, conflict management, group dynamics, group facilitation and interpersonal communication should form part of study programmes. It is also important to learn how to listen.

**Training should take place at different levels:** At the graduate and postgraduate university level but also at the technical/intermediate level. There is still much to be done to change the attitudes of field staff, extension workers and farmer trainers/leaders who have been educated to apply top down, authoritarian approaches with disadvantaged groups. In addition **there is need to train communicators at community level and from marginalized groups**. There is also need to upgrade the quality of existing communication professionals and provide in-service and refresher courses.

Drawing up curricula for various levels is less problematic than finding the financial resources and persuading deans, heads of departments and institutions to include them in their academic and learning programs. It is not only a question of numbers but also of the quality of training. **Participatory approaches require participatory, interactive and experiential learning processes, preferably field based.**

The Rockefeller Foundation and the Consortium for Communication for Social Change (CFSC) have initiated a series of activities to improve the training of communication specialists at different levels. At a meeting in Bellagio in 2003, a group of specialists convened to develop a curriculum for a three-semester university master's level course in Communication for Social Change. The meeting in Bellagio also designed a short course for communication practitioners and an 1/2 day orientation session for decision makers.

The success or failure of communication with marginal and vulnerable groups will depend on the ability to provide qualified human resources. Unless we are able to

provide a critical mass of well-prepared specialists at different levels, the discipline will not be recognised as an essential component in programs for the alleviation of poverty.

### **b) Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation of social communication processes with vulnerable groups has not been successful in the past due to a number of factors. Monitoring and evaluation should be included from the beginning of any communication initiative, but lack of time and resources allocated for this purpose in project design have often not made this possible.

Facilitative processes are not as easy to assess as agricultural production or communication products. Processes also present difficulties in demonstrating results to donor agencies, who want quick quantitative results. It is easier to report to donors on the establishment of a media centre, the number of people attending training events and the production of audio visual aids than to measure and report on indicators of participation, empowerment and social change. Numerous other social and economic factors can interfere with the objectives of social change, and thus make it difficult to assess the impact of communication alone.

**New instruments and indicators are required to effectively assess the impact of participatory communication processes with disadvantaged groups. They must be identified and implemented not only by outsiders but also with the communities participating in the process, and who are familiar with the political, social and cultural context of the place.** They are the primary audience for learning about what has worked and not worked, and improving things as a result. **The advent of new ICTs opens up a vast new field for evaluation, particularly with regard to appropriation and use by isolated and marginalized people.**

### **c) Advocacy with decision makers.**

Advocacy with decision makers is an essential priority if communication is to become a core activity in poverty alleviation programs and enabling policies are to be established in developing countries. As communicators we have not succeeded in communicating our message.

**What is required is a common communication strategy to reach decision makers and planners at international and national levels. There is need to advocate for communication to be included in projects for poverty alleviation from the planning phase, in a strategic manner, with all the necessary inputs and resources.**

**Advocacy with decision makers needs to follow all the rules for effective communication, starting with audience analysis.** Two surveys have been carried out with decision makers for this purpose. At the request of an Inter-Agency Roundtable, in 1994 Colin Fraser and Arne Fjortoft carried out a survey among 39 decision makers in governments, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies and NGOs. UNICEF and WHO financed the survey. More recently in 2003, Ricardo Ramirez and Wendy Quarry, sponsored by IDRC interviewed 13 decision makers. A number of interesting views came out from both surveys: On the perception of the objectives of communication for development, on the meaning of the term, obstacles to greater application, lack of proof of impact, lack of competent staff, the image of the discipline, problems related to organisational location and political considerations. The findings of these surveys should now be used in efforts to sensitise decision makers and planners.

The implications of these surveys for communication practitioners is that the only way to convince decision makers to devote additional resources to communication is by providing them with concrete examples of the impact and cost-benefits of communication. Simply saying that we need more communication will not be

convincing. **We need to demonstrate through hard facts and results of evaluations the value of communication in achieving poverty alleviation goals.** Anecdotal case studies are no longer sufficient. We must use the tools and approaches, which are suitable for decision makers, such as good videos and concise and punchy presentations. And, we must learn to speak their language. Is this not what we do when we work with rural people?

#### **d) Sustainability of participatory communication**

The sustainability of participatory communication efforts with vulnerable and marginal groups is another vital issue, which due to past failures requires creative and innovative thinking in the future. The collapse of many efforts once external assistance terminated is well known. Generation of income and relying on volunteers have been used to provide lasting results, but have not been sufficient. Working with the poor will probably always require subsidies and long term outside interventions.

The failure of many efforts to establish sustainable programs is possibly in part due to the fact that in many cases they were established within government institutions, without the necessary partnerships with all the stakeholders involved in community activities, and without community ownership. And, governments are not always truly interested in empowerment and grass root participation, even though they pay lip service to these concepts. Even if interested, nowadays they cannot afford to finance services at community and grass root levels.

**Participation and ownership on the part of the communities involved is essential for sustainability.** Policies and institutional frameworks should be pluralistic and promote partnerships among all interested stakeholders. The commitment of the local authorities is also essential for sustainability. Project design should allow for sufficient time to achieve project objectives. And finally, the local resources (media technology, facilities and staff) should be appropriate to conditions in the communities so that they can afford follow up. (Coldevin 2003)

#### **e) Sharing of Information and Experiences**

More exchange and analysis of a wide range of practice and experience is essential to improve communication with the poor. There is lack of institutional memory, and many communication specialists work in isolation, sometimes re-inventing the wheel. It is also important to document the vision and experiences of early pioneers who have applied successful participatory communication approaches with marginalized people.

Face to face meetings such as this Roundtable are an occasion to share information and experiences, but it is important that they also identify new partnerships, joint ventures and concrete follow up activities.

On line communication has become the principal source for networking and sharing information. The Communication Initiative is a global platform and provider of news, case studies, strategies, results of evaluations, opinions, events, training and job opportunities. It is an excellent example of a partnership among a number of institutions involved in communication for development. Other networks that concentrate more on discussing ICTs include IICD, Digital Opportunities, Bridges, the Open Knowledge Network, and GKD. However, more initiatives with a regional and country focus, such as Isang Bangsak (IDRC) would also be useful, particularly for local personnel working with disadvantaged communities. A recent workshop on radio and ICTs held in Quito, Ecuador, and organised by FAO, agreed to establish a network and a platform for exchange of information, experiences and joint ventures to promote participatory communication initiatives with vulnerable groups in the region. (La Ond@Rural.)



E-forums are also fruitful provided they are on a specific theme, that they are short and provide good facilitation. An example was the forum on Communication and National Resource Management organised by the Communication Initiative and FAO. Another fruitful forum was organised by the Communication for Development Group in the World Bank.

Publications, journals and case studies continue to be essential. A number of good books have been published recently. The Communication for Social Change Consortium is preparing an on line bibliography and a reader of major pieces on communication for social change to bring together the evolution of the discipline and the body of knowledge. It will be an important tool for scholars and practitioners. And, a new Journal under the leadership of Jan Servaes will shortly begin publication.

**“If communication for development is to become a driving force to improve the quality of lives of the poor, it is essential to create bridges between different approaches, promote common understandings and language, share experiences, identify common guidelines and principles, and identify challenges and means to overcome them. We also need to identify what has been learned, and what still needs to be learned. It is a challenge which none of us can ignore.” (Report of Eighth Roundtable on Communication for Development)**

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Communication for Development is about dialogue, participation and the sharing of knowledge and information among people and institutions. The 9<sup>th</sup> UN Roundtable (Rome, September 2004), focused on *“Communication and Sustainable Development”* and addressed three key inter-related themes that are central to this issue: Communication in Research, Extension and Education; Communication for Natural Resource Management; and Communication for Isolated and Marginalized Groups. The selection of key note papers presented in this publication offers views and perspectives that contribute to these themes.



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