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Communicating for social change: Identifying fundamental hurdles

The road to social change is always strewn with social, economic, political, psychological and cultural hurdles. Social change programmes and efforts, in addition to problems inherent in change itself, have always faced hurdles that have substantial impact on the outcome of change endeavours. Unless these hurdles are recognised and guarded against, no change effort can be successfully executed, and no executed change plan can endure for long. In this article, the author discusses how communication could serve social development. He identifies and examines factors that would enhance social change. He also identifies and discusses barriers to social change and how social change agents could use them as stepping stones in their work.

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INTRODUCTION

At no point in human history has there been as much concern with social change than at the present. Social change is occurring rapidly and with profound effects in many sectors of social life throughout the world. In most instances where change is not taking place or is taking place only slowly there is often great concern about how to stimulate change.

Zaltman & Duncan, 1973.

Development can be defined as a movement or change from existing conditions or situations that are no longer considered conducive to societal or group goals and aspirations to those that can meet expected societal or group goals and aspirations. Social change is defined as actions taken to reduce or eliminate the unconducive or negative side-effects of social and physical development. Therefore, whether one is using the concept of development or that of social change, the ultimate goal is the same - positive change to enable better conditions of living and of human interrelationships. But 'positive change' is one of the most difficult goals to achieve. The road to such a change is always strewn with social, economic, political, psychological and cultural hurdles. Generation after generation have walked the rocky roads and the stormy seas that lead to positive social change. No wonder Niccolo Machiavelli noted in *The Prince* in 1513 that 'there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new order of things...'

Change programmes and efforts, in addition to problems inherent in change itself, have always faced problems that are not uniquely inherent but have substantial impact on the outcome of change endeavours. Unless these problems, referred to here as hurdles, are recognised and guarded against, no change effort can be successfully executed, and no executed change plan can endure for long.

The first fundamental hurdles to cross in the race to positive social change are those related to misfit of, and resistance to, the advocated change. Thus, the first two concerns of the social change agent are:

- how to ensure that the new order of things advocated, its operational planning and its implementation are a 'good fit' in the target social system; and
- how to make this 'goodness of fit' find expression in as little a resistance as possible to the new order or the advocated change.

To meet these requirements, the social change communicator must first know the target social system, that is, have substantial and relevant knowledge of the socio-cultural contexts of the people and of their physical environment. In addition, it is imperative that he should be sufficiently knowledgeable of those factors that enhance social change and development, as well as of the many areas of possible resistance to any attempts at creating a new social order

or changing existing order of things to which people have already become familiar. A comprehensive discussion of the issue of knowing the audience or the target social system is beyond the scope of this article. Here, only those factors that enhance social change and development efforts and those that are capable of disabling or derailing such efforts are discussed.

ENHANCING CHARACTERISTICS

There are a number of fundamental criteria that any advocated new order must meet before it can be considered a 'good fit' in a target social system. These criteria, called dimensions of social change by Zaltman & Duncan (1973:13) and characteristics of Innovation by Rogers (1971:15) constitute the enhancing characteristics for and of social change. We have slightly modified these fundamental criteria, changing what some of them were called, and examining them in some details in the light of theoretical and practical evidence. The following are considered the most important of these characteristics.

Relative advantage

This goes beyond mere comparative advantage which is the positively advantageous benefit of an advocated change over the old order of things. Relative advantage concerns the difference in benefits in relation to how well that benefit fits into the target social system. It is not as much concerned with 'face-value' differences as it is with substantive 'social-value' differences. It emphasises quality and relevance of benefits over mere numerical or quantifiable differences. A difference may be small or even non-existent; but if the new order, that is, the advocated change, serves the cause of, for example, social justice, fair play and equality or equity, it could be considered relatively advantageous. This was what happened in the Philippines in the 1970s when, in spite of its economic disadvantage to the nation, land redistribution to the peasantry was carried out, because the action served a more substantive social value cause. Relative advantage is the single most important motivating factor in social change and development. Without it, nothing else could significantly matter, even though its presence does not mean automatic acceptance by the target social system of a proposed change. If, in the context of the target social system, a proposed change does not offer better substantive and clear opportunity than the existing order, the target group may not see any reason to change. But if, as seen by the people, the advocated change has the potential of positively and significantly impacting on the target social system, not only will the people accept, they would also be easily induced to be involved in and committed to the efforts directed at bringing about the change.

It is not that comparative advantage is not important in inducing acceptance of social change proposals by target social systems. It is important, and sometimes, it is the only advantage that needs to be examined. But in many cases, comparative advantage is just the tip of the

iceberg. Higher incomes may be good, but in the context of a target social system, preventing destructive status-symbol consumptive behaviour may be better. Parks and play grounds may be useful social amenities, but could, under the socio-cultural conditions of certain type of target social systems, become arenas for rapes, drugs and child abuse. Concerted efforts to make a nation very powerful may be advantageous in terms of national status and international prestige, but could, as examples from a good many developing countries show, lead to diverting national resources from basic human needs to arms and ammunition. Relatively speaking, therefore, it is more advantageous to use the resources to meet basic human needs than to use them to build up military strength, in spite of its international glamour. It is because of this apparent possibility of comparative advantage camouflaging its dysfunctional effects that the term relative advantage is preferred. Sometimes, comparative advantage may have no under-currents of socio-cultural or economic dysfunctions. This is when the benefits of the new order are not only higher and better than those of the old order but are also in line with the expectations of the target social system. When this happens, the process of implementing advocated change is made easier.

Here is an example that should help to clarify the difference between comparative and relative advantage in social change and development. A municipal council in Texas, USA, gave the owners of a shopping mall the permission to buy up and demolish adjacent houses around the mall, so that they could carry out an expansion of the mall. The mall owners were told and agreed to pay each landlord whose house was to be demolished 20% over and above the market price of their houses. The landlords rejected the offer and protested against being forced to sell their houses. In spite of the angry protests of the affected landlords, most of whom had lived in these houses for decades, the council did not rescind its decision. The houses were 'forcibly bought and bulldozed'. The council explained away its action in terms of financial and economic improvement of the area (comparative advantage), which the landlords did not dispute. But the landlords saw a higher value and benefit in being allowed to remain in their cultural and social roots and in not destroying the emotional attachment they had with their houses. In terms of their welfare and family prestige, keeping their houses and avoiding disruption of their lives (even though robbing them of higher financial and economic gains) were of a relatively higher advantage than the extra 20% of the value of their houses.

Compatibility

This is the degree to which the advocated new order of things is consistent with the needs and aspirations of the target social system in particular, and with its socio-cultural contexts in general. This is the one characteristic that most emphasises goodness of fit. 'Consistency' here does not mean 'sheepishly or blindly going along' with existing order of things, which is an antithesis of the concept of change. It rather means providing alternatives that are valid within the system - alternatives that speak to the needs and not just the wants of the people.

This could mean changing an existing value because of its adverse effects; teaching a new way of doing things without which advancement in that aspect of the people's life would be impossible; restructuring old and non-facilitating political relationships that subtly but firmly enslave the people; or eliminating an anti-social behaviour pattern that is giving the social system a bad image before the world. All these, though not compatible with existing order of things, are compatible with the deeper values of beneficial social order, productive education, and good government.

Compatibility means facilitating the creation of socio-cultural, economic and political conditions that meet the people's needs whether or not such conditions also meet the people's wants. For example, in 1977 in Nigeria, a farming community to which this author once worked as a development agent, asked the government for a matching-grant to build a town hall. But there was no motorable road to this village - a farming community that experienced great difficulty in getting its products to the market that was ten miles away. Obviously, what this community needed was a road; but they wanted a town hall. Having a road that could facilitate transporting their farm products to the market was no doubt more compatible to this community than building a town hall. But this community, like most others, was not able to recognise its real needs. One of the most frequently encountered problems in social change endeavours is the inability of most communities and target social systems to differentiate between their needs and their wants. While wants are not to be discarded or ignored completely, it is needs that constitute the main objective of compatibility.

What all this boils down to is that compatibility in social change always calls for consistency with fundamental or basic values and needs, not necessarily with secondary or peripheral values and wants. In fact, the very idea of change is incompatible with existing order of things, but not necessarily with fundamental values and needs. The demands of a social change project may be incompatible with a people's right to smoke but provides an opportunity for strengthening the fundamental value of living a healthy life and the need for breathing clean air. Because other motorists have a right to a safe high-way (individual freedom), my right to drive as I like (personal freedom) is curbed by life-saving regulations. Development communication is directed at helping target groups and individuals understand and accept the rationale behind the emphasis on needs as against wants and therefore to appreciate the role of compatibility in social change.

Trialability

This is the extent to which an advocated change project can be subjected to trial efforts or implemented in manageable and reasonable bits. Advocated changes or development projects that can be tried out first before full implementation are known to have stronger appeal to target groups than those that cannot. One of the reasons why vasectomy has not been a very viable tool for birth control is the chord of finality with which it strikes in people's mind. Even

though it is not castration (which has been even less successful in birth control efforts) vasectomy is strongly associated with irreversibility. But when, for example, a new 'improved' seed is introduced to farmers, there usually is no flat rejection of it, even though there is also no exuberant acceptance. It is usually accepted with caution, until it has been tried out. The possibility of trial saves the seed from being rejected outright and gives the advocated change a chance of being accepted and implemented.

When trialability is ignored the outcome could be disastrous. In the early 1960s in the Delta (then Bendel) State of Nigeria, a new brand of fertiliser was introduced to improve on the production of yam tubas. Older farmers, with the natural suspicion that usually surrounds any new idea in a heavily culture-conscious social system, accepted the fertiliser with suspicion; they applied it to very small and insignificant portions of their farmlands. Younger farmers with little experience and a desire to buy into anything new and modern, applied the fertiliser wholesale to their farms. The result was catastrophic; yam tuba production from the lands to which the fertiliser was applied was a complete failure. While production on the farmlands on which the older farmers did not apply the fertiliser remained constant (with tubas 9-18 inches in length, and 12-21 inches in circumference), production on the portion of their farmland on which they had applied the fertiliser was almost zero (with tubas 3-6 inches and 6-9 inches). Some of the yam stems actually produced no tubas whatsoever. What happened on a very limited scale to the older farmers happened on a wholesale scale to the younger farmers. Trialability saved the older farmers from loss of revenue; its absence (neglect) caused the younger farmers a whole year or more of wasted labour.

Trialability does not only remove the fear of uncertainty or the fear of large scale failure; it, in fact, prevents possible disasters in social change endeavours. Also, it tends to reassure target groups that they have the opportunity to revert to the old order if the trial proves that the advocated change would not succeed within the social system. Success of the trial would help to build up the people's confidence in both the project and the social change agent and, therefore, serves as a bulwark against rejection. Even a failure does not always indicate that the advocated change is untenable within the social system. Often, such a failure of the trial helps point out deficiencies in both the advocated change and its plan of implementation. Thus, rather than lead to the rejection of a new order of things or action, a trial that fails to prove an advocated change as 'fit and proper' for a target social system, helps to improve the change efforts. It usually instigates a re-examination of the proposed change and of its plan of implementation with a view to restructuring them to fit the socio-cultural contexts of the target social system and the deeper values, needs and aspirations of its people. Trialability is a characteristic that provides very strong impetus for implementing social change or development projects for, more often than not, trials - even when they are not completely successful - create learning opportunities. As a result, trials that do not meet expectation are generally followed by a critical evaluation and restructuring of the social change plan, leading eventually to full-scale implementation.

Simplification

This is what Zaltman & Duncan (1977:14) and Rogers (1983:230) call complexity. This characteristic is directed at ensuring that the demands of both an advocated change and the process of implementing it are not too complex. If what the change proposal entails is difficult for the target social system to understand, it may not be easily persuaded. If the target social system understands the expectations, but foresees what seems to be insurmountable difficulties, it would not be too eager to initiate the process of implementing the advocated change. Both the level of comprehension necessary for the target social system to understand the change proposal, and the level of knowledge that is necessary for the proposal to succeed must not be too high above the capacities of the target social system. Otherwise, the advocated change would face rejection based, not purely on its merits, but on the disparities between the people's capacities and what it would take to successfully implement the change. As Rogers (1983:231) puts it, 'the complexity of an innovation (development project) as perceived by members of a social system, is negatively related to its rate of adoption'.

In the early 1980s, the World Health Organisation (WHO) carried out a development campaign aimed at eradicating guinea-worms from the Abakaliki area of Eastern Nigeria. The major thrust of the campaign was to 'convince' the people in that social system of the necessity for boiling their drinking water before use. The campaign did not succeed, not because the people did not listen to the messages or did not understand what they heard. No, the representatives of the people were fully involved in the discussions on the devastating effects of the disease, on why and how to combat the disease, and in the construction of the development messages. The campaign failed because of the complexity of the process involved in boiling and filtering water before drinking, and because of the unnatural taste of boiled water for which the people had no solution.

Simplification demands appropriateness in the structure (content and relationships) and procedure (operational strategy) of the advocated change in relation to the level of the target social system's capacities. The structure and the procedure for the implementation of any social change or development project must be at the identified level of intellectual capacity, comprehension, skills, and abilities of the target social system, otherwise motivation and commitment would not be forthcoming from the people. Problems with simplification are an obvious indication that there is a crying need for information and education in the target social system. These, therefore, should be the first development or social change task to be carried out. Often, the demands of simplification unwittingly help point out problematic antecedent problems that must be dealt with before a particular social change project can succeed. Therefore, not only is this characteristic useful in itself; it is also very significant in helping to expose initial and usually 'hidden' hurdles that make the scaling of conspicuous and targeted hurdles impossible. Thus, for example, to be able to teach literacy successfully, an instructor needs first to learn how to instruct at a level that is comfortable for the illiterate student!

Communicability

This characteristic is concerned with the degree to which it is easy to disseminate and discuss the facts of a social change project. If people are bashful of, or are constrained by cultural demands from, open and free discussion of the issues involved in a change programme, then it is not likely that such a change would come about easily. It is discussion that helps create greater knowledge and understanding of a change project. And it is such knowledge and understanding which help elicit acceptance and commitment. If the subject of a social change project is one that people are not willing to openly talk about or discuss either because of cultural demands or social taboos, it usually faces problems of understanding and acceptance. The problems that birth-control campaigns have faced in most developing countries derive from the communication inhibitions created by the culture and social structure. For example, in high context cultures communicability is almost always a problem. It is not taken for granted, for in such communities, who says what to whom when and how, is regulated by the culture and sustained by the social structure. Unless those at the pinnacle of the social structure declare a topic suitable for open discussion, no one would freely disseminate information on the topic or discuss it openly.

In order to build communicability into a change programme, the social change agent needs first to deal with the restraining hurdles, in order to create a conducive atmosphere for open discussions and dialogue that would enable the scales to 'fall off' the people's eyes. Then he must find relevant and alternative ways of circumventing the constraints. This means that dealing with the constraints must replace the original change project in urgency, for unless the constraints are removed or circumvented, the change will almost certainly fail to take off. Sometimes, there may be no cultural restrictions on disseminating information on a topic or discussing it in groups or in public, but strong social inhibitions may prevent any serious sharing of ideas on the topic. People may jokingly refer to the issues related to the social change topic, but will feel obliged not to talk about them seriously for fear of ridicule or social isolation. For example, in many African communities, men and women do talk about birth control, but mostly as something that others, and not they, do. When the conversation shifts to getting condoms and submitting to surgical contraception, the topic is either quickly changed or the participants start leaving unceremoniously. But topics like the education of children or clean and safe neighbourhoods, which are openly discussed and for which many people are willing to give their time and energy, have made tremendous progress in many societies.

The easier it is to talk about different aspects of a social change issue, the easier it will be for the people to understand its ramifications and to make informed decisions about accepting or rejecting it.

The other side of communicability is what Rogers (1983:16) has called observability. It is

concerned with the degree to which the results of a social change or development project can be seen by others. Observability requires that there should be as little hindrance or difficulty as possible in letting the outcome of a social change project seen by or made known to others. The outcome should be such that it can be easily observed. This characteristic produces what has been called the 'radiation effect' (Moemeka, 1987), making it possible for more people within and outside the target social system where the project was successfully completed, to observe, accept and behave according to the demands of the new order. Radiation effect holds that if the result of a social change project is positive, and if such result can be easily observed, then, if other conditions are met, more people would implement the demands of that project.

These enhancing characteristics are individually important in any development or social change programme. It is not that they are each (with the possible exception of relative advantage) absolutely indispensable. But ignoring any of them when considering how to ensure a target social system's motivation and commitment, may constitute a serious handicap to success. It is also important to note that, although the characteristics have been recognised as objective criteria that enhance the acceptance of, and willingness to be committed to, development projects, the target social system may not perceive them as such. Therefore, the critical factor in their utility is the people's perception. Unless the target social system perceives each of the characteristics as enhancing, they will not have the impact described above. The closer the perception of the majority of the target social system members is to the objective facts of the characteristics, the greater the impact which they would have on the fate of the change advocated for that social system. It follows that apart from ensuring the presence of the characteristics in the conception, planning and implementation of advocated change projects, there is the very important task of creating the communication environment in which the people can positively perceive the characteristics as enhancing.

HINDERING FACTORS

On the other side of the coin of social change are those factors which, by their very nature, tend to always work against the introduction of new ideas or the implementation of new programmes. One such factor is the centrality of beliefs related to the advocated change. As Rokeach (1968) points out, the more central a belief, that is, the more it is functionally connected or related to other beliefs and the more strongly it is held, the greater the likelihood of it being a source of resistance when advocated change is incompatible with it.

There are few, if any, changes that have been introduced and implemented without any voices of dissent. Because change involves the alteration of the status quo, it always faces resistance - mild or strong. Whether people will mildly or strongly resist change is, first and foremost, influenced by their world view or their articulation of social reality. Those who see reality as a 'fixed entity' that cannot be changed (covering laws), and therefore should not be

'disturbed' are almost always opposed to any alteration of the status quo. They do not like 'to rock the boat'; change does not sit well with them, and they always stoutly resist any efforts directed at reallocating more power to the underprivileged.

Those who see reality as 'individually determined' or created (interpretative rules), based on predispositions, are less closed-minded to change, but do exhibit a very selfish perspective. They would argue in favour of advocated change but only if the expected outcome of the change contains ingredients of personal gains. If the change outcome is tending only towards a global (community) benefit, with very little specific personal gain, they would not be too excited about it, and certainly would not feel obliged to participate. To this group of people, the extent of the benefit of the project to the community is of little concern. They would rather use their time and energy in pursuing personal goals than spend them on community goals. If they are well-to-do, (and the majority of them usually are) their resistance is even stronger, because they would resent reallocation of power and resources to those in need.

Those who believe that no single factor can fully explain reality, that is, that what is real or good or true is usually the result of the unique combination of interdependent variables (open systems) are most open to change. They generally take a retrospective look, a circumsperspective look, an introspective look and a prospective look, at the social situation vis-à-vis the advocated change before making up their mind. For them, no change proposal is good or bad on its own; whether a change effort will benefit the community and therefore deserves consideration, would depend on the relationship of that change proposal to the prevailing socio-cultural realities of the community. When those in this group are in the majority and/or have enough power, they are able to direct the flow and rate of change in their community. Their suggestions and exhortations are mostly objectively guided, and are not based on selfish or irrational views.

It is an extremely important duty of the social change agent to creatively harness these different world-views to advantage - openly encouraging the open-minded, re-educatively handling the closed-minded, and persuasively changing the minds of the selfish. This is no easy task. For if any change effort must succeed, it must begin on a solid base of community commitment. While divergence of views is not necessarily a bad thing, it can, if not handled creatively, put a stop to a change programme before it even begins. In order for the social change agent to creatively harness divergence of opinions on a development project for a target social system, the development communicator must know that social system well enough to be able to identify the opinion leaders among the different divergent groups. No social change agent can easily identify who in the target social system, can sway opinions one way or the other, without adequate knowledge of the socio-cultural realities and interaction patterns of that target social system.

The open systems group is generally the very desire of any social change agent. It is this

group that would seem to face change proposals and situations intelligently, making objective and non-biased decisions. But even for this group, unanimity can never be taken for granted. It is not that those in this group do not ever resist change; they sometimes do, especially when the change advocated is seen by them as irrelevant in the target social system. At other times, some members of this group may resist change, even in the face of strong pressure to alter the status quo. But such resistance is caused by a number of factors that derive from the socio-cultural and environmental realities of the target social system. Zaltman & Duncan (1977:66) identify four broad areas from which such resistance can emanate. Collectively called barriers to change, they are cultural, social, organisational and psychological. Each broad area is made up of a number of resistance factors that are generally rationalised within the context of individual social systems.

Cultural barriers

These are hindering factors brought to the surface as a result of lack of correspondence, symmetry or relevance between the culture of the target social system and the demands of an advocated change. The perception of such incongruences could be individual- or group-based and tend to be rooted, in general, in the prevailing socio-cultural and economic situation, and in particular, in cultural values and beliefs. Socio-cultural and economic barriers find expression in numerous types of resistance which, invariably, have solid justifications in the context of the target social system. Okediji (1972:4) lists a few examples of such resistance and their corresponding rationalisations in relation to contraceptives.

Corresponding rationalisations

There is resistance rooted in ideologies that run counter to population control and beliefs about the negative and positive aspects of specific methods. For example, the elite in developing nations often accuse the highly industrialised nations of an overconcern for controlling their population; they claim it is a 'neo-colonialist' plot. There is also a belief that particular contraceptive methods cause sterility, cancer of the vagina or reduce the enjoyment of sexual intercourse. In some cases, nationalistic ideology rationalises that uncontrolled population contributes to the strength of a nation.

There is resistance rooted in traditional heritage of a people. In this regard, the community, village, family and clan accept large families and there is a desire for male children, especially in patrilineal societies.

There is resistance rooted in social relationships with particular reference to co-wives, attitudes towards birth control believed to be prevalent among peer and reference groups, and normative values pertaining to 'moral-immoral' as well as 'natural-unnatural' types of behaviour. For example, in polygynous families co-wives who are favourably oriented to contraceptives are

regarded by other co-wives as 'prostitutes' who deviate from traditional standards. To the extent that reference and psychological groups give social, economic support one cannot afford to deviate from their scales of values, which may disfavour the use of contraceptives as 'unnatural behaviour'.

There is resistance rooted in economic well-being. A large number of children is an economic advantage; they are useful in helping a family earn a living; children pay for themselves by working as they grow. Also, a large number of children serves as social security for their parents when the parents get old.

There is resistance that is anchored in the personality needs of the individual with particular reference to sex-role images and sexual relationships. This is seen, for example, as a demonstration of virility or a manifestation of manliness.

There is resistance that is anchored in health conditions. High fertility represents a functional adjustment to the high mortality existing in such communities. From the point of view of under-developed communities and from the point of view of particular families, it is considered necessary to raise large numbers of children to guarantee that a few will reach adulthood.

Cultural values and beliefs

These are a major cause of resistance to change. Lack of work ethic or competitive spirit, socially sanctioned unwillingness to accept new ideas and lack of socialisation in certain key values like upward mobility and achievement motivation as well as strong belief and trust in traditional ways of doing things, constitute constant barriers to change. People who have been brought up in a culture in which working hard for self is suspect, that is, where there is a socially sanctioned aversion to being conspicuously better than one's neighbours are not likely to understand and work for change. Those who live in societies in which hard work is not rewarded are not usually willing to make the sacrifice that normally accompanies change efforts.

A target social system's values and beliefs can become behaviour instruments for resistance when the change advocated or the way it is advocated and the expected outcome are very different from what the people expect or are used to. For example, a change programme calling for hard work in a cultural environment in which there is lack of work ethics, a change endeavour calling for family planning in a social system in which children are seen as wealth, or a plan to introduce labour-saving machine into an organisation which has been based on a labour-intensive operation, will each evoke resistance of some sort - some mild, others strong. But such resistance almost always fades away in the face of a well-planned and executed development communication effort geared towards re-education and carried out within the target social system on a dialogical basis.

The change-preventing factors mentioned above may be what the people want, but they, certainly, are not what they or their social system need. A communication strategy that creatively uses existing knowledge to carefully explain the difference and subtly show how the pursuit of wants is less fundamentally beneficial than the pursuit of needs. But as an Igbo (Nigerian) adage points out: You cannot stay at a distance and physically help someone else to properly put on a necklace. The social change agent needs to KNOW the target social system to be able to circumvent these inhibiting socio-cultural factors.

A related social factor that is often not discussed is the unspoken belief in many communities that their situation is a condition from which there is no escape. Known as fatalism, it is a subtle source of resistance to change both for individuals and for communities. For the individual, fatalism can be explained as a post hoc rationalisation of behaviour; but for societies and communities, it is a strong variable that impedes social change. If people are convinced that what they are and have is all that they can be and own, they are not likely to be open to suggestions about change. A number of studies in the USA in the 1970s, using the Rotter internal/external tests, which measure the degree to which a person feels he has control over those things that influence his behaviour proved that fatalism is an important, albeit inhibiting, variable in social change. Zaltman (1974) found a positive relationship between the degrees of felt control and levels of innovativeness in family planning; the lower the feeling of control, the less innovative the person is.

Cultural ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism in this context refers to the ascription of superior qualities to what one is familiar with. It is a cultural 'sin' that is generally committed by both change agents and change recipients. But it is more often associated with change agents. Its major cause, of course, is differences in cultural background between the social change agent and the target social system. These differences which may be cultural, economic, political, social or intellectual often create very non-conducive attitudes and behaviour, sometimes, unintentionally. However, whether intentionally or not, the impact of such differences can, unless taken care of early, lead to a variety of disabling situations:

- A feeling of superiority, especially on the part of the development agent.
- A superiority-complex that could 'push' the agent to want to lead from the front, that is, assume a know-better-than-thou attitude, instead of leading from behind, that is, provide the necessary cues and information that would facilitate the people's understanding and decision-making process, boost their sense of self-worth, build up their motivation and increase their desire to be fully involved.
- A target social system that resents the development agent simply because he is not of their own 'kind' and, therefore, perceives the advocated change as an imposition from the outside.

Such attitudes and behaviour are, of course, the result of two underlying factors - lack of knowledge of the target social system by the social change agent and non-participation by the target social system in the change endeavour. They manifest when the social change agent fails to learn from the people, and also fails to create opportunities for members of the target social system to be physically and actively involved in the conceptualisation, discussion, planning and execution of the advocated change. There can be reluctance on the part of target social systems to adopt a change they helped to formulate if they were not adequately involved in defining the problem to which the change is addressed. The tendency for social change agents to be satisfied with passive or vicarious participation (Moemeka, 1987) of the client system often leaves differences in cultural perspectives between the agent and the target social system largely unresolved with adverse attendant consequences. Such unresolved differences which a 'distant' social change agent may not be aware of, often create differing underlying perceptions about the real nature of development problems and how they can best be solved. Sometimes these differences cause strong resistance to otherwise ostensibly advantageous change projects.

Closely associated with cultural ethnocentrism is cultural pride which manifests itself when the target social system sees the way a new order is being introduced as putting down of its long-cherished beliefs and values. This happens when the social change agent focuses his total attention on pointing out the disadvantages of existing order of things, emphasising the superiority of the new order - the advocated change - over the old. Such an approach is like driving the people of the target social system against a stone wall from where they eventually turn round to fight - to defend their cultural heritage. This was starkly brought home in 1994 to a government veterinarian in the Republic of Benin who was sent to help improve life-stock rearing in Parakou village. He began his assignment with an aristocratic, arrogant, ethnocentric, know-better-than-thou, attitude - condemning existing practices and telling the people what to do. The villagers heard him but did not listen; they rejected his advice, in spite of the fact that their sheep and goats were sickly and thin and in spite of the fact that the advice he gave them was the right one.

The burning desire to succeed forced the veterinarian to change his approach. Instead of condemning existing practices, he spent time studying them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Instead of throwing information at the people, he learned to communicate with them; instead of talking at the people, he learned to talk with them; and instead of pushing solutions, he learned to listen to the people's views, explanations and opinions. Before long, the villagers began to implement the better practices that he suggested - the same practices which he unsuccessfully tried to ram down the people's throats initially.

Whether or not a social change agent means it, non-involvement of target social systems in the development process is always interpreted by target groups as superiority complex on the part of the agent. It is generally seen as denigration of the people's abilities and potentials

and creates resentment which often leads to seeing the advocated change as an imposition from the outside. The appropriate approach, which completely avoids cultural pride, is to involve the people, learn from them and give 'due' credit to the old order of things (after all, it has all along, somehow, sustained the people) while carefully showing how it no longer is adequate to meet ensuing expectations which the advocated new order of things can be met adequately.

Social barriers

Group norms, group solidarity, fear of isolation and group conflicts are all examples of social barriers that frequently cause resistance to change. These factors, which ordinarily are positive elements of human interrelationships for any society, often become impediments if new ideas and change efforts are perceived as threatening their existence or their acceptance as sanctioned societal standards of behaviour and community relationships.

Group norms are behaviour guides that delineate or define what society expects from individuals and what individuals expect from one another. They are 'instruments' of social stability used to consciously and subconsciously 'construct' and maintain the conduct of any social system. Therefore, when a social change project is perceived as having the capacity of adverse impact on existing norms and social relationships within the target social system or between it and other social systems, that project would face resistance. One of the strongest factors that has worked against the social acceptance of western-style freedom in many developing societies is its tendency to radically change existing traditional social order in ways that affect society more adversely than beneficially. For example, freedom as practised in western societies leads to reckless behaviour and carefree attitude in many adolescent youths; to the disregard of authority and ridicule of parental control, and it inevitably leads to what is generally described as 'individualism', but which, in reality, is 'personalism' or selfishness. Even though this type of freedom under which the individual takes precedence over the community, builds up self-reliance, it destroys community spirit which, in traditional communalistic societies, is valued more than self-reliance.

The use of condoms, to take another example, has met strong opposition in many developing societies. The opposition is, in fact, not against condom use as such, but against what condom is socially associated with - adultery and prostitution. There is a strong norm against both adultery and prostitution in many societies; and even in societies in which a 'blind eye' is turned against them, adultery and prostitution are still considered as socially pervasive. In general, no one needs a condom before having sexual relation with a legal partner. Only those who are afraid of contacting sexual diseases or of the responsibilities for an illegitimate child need a condom for sexual intercourse. These are those who engage in adultery and prostitution - two anti-social sexual behaviours that have helped in no small measure to give the condom a bad social image as an instrument that promotes moral decadence and 'inflicts' unfaithfulness

in marriage and, consequently divorce, on society. This is why there is, in many developing countries, a strong public opposition to the free sale or distribution of condoms. This is not to say that condoms is never used by any one in such societies. Those who use it, do so very stealthily - an indication of the strength of social sanction.

Group solidarity finds expression in unity of purpose and adherence to established modes of carrying out mutual or reciprocal obligations. Any changes affecting the group must be changes that strengthens the group and advance its purposes and principles. The stronger the solidarity of a group, the greater the chances that the group as a whole or individuals within it would resist any new order of things that threatens that solidarity, even when there are obvious advantages of the new order of things. In this case, the unity and survival of the group is treated as a priority over any other possible benefit. In a more specific way, social change projects can be adversely affected by the strength of the power structure within the target social system. This is particularly forceful with regards to those who exercise referent and/or reward power. If the group or groups to which the social system look up for guidance or depend upon for socio-economic and political well-being are not in favour of a change endeavour, usually because of its possible adverse effect on the group, the target social system will tend to resist the change effort, even when the social system would have benefited from the change. In general, when those who have power are threatened by a possible change, they tend to use their power to sway opinions to their side, thus creating in the target social system the need to resist the change. 'The more a reference group is threatened by a possible change, the more active it will be in expressing its opposition to the target or client group' (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977:73).

Strong in-group solidarity can be as much an advantage as it can be a disadvantage. When there is unanimity of purpose in favour of a development programme, or when leaders of the group are in support of any project, in-group solidarity functions as an advantage, for the group would act in unison or in deference to its leaders. This does not occur frequently, but when it does, the task of implementing social change runs smoothly. But it must be remembered that unanimity of purpose and obedience to group leaders can equally work against a social change programme. It is important to mention one other adverse effect of in-group solidarity. It can be a very strong weapon against 'outsiders'. When people have leaders that they trust; when they feel self-sufficient under their leaders, attempts from outside to change their lives are usually strongly opposed, unless supported by the leaders. But 'one who has stayed long enough in a cold pool of water no longer feels the water cold'. He becomes aware of the coldness of the water only when someone else comes into the pool, feels the 'bite' of the cold water and complains. Rarely are most communities that have social problems articulately aware of the full ramifications of their problems and rarely do they know completely how to deal with such problems. Infusion of news ideas and knowledge from the outside is almost always necessary even though never sufficient. But if such new ideas and knowledge

are stopped from filtering into the community, positive change would become almost impossible.

One of the most obvious barriers to social change is group conflict. As already mentioned, the unity and survival of a group is usually uppermost in the mind of the group members. As a result, members are generally very careful not to do or support anything that could create conflict within the group, or lead to their own isolation from the group, or to the disintegration of the group. This is a consequence of group solidarity. But it is more than that. It also reflects the need to be in a position of power against which opposing groups cannot easily prevail. When there is a conflict between or among groups within a community or an organisation, the social change supported by one group may be rejected by others. This is when 'change or innovation suffers guilt by association' (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977:74). This idea is developed by Frye (1969) who discusses what happens when there is conflict between two anxieties - conservative anxiety and radical anxiety. Frye (1977) describes conservative anxiety as one which makes group members say 'let's-be-careful-about-losing-what-we've got'; and radical anxiety as one which makes them say 'let's-be-careful-and-clear-out-all-this-stuff-and-have-a-fresh-breeze-blow through'. When holders of each type of anxiety communicate their fears, they do so effectively, inadvertently reinforcing the anxieties of the other group. This makes an objective examination of the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed change very difficult and its acceptance by both sides near-impossible.

Organisational barriers

The concept 'organisation' is used here more as a verb than as a noun. Even though it has consequence for commercial, industrial, financial and other profit-making institutions, its relevance here is structural rather than institutional. We are concerned here not mainly with organisations as legal institutions but rather with how an organisation is structured for purposes of carrying out the activities necessary for meeting its goals. The question is: How does the executive, administrative, and operative structure of an organisation create barriers to change within the organisation? A similar question applies to a community or a village or town. How does the governance structure of a village or community adversely affect attempts to cause positive change in the village or community? The organisation of a system - industrial, educational or socio-cultural - into levels of authority and responsibility implies the distribution and structuring of power within the system. Such perfectly normal and useful administrative arrangements, however, do create problems when new ideas or shifts from the status-quo are planned. This is usually because change or innovations may be seen as a threat to those whose power or influence would be adversely affected. Such fears of depletion or loss of power or influence rank high among sources of resistance to change.

One of the reasons why literacy and self-awareness programmes in rural Africa did not, until recently, succeed well enough was the contradiction between what local leaders publicly said

should be done and what they privately wanted done or not done. While they publicly supported the programmes that would improve the physical, mental and socio-economic conditions of the poor, they privately subverted such programmes (by action or inaction) for fear that they would lose their privileged positions in the community. Sometimes, opposition to such programmes is very overt, but the reasons are the same - the inordinate desire or determination to retain power and protect privileged positions. To take another example, at the Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, USA, a change was stoutly opposed by faculty members, not purely to maintain the status-quo, but to respect it. Plans for the change were made purportedly without adequate consultation with faculty members as the approved regulation of the university demanded. So even though the change - the establishment of an inter-departmental programme to teach information design - was academically appropriate and financially profitable (the department would have easily won contracts from industry) - it was stoutly, if not vehemently, opposed. Why? Because the university authorities did not follow the rules. Frustrated by this 'irrational' opposition, the president of the university cancelled the inter-departmental programme plan and, using one of the unique powers conferred on him as the president of the institution, established a department of information design.

Hierarchy of authority, channels of communication, division of labour, rules and regulations and organised labour are the important components of the structure of organisations. Before any change in any of them or in the structure itself can succeed, there must be sufficient harmony between the demands of the proposed change and the expectations of the different components of the structure. Without this, support for the change may be non-existent altogether or limited. For example, hierarchy of authority is generally jealously guarded in organisations. Any proposed change that would affect existing status differentials and cause loss of status by some personnel will almost certainly be resisted by those affected.

One other factor that has strong impact on organisational barriers to change is the climate for change that exists in the organisation. Zaltman & Duncan (1977:78) explains: 'The notion of climate for change focuses on organisational members' perceptions of the change process. What does the change mean to them?' Campbell & Converse (1972) add two more important questions: 'What are their attitudes towards change? Are there differences throughout the organisation regarding the climate for change?' If some units in the organisation have different climates for change, there would most likely be problems during implementation of the change.

Duncan (1972:205-245) identifies three important dimensions for understanding the climate for change, namely, the NEED for change, the OPENNESS to change and the POTENTIAL for change. The need for change focuses on the perception by organisational personnel about the need for change in the organisation. If such perception does not exist, it would be difficult for change efforts to succeed. The openness to change focuses on the perception of organisation personnel about the openness or willingness of departmental personnel to

change. All other things being equal, if departmental authorities are not well disposed to change, then change efforts would not be permitted, let alone succeeding. The potential for change focuses on the perception of organisation personnel that the organisation has the capabilities for dealing with change. There are two pertinent questions here to ask: Has the organisation been successful in past change attempts? Is there a commitment to change in the organisation? If the answer to any or all of these questions is in the negative, organisational personnel would most certainly oppose any proposed change in the organisation. Resistance is generally greater when the climate for change is most favourable, that is, when all three dimensions of organisational climate are perceived as low in the organisation.

Duncan (1972) also examined the relationship among the three dimensions vis-à-vis their impact on change and change efforts. He found that the need for change is negatively related to openness to change ($r = -.26, p < .01$) and potential for change ($r = -.57, p < .01$). This means that the need for change is perceived as great when there is no openness to change and there is no potential for changing. The more organisational personnel perceive that their organisation needs to change before it can meet its goals and objectives and increased demands from its environment, the less they perceive that the organisation is willing to change or has the potential to change. If the organisation had the potential to change and was always willing to implement necessary change, all other things being equal, all necessary changes would have taken place, making it impossible for organisational personnel to perceive the need for change. This inverse relationship also creates its own problem. Perception of a high need for change can create anxiety in organisational personnel, because such a perception would well-up the feeling that they cannot change anyway, fully aware of the negative impact of the other side of the equation. 'They are potentially less able to deal with change in that they perceive that their department is less open to change; there is more scepticism about the success of change efforts; and so forth. As a result, they may be somewhat less likely to try change' (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977:79, 80).

Psychological barriers

These are also barriers to social change on the part of the individual. They are created by, among others, lack of awareness (often due to selective perception), the need for homeostasis, professional orientation, and low empathy. There are other psychological barriers too such as individual pride, arrogance and unwillingness to acknowledge other's superior quality, knowledge and suggestions and to admit one's own limited abilities. The arrogance of those who are knowledgeable quickly translates into the denigration of those who are limited in their knowledge of the issues or problems at hand. These barriers lead to building selfish defences which then become more important than the task at hand, leading to the concretising of differences of perception and opinions and, subsequently, lack of consensus on change plans and efforts.

Selective perception and lack of awareness are among the strongest barriers to social change. When an individual is not aware that there is a problem in the situation and, therefore, he is unaware of the need for change, that individual cannot easily support a change effort directed at that problem. An individual may be aware that there are some significant problems affecting him or the group or community to which he belongs, but may be unable to see any solution to the problems. For such an individual, suggestions for tackling the problems (proposals for change) may fall on deaf ears. Earlier on in this article we referred to the impact of covering laws perspective (that 'reality' is out there to be discovered and adjusted to rather than changed) on the level of resistance to change. Those who hold this perspective are only one step away from being fatalistic; they believe that whatever happens is determined by fate, and the only option open to the individual or to the target social system is 'adjusting to that which fate has determined'. This is not particularly different from fatalism which Rogers (1969:273) defines as the degree to which an individual perceives a lack of ability to control his future. There can be very few stronger and more debilitating roots of resistance to change than this. It is caused by lack of awareness or most often, by unwillingness to seek 'other' information (selective perception).

Fatalism has often been seen as a social 'disease' of the underdeveloped societies. It has for long been held that the unending underdevelopment of these societies is largely a consequence of fatalism; that they see their situation as one from which there can be no escape. The truth, of course, is that fatalism is found everywhere - in developing or developed societies. For example, when an over-weight eighteen year-old German, or British or American agonises over the fact that she cannot lay her hands off sugar even though she knows her weight problem is strongly associated with too much sugar, she is yielding to the 'hand of fate', she is falling prey to the power of fatalism. The same is true of the inner-city dweller who strongly believes that because his grandfather was poor and his father is poor, he cannot get out of the poverty cycle; and the sub-urban nymph who, through indiscriminate sex, has contact gonorrhoea many times, but says in utter despair: 'I cannot help myself; I must have many men in my life.' If these young people were willing to seek and utilise relevant information, not only would they have seen the need for change but also they would have been willing to make the effort to change.

Two other inhibiting factors in social change and development that deserve mention here are people's need to maintain a certain level of comfort and the impact of professional training on how people perceive problems and solutions to those problems. Watson (1971) points to the inherent desire of all organisms to seek a comfortable level of arousal and stimulation (homeostasis) and to try to maintain that state. When people are comfortable where they are or with what they have, they tend to opt for the status-quo. But change is the very opposite of status-quo. Unless people are extremely uncomfortable with the existing situation, they are wont to resist change. There are few, if any, social change projects that do not involve a level of arousal and stimulation higher than what is comfortable, especially for the elite of target

social systems. It follows that change efforts that create discomfort for residents of a target social system, especially for those who have political, referent or coercive power, most often, if not always, face resistance from within. Other aspects of homeostasis that can adversely affect social change and development efforts include the fear of failure associated with doing something new and bad experiences with past change efforts.

Commitment to, and conformity with, the ideals, standards and expectations of professions can be sources of resistance to change. People like to uphold and practice what their professions demand. But a person's professional orientation can affect how that person views a change programme, the rationale for such a change and how to achieve its goals. Deviations from the professional expectations of the social change agent or of those responsible for financing the programme always meet reservations, if not resistance. The difference in perception between the nurse and the social worker on the issue of abortion is common knowledge among social change agents. While nurses are wont to focus on preserving the health of the patients, social workers are more concerned about helping the patients cope with abortion and its ramifications. There is no doubt that both the nutritionist and the environmental hygienist work for the health and better living of individuals and target social systems. But while the nutritionist would feel comfortable recommending the making of compost that would produce manure for fertilising the family garden in order to have healthy fruits and vegetables for the family, the environmental hygienist would be appalled to see such composts, associating them with germs and diseases. Is any of them wrong? No. Fruits and vegetables are necessary for good health; so is clean air and environments free of germs. The obvious solution is to reach a compromise, but this is easier said than done. Differences of perception and opinions deriving from professional training can cause very disturbing disagreements that often lead to project abandonment to the disadvantage of needy target social systems. 'When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers'.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion on hindering factors of social change and development would seem to suggest that resistance to change proposals and plans is not only an endemic problem associated with social change, but it is almost always a development obstruc-ter. While resistance may be endemic in the social change process, its impact becomes negative only when it is allowed to thrive through lack of co-orientation, lack of empathy, jealousy, ignorance and selfishness. From what has been said above, it is clear that resistance can emanate from the social change agent or from the target social system. Regardless of the source, resistance is not necessarily a destructive factor in the social change process. In fact, resistance is a healthy phenomenon to the extent that it acts as a smoke detector, drawing attention to issues and problems that would otherwise escape early or any detection, and cause greater problems in the later stages of implementing a social change project. The

existence of resistance, though at first sight is generally uncomfortable, does create opportunities for discussion and for thrashing out differences, and so helps to put change programmes on more solid grounds.

This is not saying that resistance cannot act as a hindrance to change efforts. It can, if it is very strongly expressed, especially by leaders of the target social system, and if it is supported by a majority of the people in the target social system. But in general, most of the reasons for resistance to social change programmes, without necessarily meaning to, end up facilitating rather hindering the process. In order to turn resistance into positive use, however, the social change agent needs to understand the reasons behind the resistance. To be able to do so, he needs to enter the socio-cultural contexts of the target social system. The social change agent needs to know the target social system well enough before he can hope to understand the reasons for any resistance and to be in a position to turn the resistance into 'a blessing in disguise'.

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