

Development Communication in Action

Building Understanding and
Creating Participation

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Chapter 6

Development Communication: Planning for Social Change

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The delicious stew began its journey from the market.

An Igbo adage

In a very welcome article, Halloran (1998) clearly points out that as far as communication and development in the Third World was concerned, implicit in the research approaches of such as Schramm and Lerner, as well as in much UNESCO-related research in the 1950s and 60s was the idea that development in the Third World should be measured in terms of the adoption and assimilation of Western technology and culture. The main emphasis, he explained, was on increasing efficiency with an accepted and unquestioned value framework. Many examples could be given in support of Halloran's observation, but three may suffice here.

Because of his cultural background, Schramm (1964) would seem to have treated the concepts of Information and Communication as synonyms. In the highly educated and technological societies of the West, with citizens culturally groomed on the concept of *individualism*, information does, under certain circumstances, serve as communication. The people use accumulated knowledge to assess incoming messages and take action on the basis of individual differences. But in the tradition-conscious and largely illiterate and communal societies of the developing world, where the culture is communalistic, to *inform* is never to **communicate**, and to *talk to* is not to **talk with**. In communalistic communities, whether in the developed or the developing world, communication is a matter of interrelationship; and reaction to messages is predicated on how it would affect existing and/or future relationships. Hence, communication, audience feedback and consequent behavior are hardly ever guided by the individual differences perspectives, nor by the social categories perspectives; rather they are always based on the social relationship perspectives.

Lucian Pye (1963), to take another example of assumed value framework, gave undue prominence to the role of the mass media in political development and social change —asserting that *availability* of the mass media in a society determines the level of development in that

society. There was little or nothing said about *accessibility* and *utilization* – two accompanying concepts that give substantive effect to the relationship between the mass media and society. Pye and his colleagues would seem to have assumed that availability of mass media infrastructure is automatically followed by the ability of the individual to own receiving sets, or to read intelligibly; to have access to mass media discussions and to participate intelligently. More importantly, they did not take into account the inhibiting impact of culture on new ideas in tradition-conscious societies.

About the most poignant example is Lerner (1964) and his emphatic stand on the 'route' that developing societies would take in their journey to development. He unequivocally advanced the notion that modernization (by which he meant 'development') in developing societies will follow the historical model of the West. He made no allowances for cultural differences. In addition, Lerner affirmed that the three key factors to modernization are physical, and social in addition to psychological mobilities which express themselves in empathy. Indeed, empathy is an important factor in development, but it must be empathy that is supported by necessary resources. Lerner was probably not aware that empathy is a double-edged sword capable of building up rising expectation but also of creating rising frustration. In the very deprived socio-economic environment of the developing societies (and these days, of Inner cities of the developed world) the power of empathy to nurture rising expectation soon turns to the power to 'inflict' the pain of rising frustration.

Most researchers of the 1980s and 1990s, both from the North and from the South have not proven themselves substantially different from those of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, at a seminar in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1981, a researcher/development communication specialist gleefully told participants that the rate at which the mass media were positively affecting the people of Thailand was phenomenal. She tried to prove this to them by saying: "Farmers are even selling their land to buy television sets". What a positive way to cause development!! And in Italy in 1996, at a training seminar for country-representatives, a UNDP official politely told this author, after a presentation on "Knowing your Audience" and "Leading from Behind", that the organization cannot afford the luxury of 'going to the people'. "We talk *with* their leaders, who in turn can talk *to* the people, thanks to the availability of mass media channels", he proudly asserted.

It is rather disturbing that on the eve of the twenty-first century we are still talking about the problems associated with the unique nature of

the socio-cultural environments of societies – problems identified as far back as the 1970s. The failure of the dominant paradigm (Rogers, 1976) heightened by the information-dumping strategy adopted by governments and donor agencies (Moemeka, 1987) had been recognized, yet development specialists are still recommending and sometimes enforcing strategies that are nothing short of shots-in-the-dark, extolling planning in socio-cultural vacuums. The result has, of course, been failure or half-baked successes, mostly because of what Grunig (1971) has aptly described as “the relative intractability of the local social structure to top-down communication efforts.” Here, the aptness of Halloran’s recent article becomes even more pungent. Halloran does not deny there have been changes in social science approach to development and social change, but he points out that such changes that have occurred are more or less cosmetic and peripheral. They have left the more fundamental issues about the nature and scope of social science unaddressed.

We have recognized several intrinsic problems, but we must now ask how can we possibly deal with the increasing diversification within communication research which inevitably stems from its extension to cultures outside the cultures within which most of its ideas and tools were conceived, developed and articulated.

There is little doubt that the first practical steps towards building a “culturally relevant bridge of understanding” between agents and social systems, is to engage the people in fact-finding discussions, and then to involve them in project activities. There is hardly any easy way for any development plan or project in any social system to succeed if development/social change communicators merely *work for* the people without *working with* them. And it is near-impossible to successfully work with a target social system if the development communicator does not know and understand “the way of life” of that target social system. But no development communicator or social change agent can understand such a target social system unless he/she enters into the socio-cultural contexts of that target social system. This is why it was recently pointed out (Moemeka, 1993) that a key imperative in social change and development efforts is *knowing the audience*, that is, knowing the beneficiaries of the efforts. This knowledge is important for identifying appropriate research methods and methodologies; for constructing relevant questionnaires, analyzing data and interpreting

results. It is very important for appropriate utilization of the enhancing characteristics of social change, and for turning the hindering or disabling characteristics into advantage. And it is particularly necessary, in fact, a *sine qua non*, for identifying appropriately relevant strategies. For unless one knows and understands a people, one cannot know what is good and suitable in such a people's situation.

Communication planning is the orderly and systematic development of a strategy or strategies for the effective implementation of a program of communication in relation to the solution of human problems – economic, social, cultural, political, etc. It is based on a careful analysis of the communication factors in the task to be carried out and the application of communication knowledge and expertise in relation to the socio-cultural contexts of the target social system and the resources available. The starting point is understanding the target group and that group's characteristics and needs. Hence communication planners ask and attempt to answer such basic questions as *who* has to be reached, *who* needs to know *what* – *how* and *when*, and at *what cost* in terms of time, resources and energy. But communication planners also go beyond people to examine the physical, economic and communication environments in relation to the problem or problems to be solved.

In development communication, planning involves the organization of human activities for the efficient use of communication resources and for meeting laid-down communication policy goals as they pertain to the target social system. This is done in the context of each social system's development goals, subject to the prevailing social, cultural, economic and political realities. "All we can objectively say" (Tulloch & Lupton: 1997, p.81), "is that the more general we make our communication, the more we run the risk that people will slip through the education (communication) net...."

Development communication action projects require very careful and detailed planning that must incorporate six interdependent elements or tasks. The first task regarded as basic and very necessary for the success of the other five is *the collection, collation and analysis of facts and figures* about the target social system – about the people and about their relationship with the issue or issues at stake. This task attempts to meet the Information Needs, that is, all the facts and figures necessary for planning a communication strategy directed at solving social change or development problems. The other tasks or elements are Problem Identification, Goal Clarification, Strategy Selection and Operational Detailing, which are regarded as the 'soul' of development communication planning, and Evaluation, which is both the 'searchlight'

for ongoing projects and the 'facts-bridge' between an executed project plan and future plans,

Meeting Information Needs

This is the initial task of providing the basic information (facts and figures) needed to ensure that the communication plan for development or social change in any target social system is appropriate and relevant to that target social system. It is aimed at documenting the realities of existing conditions - political, economic, cultural, social and other human and environmental contexts in the benefiting target social system with a view to determining how each and all of them could affect the development endeavor. It also helps to show how such prevailing conditions could affect and be affected by different communication strategies, thus making the selection of the most appropriate strategy or strategies for the task at hand fairly easy.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has suggested five major activities that help in identifying the information needs and resources of a country or a social system (UNESCO, 1976: 5-10).

The collection of basic data and systematic analysis of the target social system (of the country) upon such bases as population densities, geographic and political limitations to communication, variety of social structures, ecology and agriculture, industrial, manpower and economic capacities, etc.

Particularly important here are data that could help to reveal the mutual impact on the target social system's development goals and objectives of the broad factors mentioned above and such specific ones as hierarchy of authority, decision-making processes, leadership types and styles, levels of education, political climate, major occupations and relationship with surrounding and distant social systems.

The production of an inventory of the present communication resources including modern and traditional media and analysis of the variety of present communication structures. Such inventory should include study of the audience, its communication consumption patterns, and utilization, accessibility to media infrastructure and availability of resources.

Here, the emphasis is on the relationship between the people and the existing communication infrastructure and systems. To help identify this relationship, relevant information is needed on (a) what traditional communication structures and modes the social system has and how these are utilized, (b) how available and accessible the mass media facilities are, (c) who uses what medium, when and for what purposes, (d) what utilization capacities – receiving sets, literacy, purchasing power, leisure time, etc – obtain in the target social system.

Critical analysis of present communication policies (or lack of it) including such consideration as ownership structures, political control and decision-making.

The demand here is for data on policy plans and decisions as to what medium/media to establish, where to locate them and why, personnel hiring and deployment, freedom of action for media personnel, availability of financial resources for maintenance and operation, ethics and equity in the distribution of communication content, feedback, openness and audience participation in the communication process of the target social system.

Critical analysis of communication needs of the target social system especially in relation to the existing social and communication structures and the uses to which communication is put.

This is intended to find out if existing communication systems are appropriate and adequate for achieving identified objectives, and whether there is need for new communication infrastructure that could be used to make the existing systems more efficient and effective. Also important here is the need to ascertain the policy objective with reference to communication content and how this affects and is affected by existing socio-cultural situation.

The analysis of the communication components in all aspects of national development plans and programs in order to ascertain the communication requirements of the programs, and be in a better position to reconcile the needs with the means and capacities available.

This activity seeks to determine the level of consistencies that exists between infrastructure and institutions, as well as the consistencies between project goals and national goals. This examination is intended to help point up any weak points that may exist in the linkages among different levels (project, local and national) of development communication objectives and activities.

Problem Identification

This task is concerned with determining priority. Every target social system has a variety of social and developmental problems. All of them cannot be solved at the same time. Therefore priorities have to be set based on identified levels of urgency that attaches to each need. The task then is identifying the problem which seems to require the most urgent attention based on felt/expressed need. A rural community may be faced with the problems of a falling school building, lack of passable feeder road and a very distant source of drinking water. All three are real problems and seem to present themselves as conditions that require urgent attention. Which should be selected for solution first?

Invariably, the problem selected for immediate attention should be the one that the development communicator and the target social system believe has the potential of being solved, taking into account the human and material resources available as well as the prevailing socio-cultural and political environments. The choice made may or may not be a popular one. However, while it is important to satisfy as many people in the target social system as possible, it is even more important to ensure that projects selected are those that can be completed successfully. Projects carelessly carried out or unsuccessfully completed tend to alienate target social systems from development or social change activities.

Goal Clarification

Not only is the identification, or singling out, of the problem or problems to be solved a necessity, the clarification of the goal or goals aimed at in attempting to solve the problem or problems must also be seen as imperative. It is one thing to know the existing conditions that need to be changed; it is another to know how to tackle the problems there in, and to judiciously select which aspect of the problem to tackle, when and to what extent – again, taking into account available human and material resources and the socio-political climate.

Let us take the distant source of drinking water mentioned above. The community that has this problem cannot bring that source of water

nearer; it can only create another source, but how? The answer will depend mostly on available resources, and to some extent on political will. It is possible, for example, for the community to sink a borehole or to dig a number of wells, the water from which would be purified before drinking; or to go modern by providing facilities for pipe-borne water. If the decision is to sink a borehole, should it be one to which everyone should go to fetch water from with buckets or sachets or should it be one fitted with a pump capable of distributing water to different sections of the community through pipes fitted with taps? If the latter, how many taps should there be?

Issues of this type need to be decided upon in order to give a clear focus to the project. Hence, development communicators, after selecting a project, always follow up with clarification of goals. What is it about the problem to be solved that is a priority? What is it that can and should be done about this priority area? Is it to change a whole structure or to eliminate undesirable consequences? For whom, and to what purposes? Generally, goals are transitional because conditions are always changing. However, if there is to be focus at each stage of a development project, goals must be set and clarified. If the conditions relevant to the project change, then the goals already set must be modified to meet the changed conditions.

Strategy Selection

There usually are different or alternative ways of solving a social problem or of meeting the needs of a target social system. Each alternative has its strengths and weaknesses. While some alternatives may be appropriate in some environments and for some solutions, others would be effective only under different conditions and for different solutions. Strategy selection provides the opportunity for development communicators or social change agents to take a hard look at different development communication strategies and methods (see Chapter 7) with a view to selecting those that most appropriately fit the project at hand, as well as the socio-cultural realities of the target social system. In order to ensure that one makes the best choice of strategy or strategies possible, the following must be done first:

- Determine how existing social, cultural, economic, political and environmental as well as organizational factors can help or hinder the development objective.

- Identify existing media resources – traditional, interpersonal as well as modern print and electronic media – and how these relate to the people in terms of ownership, availability and access.
- Study combinations of communication channels that could, based on available data, be used for communication ‘feed’ both into and out from the benefiting target social system.

An unambiguous understanding of above conditions would help in determining which of the broad Interpersonal and Communication strategies discussed in chapter 7 below (or specific variations and components of each) would fit the target social system vis-à-vis the social problem to be tackled. As indicated below, there is no best strategy or combination of strategies outside of the target social system. What works for one target social system may not, in all probabilities, work for another target social system. And what works under a distinct socio-cultural condition in a target social system may not work under another socio-cultural condition. This is why the task of selecting strategy or strategies is a very difficult one for development communicators. The rule of thumb, however, is usually to use the realities of a target social system in determining which strategy or strategies would be most effective. For example, while a communication strategy that relies heavily on the print media would not be very successful in a highly non-literate target social system, one that relies on the electronic media may be successful, provided there is sufficient receiver-set ownership, and the utilization pattern is one that is built on effective listenership. To take another example, while a mass media strategy may succeed in a literate and individualistic society, it would certainly be a dismal failure in a non-literate, traditional and communalistic society.

Operational Detailing

This is where schedules of activities and responsibilities are specified in fine details and in clearly written briefs. It is here that painstaking details of activities are required with regards to sequential order of activities, hierarchical order of authority or supervision and assignment of responsibilities. Definite answers are required to such questions as: what is to be done, where, by whom and when; what resources are required, in what quantity, where, when and for what activity.

Operational detailing (also known as Operational Planning) also calls for broad guidelines as to how assignments are to be carried out with respect to timing of activities, span of control or supervision, speed of actions, components and utilization of resources, context of implementation, coordination and direction of project. In addition to written briefs, oral or face-to-face communication is particularly called for because it offers the opportunity for direct and on-the-spot clarifications, explanations and instructions – all of which are extremely necessary to ensure correct interpretation of guidelines and proper execution of assigned responsibilities.

It goes without saying that if any project must succeed to the level expected, responsibilities must not be seen as fixed entities. In other words, those assigned duties and responsibilities would retain their roles and positions only if they are performing according to plan. Those found wanting should be relieved of their roles or positions, and either reassigned or let go. In all of this, however, care should be taken to work within the socio-cultural boundaries of the target social system, to ensure that no taboos are broken, and that the development communicator is not seen as ignoring the communication and behavior rules of the community.

Not only people should be monitored, but also resources. If those assigned duties are short of resources to fully carry out their responsibility, then not only will they be frustrated, but also they may be disillusioned to the extent that they may lose faith in the development communicator and in development activities. And if the expectations of the target social system has been raised, but not fulfilled, the disappointment may lead to distaste for development endeavors, and for social change agents. In detailing therefore, it is important that emphasis be placed as much on getting the right people to carry out the project as on getting the necessary and sufficient resources.

Evaluation

This is a development communication task that many do not see as belonging to planning. The argument usually is that evaluation takes place only after a project has been completed. This, of course, is a very narrow view of the role of evaluation; it wrongly associates evaluation only with end-of-project assessment. The truth is that any project that must avoid unnecessary pitfalls, must see evaluation as a continuous activity. It is usually the first action to take and the last to be carried out. Its usefulness lies in the fact that it provides the data to –

- (a) establish what existing conditions are;
- (b) help understand the direction of ongoing project activities;
- (c) assess the performance of a just-concluded project; and
- (d) facilitate the effective planning of future projects.

First, evaluation is used to determine the prevailing communication circumstances of a target social system. This type of evaluation which is made possible through formative research helps to reveal existing socio-cultural, political and environmental and communication conditions which, in turn, helps to establish a basis for any meaningful planning. It provides data which serve as a guide to whether or not any planning is useful; what to plan for, and with what resources. This is the rationale behind UNESCO's recommendation discussed above.

Second, evaluation is used to guide ongoing development communication and social change activities. In this regard, data are gathered and used to examine ongoing projects to see whether or not they are proceeding according to plan - whether they are succeeding or not; and to point up possible areas of strengths and/or weaknesses in organization, implementation and/or operation. This helps to identify and 'nip in the bud' any errors or threatening problems before they become too difficult and expensive to solve.

The best known role of evaluation is assessing completed projects. Here, the need is to look at all activities in relation to the resources that were available and compare the outcome of the activities with the goal or goals of the project. Evaluation should be able to show whether the project was a success or a failure taking into account the conditions under which the project was carried out - timing, resources, socio-cultural environment and political climate, target social system's commitment and political will. The project will have succeeded only to the extent that circumstances beyond the control of the project directors and participants did not seriously disturb implementation, so that all that needed to be done were done and the expected outcome achieved. If there were impediments, then the performance of the project would be judged taking such intrusions into account.

Finally, evaluation provides the data necessary for future development plans and projects. The evaluation of a completed project yields facts and figures about the organization, implementation and success or failure of the project. Such evaluations do reveal both the

strengths and weaknesses of the planning procedures adopted, of the implementation strategy or strategies employed and of the operational guidelines followed, as well as the ease or difficulty with which necessary inputs were forthcoming, and the level and quality of community reaction and involvement. Facts such as these are invaluable for future development plans and projects. Accurate analysis of such data cannot be over-estimated. Hence Piotrow, et al (1997, p.30) have pointed out that "the success of any communication program depends on an accurate analysis of the problem to be solved; the people, policies, programs, and organizations needed to resolve it; and the communication resources that can be mobilized."

What has been said so far implies, directly and indirectly, the need for a collaborative and cooperative endeavor between the development communicator and the target social system. By target social system is meant, not just the leaders of the community and officials of the government, but the ordinary citizens who live with the deprivation and hardships a good part of which development communication is intended to alleviate. It is good to plan with community leaders who invariably present themselves as opinion leaders; it is also good to plan with government official who are to provide most of the resources needed for projects. But for purposes of winning community support and commitment, as well as inducing active participation, the ordinary citizens of the community must be included in both the planning and execution of development projects. Development communicators must, if efficient and effective change programs must be executed, take seriously to heart this Chinese slogan:

*Go to the People
Live among them
Learn from them
Love them
Serve them
Plan with them
Start with what they know, and
Build on what they have!!!.*

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