

# Development Communication in Action

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Building Understanding and  
Creating Participation

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Development, Social Change, and Development Communication: Background and Conceptual Discussion**

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At the end of the Second World War, the United States of America developed a plan to rebuild war-devastated Western Europe. The plan known as the "Marshall Plan" was a huge success. With heavy financial investment, technology and expertise, Europe was not just brought back to life, but was given a higher standard of living than it had before the war. This success would seem to have been the impetus for the push towards development in the Third World countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America in the 1960s. Many of these countries had just then gained their independence from colonial powers and were directing their energies towards establishing a solid social and economic base that would help improve the living conditions of their people. Two forces appear to have worked in favor of 'transplanting' the Marshall Plan strategy. First, the powers that had colonized the developing countries were those that directly benefited from the Plan. The argument was that the plan could work successfully anywhere. If the plan worked in Europe, then it should work for the former colonies. The second reason was the impatience of the developing countries to develop and "catch up" with the developed nations of the West. The Marshall Plan had worked like magic. In less than ten years, it turned destruction and devastation into construction and industrialization. What better example of development strategy could there be for the developing countries in a hurry to improve their own social and economic conditions! Therefore, both for the developed countries eager to help and for the developing countries desperately seeking help to achieve rapid development, the

Marshall Plan had a message: "Rapid development of any society is possible if adequate international financial and technological assistance were forthcoming."

Of course, the Marshall Plan was a development strategy geared towards economic growth -- economic reconstruction of war-devastated countries. It was completely geared towards economic growth for it was strongly believed that a buoyant economy is the key to all developments. The "obsession" with the strategy for the developing societies was, therefore, based on the strong assumption that economic growth was the surest and quickest route to development. This 'route' had three very important signposts, generally referred to as the three imperatives of the Economic Growth Paradigm:

- the infusion into the economy of large sums of money and modern technology,
- which makes possible the establishment and growth of industries which, in turn,
- yields large profits for investors and industries and economic incentives for workers.

The convincing 'tone' of these imperatives was too inviting to turn away from; their apparent benefits too tempting to ignore. It was not easy to argue against a strategy, which looked so straightforward, and less complex than most, and whose success in the West was still very fresh in people's minds. Nor was that all. Donor countries who had the financial resources wanted to use the strategy; recipient countries looking for the fastest economic vehicle to development were eager to have it applied to them

The success of the Marshall Plan was of course, not the only factor that contributed to the adoption of the Economic Growth Paradigm for developing societies. Two very well-known communication specialists -- Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rogers -- made very significant impacts with their writings. In 1962, Rogers published *The Diffusion of Innovation* - a book that presented and discussed in great detail how new and development-oriented ideas could be diffused through a social system. The diffusion model which was presented was one which treated the concept 'communication' as a *transfer* of new ideas from willing experts to an assumed ignorant target social system. In this model, as presented in 1962, *communication* was treated as a synonym for

Europe, was a colossal failure in the developing societies. While Europe was and still is heavily materialistic, the developing societies of the 1960s were very far from materialism. In addition, certain socio-cultural and political conditions present in the European environment of the Marshall Plan period, were non-existent in the developing societies. Because the Marshall Plan was for materialistic development, and because it succeeded in Europe with little or no hitches, the agents assigned to the developing societies to implement development projects were completely oblivious of the many important non-tangible factors (socio-cultural values) that made its success possible in Europe.

First, there was, in Europe, existing social structure that was oriented towards industrial organization and activities. No such structures existed in the developing societies. Second, as Radcliffe-Brown has pointed out, there were three very relevant cultural values that were basic to European social order -- Protestant work ethics, achievement motivation and economic pragmatism. The culture of the developing societies did not pay adequate attention to these values; they were not values associated with the strict communal social order under which the people lived then. But western development agents assumed the existence of these values in the developing societies. Thirdly, it seems obvious that Western implementing teams in the developing societies were very ignorant of a fundamental requirement of social change -- *knowledge of the socio-cultural and structural environments of target social systems*. They did not take the people into confidence; or attempt to learn from and about them. So even though good intention was evident, and money, technology and expertise were not lacking, the efforts failed mainly because the agents did not learn enough about the people to become aware of the absence, in the developing societies, of the nontangible factors that were a *given* in the West.

Beginning from the late nineteenth century (and with a strong push by the Founding Fathers of the United States of America) Protestant work ethics was highly promoted and sometimes subtly enforced in the West. The central idea of this work ethics is that labor should be in the center of human activity as the main goal of human existence. It was so important that a spiritual/religious gain was attached to it. It was held then that success in this world was a sure sign of success in the after-life, that is, a sign that one would go to *Heaven*. So there was a very strong cultural value attached to hard work. Efforts towards economic development is not just pooling resources and investments; there needed to be supportive cultural values and social organization. Europe was already immersed in protestant work ethics before the war. In addition,



she was made up of nations of individualistic and collectivistic orientations, in which materialism was a way of life. These values provided a solid and strongly enhancing cornerstones for the Marshall Plan. The Plan was therefore such a success in Europe because it was carried out within an existing supportive cultural and organizational structure.

No such strong work ethics and/or social organization existed in the developing societies at the time the West began pumping money, men and technology into them for development. It was not that people hated to work hard; it was that there was no strong social or cultural demand that people should aim at working hard enough to be better than others. Harmony rather than difference or change was the rule. There was social organization but it was not geared towards industrialization or national wealth creation. Hence there was little or no visible signs of achievement motivation. People looked at the world from communalistic point of view, not from the individualistic or the collectivistic. In communal social order, community services are carried out altruistically; people work for the community not because of what they can get back from the community, but because they feel culturally obliged to do so. Communal activities were directed at meeting life's immediate needs and the survival of the community (Moemeka, 1998); working for purely economic advancement was, strictly speaking, not part of the culture. Emphasis was not on how much one has achieved for oneself, but rather on how much of what one has achieved is of value to the community. In a culture which values harmony much more than differences or change, achievements were instinctively made to fit into existing conditions rather than change them. Anything beyond this goal was suspect. Is it then any wonder that strong and collectivistic work ethics geared towards economic and materialistic development was not a cardinal value, and that achievement of personal goals beyond what is considered acceptable by the community was not aggressively pursued? The absence of or low emphasis placed on these two values created a vacuum which made a pragmatic approach to economic decision-making unnecessary, if not, impossible.

But what appears to have most adversely affected the development efforts of the 1960s was the information-dumping strategy adopted by governments of recipient countries, and by donor agencies. There was a lot of information -- a lot of *talking to*, but very little communication -- very little of *talking with*. All the three factors that led to the adoption and success of the economic growth-only paradigm in Europe were non-existent in the developing countries, but donor agencies and

development agents were unaware of this important fact. Thus, their efforts were virtually shots-in-the-dark because they talked about growth in a socio-cultural environment the fundamental basis of which they had little or no knowledge. Little or no attention was paid to the human aspects of the societies 'to be developed', that is, to the socio-cultural contexts of the people and how they relate to their structural environment. There was no attempt to 'know the people' and to understand their world view. There were no real consultations. Meetings were held only to 'tell the people' about what was to be done, and the part which they were supposed to play. No opportunity was given them to discuss issues before decisions were made. Discussing the reasons for the failure of the 1960s attempts, Grunig (1971) pointed to the inability of top-down communication efforts under the dominant paradigm to break through the local social structure. Rogers (1976), in agreeing with Grunig's observation, described the materialistic communication strategy that obtained under the paradigm as one merely for "conveying informative and persuasive messages from a government to the public in a downward, hierarchical way."

One obvious lesson from the failure of the economic growth-only paradigm and its information-dumping strategy is that it is impossible for development efforts to succeed in any society if development agents fail to actively involve the target audience; if they only worked for the people, without working with them. Acting in such a detached manner causes a number of relational problems - lack of cooperation, hatred of the agents, self defense on the part of the target social system, and lack of interest in the efforts of the agents. Unfortunately, dominant paradigm development agents would appear to have been completely unaware of these negative consequences of their ethnocentric posture. They would appear to have been too self-justifying to worry about what the people thought of them. They seemed to have been ignorant of the fact that if the population of a target social system behaved indifferently to or indirectly worked against the development efforts aimed at improving their condition, that it would be hard for such efforts to succeed and to be sustained. True and relevant development that would be lasting begins with the individuals in the target social system. This is because, as Coombs and Ahmed (1974: 25) have pointed out, for any development to be relevantly meaningful to a people, and therefore, have any hope of success it must begin with -

The people themselves - in their attitude towards change, in their aspiration for improvement and, above all, in how

they perceive themselves and their own inherent power to better themselves individually and collectively.

To be able to know what a people's self-perception and aspirations are, and therefore be in a position to positively affect their attitudes and behaviors, one must enter into their socio-cultural context by communicating with them. Sufficient knowledge about a people is impossible to obtain by merely *talking to* them. The development agent must **talk with** the people, that is, have direct dialogue with them about their environment their aspirations and expectations and their strengths and weaknesses before sufficient information relevant to their needs and aspirations can become evident. Without such relevant information, obtained from direct dialogue with the people, very few development messages and strategies would be relevant and useful enough for the people to accept and participate in implementing.

As a result of the disappointing results of the development efforts of the 1960s and early 1970s, a determined effort was made at reexamining the concepts of and strategies for Development, Social Change, Diffusion of Innovation and Development Communication. Because meaning would seem to give effect to relevant action, some redefinition of these concepts to incorporate, in both depth and breadth, relevant dimensions that were missing under the economic growth-only paradigm appeared to form the basis of the reexamination efforts.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

Development is defined here as a positive change (for the better) from conditions (social, economic, political, cultural and human) that are no longer considered good enough for the goals and aspirations of a society to those that are most likely to meet those goals and aspirations (Moemeka, 1989). This definition makes the economic aspect of existence and of development only a part of the total developmental objectives of society. Of course, we are not the first to recognize that development problems go beyond the economic arena. Inayatullah (1975) had earlier played down considerably the economic growth-only orientation of the dominant paradigm. In his definition of 'development', he merely alluded to the economic aspect, while emphasizing the human. He defined development as -

Changes towards patterns of society that allows better realization of human values; that allows a society greater control over its environments, and over its own political



destiny; and that enables its individuals to gain increased control over themselves.

In his own definition, Rogers (1976) clearly shows that development occurs on levels other than economic. There is (a) *personal development*, when an individual does something positive to change his/her existing situation to something better, for example, taking a job instead of loafing around in the street, or becoming self-reliant instead of depending on others, or becoming honest and hardworking instead of spending time planning how to explain away lies and dishonesty; (b) *societal development*, when there is a more equitable distribution of the wealth of society, or when identified social ills are tackled successfully; (c) *human development*, when disputes that divide communities and groups are settled to the advantage of all, or when nations pay adequate attention to human problems and provide opportunities for their citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities with adequate recognition and reward; and (d) *physical (material) development*, when schools are built where there were none, roads are constructed to facilitate travels and transportation, industries are built to provide employment and higher incomes and higher standard of living, etc. This is why Rogers (1976) defines development as -

A widely participatory process of social change in a society intended to bring about both social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities for the majority of the people through gaining greater control over their environment.

Both Inayatullah and Rogers would seem to uphold the view that true and effective development must be internally originated and must stress human and environmental control. But it is not immediately clear which of two levels of coordination at which internal origination can occur is meant by these two specialists (a) origination at government offices by officials of the government and development agents/organizations, or (b) origination at the social system level by government officials, development agents/organizations and the intended beneficiaries of the project. Origination at the first level mentioned leads to *thinking and deciding for the people*. And it makes target social systems see development and participation in development activities as government responsibility because they are conceived, initiated and controlled by the government. What passes as discussion between government officials



- Upholding the virtues of self-reliance and independence; and
- Integration of traditional with modern systems (admixture of old and new ideas in proportions based on the needs and capacities each community).

## **SOCIAL CHANGE**

Rogers (1983:6) defines social change as "the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system." This definition implies (and correctly, too) that social change can produce both positive and negative results. The social conditions of a people could change from peace and tranquility to strife and war or from good neighborliness to hatred and rancor, from wealth to poverty, from manageable cost of living to exorbitant cost of living or from high standard of living to low standard. On the other hand, changes can also occur which reflect positive and better conditions -- from illiteracy to literacy, from widespread sickness to good health, and from poverty to sufficiency. The concern here, of course, is with positive changes that can occur in society. From this perspective, *social change is a special type of development basically directed at recharting the course of specific development outcomes*. It is generally a very important vehicle for off-setting or eliminating the dysfunctional effects of modernization - 'pollution' from industrialization; 'depopulation of rural communities' as a result of urbanization; 'dangerous driving and fatal automobile accidents' as a result of the availability of cheap alcoholic beverages and the provision of modern, well-constructed and multi-carriage-way highways; 'cultural and environmental degradation' as a result of the availability of leisure-time activities, excess liquidity for more industrial and commercial establishments, and the loose interpretation of the legal provision for individual freedom.

Social change occurs in both developing and developed societies. However, while 'development' is directed mainly at replacing identified retrogressive attitudes, behaviors and outmoded methods, structures and systems, 'social change' is aimed at restructuring, that is, removing the undesirable effects and consequences of otherwise good and desirable attitudes, behaviors, structures and systems. This is why social change is regarded as a more appropriate conceptual framework for developed societies where the concept of development, rightly or wrongly, is seen as inappropriate for describing changes in the social system. Ultimately though, both concepts - development and social change - are geared towards the same goal - the improvement of the social, economic,

political, cultural and environmental conditions under which human beings, whether in the developed or in the developing world, live.

## DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION

INNOVATION is a new idea - a new way of doing things - a new product or a new system. In this regard, all developments, in general, and all social change, in particular, are innovations. Whether one is replacing an old methods, product or system completely with a new one, or is working at removing the undesirable consequences of existing system, product or method, one is invariably introducing something new to the social system. What is introduced - the object of the effort - *is the innovation*.

DIFFUSION was originally defined as the process by which any new idea introduced into a social system is 'disseminated' through that social system. This is why diffusion was seen as a communicator-oriented process with emphasis on *information transmitted* rather than on **meaning sought and shared**. Mere dissemination of facts and figures to change something as important as a people socio-cultural condition indicates not only a know-better-thou attitude, but also casts aspersions on a target social system's abilities and capacities. It breeds mistrust of development agents. As the Xavier Institute (1980: p.11) has clearly advised -

Development efforts should be anchored on faith in the people's capacity to discern what is best to done as they see their liberation, and how to participate actively in the task of transforming society. The people are intelligent and have centuries of experience. Draw out their strength. Listen to them.

Active, as opposed to passive, listening helps build trust much more than talking; it also helps reduce socio-cultural differences between development agents and target social systems. Incessantly talking at or to a people without listening to them, more often than not, creates resistance to novel ideas. According to the time-honored wisdom of the Massaii "no one dares talk before learning the art of listening."

The failure of the diffusion process as originally conceived would seem to have opened the eyes of development agents and government officials to the simple, but up until then, unrecognized fact that development begins with listening, and is fostered and strengthened by the participation of the target social system. Hence, the new development

paradigm sees diffusion as much more than a mere disseminating vehicle. Under the new approach, diffusion is defined as the process through which any new idea introduced into a social system is 'communicated' throughout that social system. The difference is significant. While dissemination connotes "*talking to, supply of facts and figures to 'unknown' members of a social system, and priority concern with area coverage and with quantity (number)*", communication connotes *respect, exchange of ideas, discussion/dialogue, freedom, equality, understanding and quality.*" Furthermore, communication also implies that diffusion should be carried out in the context of the social system's socio-cultural realities, that is, taking the realities of the people's conditions into account. This 'relevance' requirement demands that the diffusion agent must not only be **in** the social system that is meant to benefit from the innovation being communicated, but he/she must also be **with** that social system through entering into its socio-cultural context. By this is meant that the agent must not only be seen in the community, but must also be 'felt' through interaction with the people. He/she must have, at least, a working knowledge of the people's mores, norms and values, and of how these affect their daily lives.

## DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

When diffusion of innovation is defined, not in the context of information dissemination, but of communication (exchange of ideas), it is elevated to the level of development communication, which is the use of communication techniques, technology, principles and practices in the development process. Simply, therefore, development communication is the application of the principles and practices of exchange of ideas towards the achievement of development objectives. Because it is communication with a social conscience, development communication is oriented towards human beings, that is, towards the human aspect of development. Even though it is primarily associated with rural development, it is nevertheless also concerned with urban problems. Hence it is as well suited for uplifting the lives of rural inhabitants as it is for improving the lives of the urban poor and of inner-city inhabitants.

Development communication is a course of study that gives proper perspective to communication, helping us to see its central place in human activities, and showing us how to effectively utilize it. While it regards the provision of facts and figures (Information) as an imperative in any development initiative, it places the highest emphasis on exchange of ideas and opinions (Communication) on available facts and figures in order to create understanding. It is a pervasive discipline with differing



definitions and approaches. However, the differences seen in these definitions and approaches are only in degree rather than in substance. All the definitions and approaches emphasize, to equal degree, the concepts of *participation*, *understanding* and *positive change*. The ultimate aim of development communication is to create an environment in which people are willing to participate in the discussions on, planning and execution of, development projects -- an environment which ensures understanding of issues related to the development initiative and of ways to achieve the expected outcome. It does not, all alone, create **change** or **development**. But few, if any, changes or development can occur and endure, unless development-boosting communication is built into the process as a necessary component.

Development communication plays two broad roles. The first is that of 'transformation'. Here, it seeks social change in the direction of higher quality of life and social justice and a redirection of the outcomes of modernization in order to eliminate any possible dysfunctions. The second role is that of 'socialization'. Through the efficient and effective performance of this role, development communication strives to maintain some of the established values of society that are consonant with development, while urging the discarding of those that are detrimental. This role aims at creating an environment in which citizens would see the benefits of changing unwholesome attitudes and behavior in order to create a social system in which the benefits of social and material change can be maximized and utilized in the interest of all citizens. Thus, the role of communication is *not*, as Rogers (1986:49) had indicated, *to help transfer technological innovations from development agencies to their clients, and to create an appetite for change through raising a climate for modernization among the members of the public*. Rather, it is to **discuss with, inform and motivate the people and create an environment in which target social systems can feel the need for, and demonstrate their commitment to, development activities and thus raise the level of their participation in development projects.**

Development is a multi-faceted endeavor. It involves the specialist skills and knowledge of the economist, the educator, the social worker, the political scientist, the sociologist, the development agent and the communicator. While each of the other specialists focuses on their own specialist area as it pertains to the development endeavor, the communication strategist or development communicator takes a more holistic approach. He/she is always concerned about how the different specialist perspectives and activities fit together, and how the mental and attitudinal changes that would ensure painless transition from one socio-

economic stage to another can be achieved. For example, the nutritionist, concerned about low vitamin content in the diet of rural citizens might recommend the making of composts that would produce manure for fertilizing vegetable gardens. But the hygienist, concerned about personal and environmental hygiene might recommend against anything (composts included?) that might breed germs in the easily contaminated environment of the rural communities. It is the duty of communication (the communicator) to reconcile these apparently opposing recommendations, by showing and explaining how both recommendations can be met without losing the benefits of either. This is why the development communicator is seen as one who maintained the road through which development objectives and goals are met. His/her role is that of –

“smoothing the path to arrive at development objectives - increased production, better health, nutrition and social practices, higher standard of living, cleaner environment, social justice, education - by creating an enhancing atmosphere for the exchange of ideas that would produce a happy balance between physical output (material advancement) and human inter-relationships” (Moemeka, 1987: 132).

Development communication is not directed at persuading those for whom development programs have been initiated. It is directed creating understanding; therefore it is interaction oriented. It attempts to create a conducive atmosphere for genuine dialogue that would ensure that the members of the benefiting social system understand the rationale for the development programs, accept the need for change and fully participate in the planning and execution of the development programs. This means that development communication is audience-oriented. The emphasis is not so much on getting development agents to reach their goals, but rather creating a conducive environment that would enable the target social system to understand, appreciate, be actively involved in the development efforts and be committed to the achievement of goals that are relevant within the system. Therefore, development communication calls for development agents who respond rather than dictate; those who are able to recognize and utilize what is relevant within the socio-cultural context in which they are

working; and those who place strong emphasis not on *persuasion* but on *exchange of ideas, dialogue and discussion* -  
**COMMUNICATION.**

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