



Declaration

9th United Nations Communication
for Development Roundtable

6 – 9 September 2004
Rome



The 9th United Nations Communication for Development Roundtable

- The 9th Communication for Development Roundtable, held in Rome from 6 – 9 September 2004, brought together United Nations agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations, development agencies, non-governmental organizations, scholars, and a number of practitioners in development communication throughout the world.
- The Roundtable meets every two years to examine, discuss and assess the current trends in communication for development and to set priorities for future direction in the field for members of the Roundtable and the larger development community.



Communication and sustainable development

The 9th Roundtable focused on communication and sustainable development.

The discussion focused on three thematic topics:

1. Communication for natural resource management
2. Communication in research, extension and education
3. Communication with isolated and marginalized groups



Communication for Development and sustainable development

The 9th Roundtable asserts:

1. Communication for development is about people, who are the drivers of their own development.
2. Communication for development contributes to sustainable change for the benefit of the poorest.
3. Communication for development is a two-way process – it is about people coming together to identify problems, create solutions and empower the poorest.
4. Participatory communication for development does not only apply to work with communities. It is an approach of equal importance to all stakeholders.
5. Communication for development is about the co-creation and sharing of knowledge.
6. Communication for development respects indigenous knowledge and culture; local context is key.
7. Communication for development is critical to the success of the Millennium Development Goals.



Communication for sustainable development: key challenges

In 2004 communication for development faces a number of key challenges:

1. A new and rapidly changing environment due to the challenge of globalization, privatization, ecological pressure, the decentralization of services, and the explosion of media and new social actors.
2. The rapid expansion of ICTs but the continuing gap between knowledge and information and the limited participation of the poorest in the development process.
3. Finding how communication fits into local/national development processes/policies.
4. How to demonstrate the added value and impact of communication for development and how this can be included into government, international and donor policies.
5. All the above have brought new opportunities but have also led to a marginalization of poverty-related issues. In order to counter this, collaboration and coordination among communication for development initiatives is a priority.



The Ninth Roundtable therefore calls for:

1. Scaling up - there are many successful examples of communication for development, but these are small-scale. The Roundtable recommends the scaling up of communication for development initiatives to improve practice and policy at every level.
2. Policies and resources - communication for development initiatives need to be properly enabled by concerted actions, and adequate policies and resources. These should consider longer timescales.
3. National governments should implement a legal and supportive framework favouring the right to free expression and the emergence of free and pluralistic information systems, including the recognition of the specific and crucial role of community media in providing access to communication for isolated and marginalized groups.



The Ninth Roundtable therefore calls for:

4. Research. We recommend research that addresses how to achieve and sustain the process and outcomes of communication for development. This requires a participatory approach, a shared framework between development agencies and local stakeholders, and community involvement in design, implementation and dissemination.
5. Evaluation and impact assessments should include participatory baseline formulations and communication needs assessments. They should also include self-evaluation by the communities themselves and the concept of 'social usefulness'. They should be used to feed back at the policy level.
6. Training initiatives should be focused on collaborative learning in communication for development, encouraging experiential, value-based, culturally sensitive training in participatory communication for development and fostering a community of practice across the regions. The Isang Bagsak learning process provides good examples from Asia and Africa.



The Ninth Roundtable therefore calls for:

7. Building alliances. There is a need for effective linkages which give voices to the poorest and have the ability to engage with policy and influence decision making on sustainable development. To this end, special attention should be given to fostering local, national and regional communication for development processes.
8. Information and consultation mechanisms should be set up to ensure coordinated action among UN agencies and other stakeholders at international level.



Towards a plan of action, the Roundtable proposes:

General recommendations:

1. Communications for development advocates and practitioners commit themselves to a deeper engagement with policy makers to ensure that communications is recognised as a central component in all development initiatives. This will involve a systematic coordinated effort to establish a clear, accessible body of evidence drawn from current best practice.
2. Donors and development agencies should set up well-resourced communication for development units to implement initiatives within their organization and to promote communication for development with other donors and agencies.
3. Governments, donors and development agencies should require the incorporation of a communication needs assessment in any development initiative (and eventually devote a specific percentage of the budget to this purpose eg 0.5%).
4. Initiatives such as the World Congress on Communication for Development are encouraged with the aim of building a concrete evidentiary base for decision makers in donor, development agencies and governments.



Towards a plan of action, the Roundtable proposes:

6. The United Nations should set up an inter-agency group to analyse communication experiences, suggest improvements and develop a common approach to communication for development.
7. Training initiatives should be fostered in developing countries, building on existing experiences. Programs, materials and systems for communication for development should be developed and shared. Furthermore, participatory development communication should be integrated into existing development curricula.

Specific recommendations to the Roundtable:

8. A working group/network to foster global partnerships on communication for development will be established.
9. The plan of action established by the participants of the 9th UN Roundtable should be facilitated and monitored through the mechanism of the working group.
10. FAO and UNESCO will accompany this follow up process ensuring active participation of other partners.