

**Communication for Isolated and Marginalized Groups**

**Blending the Old and the New**

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## **Executive Summary**

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

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

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

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

### **For Governments:**

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

### **For Donors and Development Agencies:**

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

### **For Communication Practitioners:**

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

## **Part One: Setting the Scene**

### **1.1 Challenges and opportunities**

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

### **1.2 New scenarios**

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

### **1.3 The communication age**

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) have created the so-called information and knowledge society. Communication technologies are becoming more appropriate for developing countries, and experiments with ICTs are demonstrating that the benefits of the information revolution can have positive repercussions for economic and social development. **But infrastructure, access and use are still limited for vulnerable groups in the rural areas of developing countries. They are on the wrong side of the digital divide, and risk further marginalization.** At the same time, processes of democratisation, decentralisation and pluralism have paved the way for community-based ownership of various communication media such as newspapers, radio, and video and in some cases even the Internet. Thus, horizontal people to people processes are emerging alongside dominant structures and vertical lines of communication. But global media markets are now dominated by a mere handful of multinationals, and **the globalisation of communication is threatening cultural diversity and the traditional values of minorities.**

### **1.4 Human development**

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

### **1.5 International policy**

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

With the emphasis on the poorest, the international community recognises that special measures are required to

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

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

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

### **1.6 Isolated and marginalized groups**

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

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

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

side of the digital divide, unable to participate in the Information Society and thus risk further marginalization, politically, socially and economically.

What is their profile?

- **They are poor, with practically no or little money to spend on access to communication technology.**
- **They live in isolated rural areas, or in slums in large cities, or in mountain terrains, or on distant small islands, often without electricity, and telephones.**
- **They are unemployed, or work as unskilled labour or self-employed subsistence farmers or unskilled agricultural labour.**
- **They are illiterate or semi-literate, with little access to education and training.**
- **They are part of minority ethno-linguistic groups.**
- **They often have social, economic, cultural and political customs that are distinct from those of the dominant societies.**
- **They are powerless, suffer from social discrimination, and lack recognition of their identities and ways of life.**
- **They are victims of violence, drugs, wars and new pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.**
- **In the majority of cases they speak minority languages.**

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

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

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

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

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

### **1.7 Information, Knowledge and Communication**

It has been demonstrated that economic and technological inputs will go under-utilised without knowledge, and it is for the sharing of knowledge that communication is indispensable. However, knowledge and communication

are essential but not sufficient elements to address poverty. **Marginal communities do not exist in isolation from wider contexts of social, political, economic forces and unequal power structures that are barriers to social change. These constraints need to be taken into account. Information and communication can never substitute for structural changes.** For example, the extent to which subsistence farmers can benefit from information will vary according to other factors such as ownership of land, proximity of markets, available means of transportation, and their productive resources to respond to the opportunities information sources might provide. (Curtain, 2004). In addition, collecting and disseminating information are not the same as knowledge sharing and communication. Communication is a two way process, and true knowledge is more than information. Knowledge is the meaning that people make of information. And, for societies the world over making sense of information depends on their ability to discuss and debate it. For social change to occur there must be opportunities for dialogue. Only when information helps people communicate, participate and allows them to make informed choices does that information become knowledge. (Panos 1998)

### **1.8 Need for new and better directions**

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

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

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

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

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

(Source: Report of Inter-Agency Roundtable 2001)

## **Part two: Some lessons from experience**

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

### **2.1 Communication as process**

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

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

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

### **2.2 Starting with the People**

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

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

### **2.3 Preserving indigenous knowledge and culture**

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

“The essence of involving rural people in the process of their own development lies in the sharing of knowledge... the outcome of useful sharing of knowledge is not so much the replacement of traditional

techniques by modern ones, as a merging of modern and traditional systems to produce a more appropriate hybrid, one that befits the economic and technical capacities of rural populations as well as their cultural values.”(FAO, 1987)

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

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

#### **Mayan values**

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

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

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

#### **The Knowledge Systems of Pastoralists**

“Human Survival has been based entirely on knowledge systems and, while most have changed beyond recognition or perished altogether, some remain and continue to thrive. Pastoralism is one of these, a way of life based on its own indigenous knowledge system, which is highly successful in the practices of preserving the environment, in livestock production, in animal health and in the art of predicting and handling natural disasters. Many advocates of modernisation do not consider these to be knowledge systems – instead they are described as “backward” or “primitive”, as falling outside the prism of a certain production and social system. And when pastoralists accept the offer to be “civilised”, neither governments nor business communities in the South have been able to harness modernisation for their benefit. So, neither are pastoralists allowed to live as they wish, nor do those who want them to change come up with a meaningful alternative...Knowledge systems other than the dominant discourse need to be recognised not just as knowledge systems per se, but as things that could be pivotal to the preservation of the environment and ensuring means of existence for the great many people who live on the edges of a rapidly modernising world.”

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

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

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

How strong are indigenous communication systems? How fragile? Is cultural diversity threatened by technology? Already we see young people in both urban and rural environments throughout the developing world embracing western models and abandoning pride in the cultural roots of their parents. In today’s global world cultures are no longer isolated. They interact and influence each other. Thus, we witness the emergence of new cultural and knowledge systems which blend rural with urban, local with global, traditional with modern customs and values and which generate “hybrid” cultures and practices. (Servaes 2003) “Glocalisation” is the term now used to define the integration of the global with the local.

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

## **Part Three: Media and Approaches**

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

### **3.1 Traditional communication systems**

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

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

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

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

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

### 3.2 Video

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

### 3.3 Radio

**Radio remains the most widely available and affordable mass medium for disadvantaged groups.** In rural areas, it is often the only mass medium available. It can reach large numbers of isolated populations over widespread and geographical areas. In some rural areas it is the only source of information about agricultural innovations, weather and market prices. It is oral and thus corresponds to the culture of poverty, making it more adaptable to many indigenous cultures. Because of low production and distribution costs it can be local. Community radio enables neglected communities, such as women, to be heard and to participate in democratic processes within societies. It reflects their interests, and plays an important role in reinforcing cultural expressions and identity as well as local languages. It can provide timely and relevant information on development issues, opportunities, experiences, skills and public interests. It thus has the ability to involve rural communities, indigenous people and underprivileged sectors of urban societies in an interactive social communication process. (UNESCO, 2000)

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

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

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

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

### **Selling a buffalo through hybrid radio**

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

Source: Kishor Pradhan, Panos 2004

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

### **3.4 ICTs: Potential and limitations**

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

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

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

### Social Dimensions of ICTs

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

Source: Bjorn-Soren Gigler, World Bank, 2004

### 3.5 ICTs and the poor

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

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

### 3.6 Barriers for the poor

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

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

### 3.7 Public access points

There is a movement in the development community pushing for **the widespread rollout of public access points as a means of extending access to the Internet and bringing it closer to disadvantaged communities** and the intermediary organisations that provide services to these communities.

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

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

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

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

### 3.8 The Mobile Phone

The development of **the mobile phone as a relatively cheap and powerful tool has enabled communities, even in remote rural areas to spontaneously and locally appropriate it for use.** Mobile and satellite telephony are bringing telecommunications within reach not only of the small entrepreneur in developing countries but also of the rural farmer. The Village Pay Phone sponsored by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is a classical example of a scheme promoting income-generating activities for the rural poor. It enables illiterate rural women to earn income by renting out mobile phones to members of the community for a fee. A Canadian evaluation of the program showed that the income derived by operators was on average 24 per cent of their household income – and in some cases it was as high as 40 per cent of household income.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.9 Local Appropriation and Impact

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

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

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

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

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

2. In the rush to “wire” developing countries, **little attention has been paid to an ICT conceptual framework or guidelines for ICT utilisation.** The design of ICT programs for the poor must take into account the lessons learned over the years by communication for development efforts.
3. **There needs to be a focus on the needs of communities and the benefits of the new technologies rather than the quantity of technologies available.** The emphasis must be on the use of new technologies as a means of improving the living conditions of the poor, rather than becoming an end in themselves. The real needs of communities must be identified with them and addressed. Successful examples of local appropriation have been those in which ICTs support the priorities and goals of communities, such as increased incomes or capacity building in business management and marketing, improved agricultural productivity or increased employment opportunities. Or where they strengthen existing traditional communication systems to promote networking and advocacy for social change.
4. **Local content and languages are critical** to enable the poor to have access to the benefits of the information revolution. The creation of local content requires building on existing and trusted traditional communication systems and methods for collecting and sharing information. These include established community media such as radio, which can be enhanced through connection with the Internet. In addition there are new technologies such as digital video that can also be appropriated for the production of local content. To be effective, external content has to be adapted and translated into vernacular languages, before local audiences can understand it. There is therefore a growing need also to develop the capacity for locally based professionals to download and transform global content for local consumption.

### 3.10 The role of donors and development agencies

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

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

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

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

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

specific focus by donors on poor, rural and marginal groups, the digital age will bypass these non-profitable sectors.

#### **A partnership for community multimedia centres**

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

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

Source: UNESCO, 2004.

### **3.11 Experimenting with new approaches**

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

## **Part Four: Conclusions**

### **4.1 Constraints for participatory communication**

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

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

- Critics say that **process and facilitative communication programs cannot be scaled up** and carried out at national level. **Is this correct or because of their nature should their validity remain at the local level?**
- **Participatory processes are costly and take time.** Participatory processes are difficult to implement within the rigid time frames of project and donor requirements for quick results. Indicators for impact are not quantitative, and thus it is difficult for communication practitioners to demonstrate the value of participatory processes to decision makers and donors. **Can practitioners identify new qualitative indicators and demonstrate the value of participatory processes?**
- **Participatory processes require new facilitative skills,** which often communication practitioners lack. **This raises the question of training.**
- Participatory communication, when dealing with political and social injustices, **can only take place if there is a political will on the part of governments and local authorities.** Authentic participation directly addresses power and its distribution in society, and usually authorities do not want to upset the status quo, even if they pay lip service to participation. **Does this mean that true participation is utopian? Or simply that one has to be careful in selecting when participatory communication can be usefully applied.**
- **Participation in activities for social change can raise conflicts** within the community, thus methods must be found to engage people meaningfully, while providing adequate protection and conflict management measures. This again relates to the question of the **training of a new communication professional.**

### **4.2 Notes for an Agenda**

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

#### **4.2.1 For Governments:**

Governments should create **regulatory frameworks and an enabling policy environment for communication with the poor.** Legislation and equitable policies are essential if communication is to become a real tool for poverty alleviation. They should guarantee the right to communicate for marginalized people. Women, refugees, displaced persons, migrant workers, indigenous people should be empowered to express themselves. And policy

makers must listen to them. National communication policies should take into account the needs of all sectors of society, including the poorest. All stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector should be involved in policy planning and implementation. Access to new information and communication technologies is insufficient without regulatory frameworks to ensure that they have meaningful use and can be socially appropriated by disadvantaged groups. **The identities, languages, cultural heritage and traditions of minorities should be recognised, preserved and respected.**

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

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

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

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

Bridging the digital divide requires much more than wiring developing countries. The support of donors should be more focused on ensuring **access for the poor, appropriate use of technologies, that the benefits for disadvantaged groups are maximised and that marginalization is minimized.** It should be recognized that access for the poor cannot take place without support from donors and subsidies from Governments on a long-term basis. There is need for **more co-ordination and partnerships among donors**, development agencies and NGOs in the planning and implementation of common effective strategies. The program and partnership created by UNESCO for the establishment of community multimedia centres is a good example.

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

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

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

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

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

**Training should take place at different levels:** At the graduate and postgraduate university level but also at the

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

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

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

The success or failure of communication with marginal and vulnerable groups will depend on the ability to provide qualified human resources. Unless we are able to provide a critical mass of well-prepared specialists at different levels, the discipline will not be recognised as an essential component in programs for the alleviation of poverty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Advocacy with decision makers needs to follow all the rules for effective communication, starting with audience analysis.** Two surveys have been carried out with decision makers for this purpose. At the request of

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

The implications of these surveys for communication practitioners is that the only way to convince decision makers to devote additional resources to communication is by providing them with concrete examples of the impact and cost-benefits of communication. Simply saying that we need more communication will not be convincing. **We need to demonstrate through hard facts and results of evaluations the value of communication in achieving poverty alleviation goals.** Anecdotal case studies are no longer sufficient. We must use the tools and approaches, which are suitable for decision makers, such as good videos and concise and punchy presentations. And, we must learn to speak their language. Is this not what we do when we work with rural people?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On line communication has become the principal source for networking and sharing information. The Communication Initiative is a global platform and provider of news, case studies, strategies, results of evaluations, opinions, events, training and job opportunities. It is an excellent example of a partnership among a number of institutions involved in communication for development. Other networks that concentrate more on discussing ICTs include IICD, Digital Opportunities, Bridges, the Open Knowledge Network, and GKD. However, more initiatives with a regional and country focus, such as Isang Bangsak (IDRC) would also be useful, particularly for local personnel working with disadvantaged communities. A recent workshop on radio

and ICTs held in Quito, Ecuador, and organised by FAO, agreed to establish a network and a platform for exchange of information, experiences and joint ventures to promote participatory communication initiatives with vulnerable groups in the region. (La Ond@Rural.)

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

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

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

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