

Communication for Isolated and Marginal Groups



Blending the Old
and the New

Setting the Scene

- ◆ International development goals place priority on addressing needs of the poorest.
- ◆ Information, knowledge and communication are essential for empowering isolated and marginal communities.
- ◆ But poverty cannot be divorced from uneven power structures, and communication cannot substitute for structural change.

Setting the Scene

- ◆ Working with the poor has always been a priority for communication for development.
- ◆ New approaches and directions are required to respond to a changing environment, new social actors and the opportunities of the information age.
- ◆ A wealth of experience and a variety of participatory approaches are still valid. The paper suggests the need to blend the old with the new.



Key Marginal Communities

Who are they?

- ◆ Traditional: small subsistence farmers, women, youth, indigenous people, nomads, etc.
- ◆ New social actors: migrant workers, diasporas, victims of aids, victims of conflict situations.
- ◆ The information poor and the computer illiterates.
- ◆ Social movements representing minority and disadvantaged groups.

Their Profile

- ◆ Poor.
- ◆ Live in isolated rural areas, or slums, without electricity and phones.
- ◆ Unemployed, unskilled labour or subsistence farmers.
- ◆ Illiterate, little access to education.
- ◆ Belong to minority ethnic-linguistic groups.
- ◆ Suffer from social discrimination.
- ◆ Victims of violence, drugs, wars and HIV/Aids.

Their Communication Systems

- ◆ Oral cultures
- ◆ Traditional and popular media
- ◆ Alternative and small media
- ◆ Community radio
- ◆ Informal meetings
- ◆ Social movements: ICTs

Effects of Global Information Society

- ◆ Infrastructure, access and use limited in rural areas.
- ◆ Wrong side of the digital divide and risk further marginalization.
- ◆ Globalisation threatening cultural diversity and traditional values of minorities.

Lessons From Experience

- ◆ Communication as process: the Fogo island experience.
- ◆ Starting with the people: listening.
- ◆ Respect for the knowledge, values and culture of indigenous people.

Media and Approaches



- ◆ Multi channel approach, mixing traditional with modern.
- ◆ Ownership by communities.
- ◆ Traditional communication systems.
- ◆ Video.
- ◆ Community radio: hybrid radio.

Media and Approaches: ICTs for the Poor

- ◆ Potential and limitations.
- ◆ Barriers: access and infrastructure;
Illiteracy; Language; Content;
Cannot afford cost.
- ◆ Public access points:
telecentres and community
multimedia centres.
- ◆ The mobile phone.

Media and Approaches: ICTs for the Poor

- ◆ Need for more evaluation to assess impact.
- ◆ Focus on needs of communities, benefits and social appropriation.
- ◆ Need for conceptual framework and guidelines for use.

ICTs for the Poor: Role of Donors/Agencies

- ◆ More coordination and common strategies. Partnerships.
- ◆ Shift focus to ensuring social appropriation, minimize marginalization and maximize benefits.
- ◆ Provide longer term support .

In Conclusion

- ◆ The ingredients for successful communication with the poorest are known.
- ◆ Why after so many years of experience are there still few examples of participatory processes in poverty alleviation programs?

Constraints for participatory communication

- ◆ Participatory processes cannot be scaled up: should their validity remain at the local level?
- ◆ Participatory processes are costly and take time. Need for new qualitative indicators to demonstrate value.
- ◆ Require new facilitative skills. Need for training.

Constraints for participatory communication

- ◆ Require political space since participation addresses power and its distribution in society. How can this be overcome?
- ◆ Can provoke social conflicts. Need for training in conflict management skills.

Notes for an Agenda

- ◆ For governments:

Establish regulatory frameworks and enabling environments for the poor.

Respect identities, languages and culture of minorities.

Provide incentives and subsidies for access to ICTs in rural areas.

Notes for an Agenda

- ◆ For Donors and Development Agencies:

Establish units with professional communication staff.

Provide adequate time and resources for communication in poverty alleviation programmes.

Provide resources for research, monitoring and evaluation.

Establish partnerships to promote access for the poor, meaningful use and social appropriation.

Notes for an Agenda

- ◆ For communication practitioners:

Assess current strategies for working with the poor and how they should be modified or expanded.

Training of a new communicator.

Identify new indicators for participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Advocacy with decision makers.

Address issue of sustainability.

Sharing of information and experiences.

The Challenge

- ◆ To create bridges between different approaches,
- ◆ Identify common guidelines and principles,
- ◆ Identify challenges and means to overcome them.
- ◆ Identify what has been learned and what still needs to be learned.
- ◆ This is a challenge which none of us can ignore