

WORLD CONGRESS ON COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (WCCD)

COMMUNICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

FAO COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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Introduction

This document contributes to the preparation of the theme on Communication and Sustainable Development that has been identified as one of the key issues to be discussed at the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) in October 2006. It provides an overview of the rationale used to address the numerous themes related to the use of communication for sustainable development and identifies sub-themes on which to focus specific discussion sessions, in line with the main criteria adopted for the WCCD:

- Discuss the theoretical foundations and methodological approaches applied in practice.
- Provide data and evidence of the impact of communication in development projects and programs.
- Demonstrate the value-added of Communication for Development.
- Reflect on how to incorporate communication into development policy and practice.

The paper is not an exhaustive survey of the topics presented but focuses on the applications of Communication for Development approaches and strategies to issues central to Sustainable Development. The issues related to the “applications” of Communication for Development have been grouped under three sub-themes conceived as broad clusters of topics related to Sustainable Development. Furthermore, an ad-hoc session will be devoted to present an overview of regional perspectives, priorities and proposals for mainstreaming communication into policies related to Sustainable Development, based on the result of a series of regional studies, consultations and workshops presently being implemented in the field leading up to the WCCD.

The present document provides a preliminary framework to guide institutions and individuals interested in the topics related to Communication in Sustainable Development.

COMMUNICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IS "A SOCIAL PROCESS, DESIGNED TO SEEK A COMMON UNDERSTANDING AMONG ALL THE PARTICIPANTS OF A DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE, CREATING A BASIS FOR CONCERTED ACTION"¹.

I. THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Communication and Sustainable Development

- Sustainable Development

Communication for Development theory and practice have been changing over the time in line with the evolution of development approaches and trends and the need for effective applications of communication methods and tools to new issues and priorities.

In the last twenty years, *Sustainable Development* has emerged as one of the most prominent development paradigms. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) concluded with a report containing the well known definition "*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*"². Three dimensions are generally recognized as the "pillars" of sustainable development (see e.g. Harris 2000³):

Economic dimension: a sustainable system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debt, and to avoid extreme sectoral imbalances which damage agricultural or industrial production.

Environmental dimension: the system must maintain its resource base, avoiding over exploitation of natural renewable resources or sink resources, on depleting non renewable resources; this includes the maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classified as economic resources (e.g. the beauty of some landscapes).

Social dimension: the system must achieve distributional equity, adequate provision of social services, including health and education, gender equity, respect for minorities, political accountability and participation (see e.g. Anand and Sen, 1996⁴).

Two years later, FAO elaborated the concept of Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (SARD), that implies "the management and conservation of the natural resource base, and the orientation of technological and institutional challenges in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs, for present and future generations. Such sustainable development (in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors) conserves land, water, plant and animal genetic resources, is environmentally non degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable" (FAO, 1989).

¹ FAO 1984. *Expert Consultation on Communication for Development*. Rome

² Elliot J. A. 1994. *An Introduction to Sustainable Development: The Developing World* Routledge 1994

³ Harris, J. M. 2000. *Basic Principles of Sustainable Development*, Tufts University, 2000

⁴ Anand S. & Sen A. K. 1996. *Sustainable Human Development: Concepts and Priorities*, UNDP Discussion Paper Series

It is after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, that Sustainable Development was universally accepted as a steering paradigm integrating economic growth, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually supportive elements of long-term development. Furthermore, in September 2000, The United Nations have declared Environmental Sustainability as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be reached by the year 2015 and established to integrate the principles of Sustainable Development into country policies and programmes and to reverse the loss of environmental resources as one of the three targets to be achieved under this goal.

Different perspectives have influenced over the years the holistic and integrated vision of Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, one of the central ideas is that there is no universal development model which leads to sustainability at all levels of society and the world. Development is an integral, multidimensional, and dialectic process that can differ from society to society, community to community, context to context⁵. In other words, each society and community must attempt to delineate its own strategy to sustainable development starting with the resources and “capitals” available (not only physical, financial and environmental but also human, social, institutional etc.), and considering needs and views of the people concerned. Sustainable Development implies a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to policy making and implementation, mobilizing public and private resources for development and making use of the knowledge, skills and energy of all social groups concerned with the future of the planet and its people. Within this framework, communication plays a strategic and fundamental role contributing to the interplay of the different development factors, improving the sharing of knowledge and information as well as the active participation of all concerned.

- **Communication for Sustainable Development**

In line with the above vision, at the end of the eighties the **participatory approach** became a key feature in the applications of Communication for Development (**ComDev**) to Sustainable Development. ComDev is conceived as the planned and participatory use of communication methods and tools that facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information, participation and change of attitude and practices aiming at achieving development goals agreed among all stakeholders. ComDev is about dialogue, participation and the sharing of knowledge and information. It takes into account the needs and capacities of all concerned through the integrated and participatory use of communication processes, media and channels. It responds to three main functions:

- Facilitating participation: giving a voice to different stakeholders to engage in the decision-making process.
- Making information understandable and meaningful. It includes explaining and conveying information for the purpose of training, exchange of experience, and sharing of know-how and technology.
- Fostering policy acceptance: enacting and promoting policies, especially when these bring new opportunities for rural people to access services and resources.

⁵ *Servaes J. & Patchanee M. 2004. Communication and Sustainable Development* Background paper, to the 9th UN Roundtable on Communication for Development. FAO, in press

Within this framework, communication is considered as a social process that is not confined to the media or to messages, but to their interaction in a network of social relationships. ComDev approaches and methods are the most appropriate to be used while dealing with the complex issues of Sustainable Development in order to:

- improving development opportunities ensuring equitable access to knowledge and information to all sectors of the society and especially to vulnerable and marginalized groups;
- fostering effective management and coordination of development initiatives through bottom-up planning;
- promote equity issues through networking and social platforms influencing policy-making;
- encourage changes in behavior and life-styles promoting sustainable consumption patterns through sensitization and education of large audiences;
- promote the sustainable use of natural resources considering multiple interests and perspectives, and supporting collaborative management through consultation and negotiation;
- increase awareness and community mobilization related to social and environmental issues;
- ensure economic and employment opportunities through timely and adequate information;
- solving multiple conflicts ensuring dialogue among different component in a society.

2. Trends and approaches in Communication for Sustainable Development

As indicated in the above examples, communication is essential to achieve As indicated in the above examples, communication is essential to achieve participation and empowerment, two key elements of sustainable development initiatives. Within this framework, communication can be mainly used to: exchange information and build consensus around specific issues; support the achievement of project's objectives and assist in identifying and defining project objective⁶. It can facilitate the active and conscious participation of all stakeholders at any moment of the project cycle (e.g. Planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation), promoting the sustainability of the development efforts.

Communication for Sustainable Development has been facing new issues and challenges in the last decade, as a consequence of globalization media liberalization, rapid economic and social changes, and the emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Liberalization has led not only to greater media freedoms, but also to the emergence of an increasingly consumer led and urban centered communication infrastructure, which is less and less interested in the concerns of the poor. While there has been a general global trend towards much greater media freedom, sometimes this trend has been confined largely to urban metropolitan middle classes rather than the population as a whole. Finally, women and other vulnerable groups and in general the rural population continue to suffer marginalization in and from communication networks, and evidence of the scale of discrimination within the media itself is growing. The issue of ensuring access to information and the right to communication as a pre-condition to achieve sustainable development has been addressed by several meetings and international conferences (World Summit on the Information Society, 2005 World Summit, World Social Forum etc.).

Different communication approaches are presently being used within UN agencies,

⁶ Mefalopulos, P. 2005. *Media & Glocal Change. Rethinking Communication for Development*. Nordicom and CLACSO, 2005, 493 p.

governmental and non-governmental organizations to meet the challenges of sustainable development and the MDGs. These varying from:

- Behavior Change Communication
- Communication for Development (or Development Communication)
- Communication for Social Change
- Edutainment (EE)
- Health communication
- ICTs for development
- Information, Education and Communication (IEC)
- Network development and documentation
- Social marketing
- Social mobilization
- Strategic Communication
- Participatory Communication⁷

The approaches differ according to the development issues and field of application. What they all have in common is a set of guiding principles and steps to follow. This trend to ensure flexibility and to allow the blending of different approaches to better respond to the challenges of sustainable development is increasingly being adopted by the community of practitioners⁸ working in the field of Communication for Sustainable Development. In general, the emphasis now is on the process of communication and on the significance of this process at the local level. Furthermore, according to the approach of different agencies such as FAO, Communication for Sustainable Development, clearly coincides with the enhancement of local capacities in this field and the appropriation of communication processes and media by local stakeholders, and especially by the vulnerable and marginalized groups. These elements of capacity building in communication, including the so called “bridging” of the rural digital divide are now conceived as essential conditions for sustainable development and the fulfillment of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The 9th UN Roundtable on Communication for Sustainable Development held in Rome in 2004⁹ provided an overall framework for advancing communication in sustainable development policies. It reiterates the need to enhance local capacities and to design new communication strategies to meet the new development challenges. In its final declaration the Roundtable identified the following key challenges:

- A new and rapidly changing environment due to the challenge of globalization, privatization, ecological pressure, the decentralization of services, the explosion of media and the emergence of new social actors.
- The rapid expansion of ICT but the continuing gap between knowledge and information and the limited participation of the poorest in the development process.
- Finding how communication fits into local/national development processes and policies.
- How to demonstrate the added value and impact of ComDev and how this can be included in government, international and donor policies.

⁷ see also **Servaes J. & Patchanee M.** *ibidem*

⁸ **FAO. 2004.** *Communication and Natural Resource Management. An E-forum on perspectives, principles and future directions*, FAO, Rome

⁹ **FAO. 2005.** *9th United Nations Communication for Development Roundtable*, FAO, Rome

- 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 ComDev initiatives is a priority.

The main recommendations of the Roundtable insist on the policy dimension and the evidences of ComDev¹⁰, and in particular:

- Scaling up – there is the need to scaling up successful of ComDev initiatives to improve practice and policy at every level.
- Policies and resources – ComDev initiatives need to be properly enabled by concerted actions, and adequate policies and resources, both human and material. These should consider longer timescales.
- National governments should implement a legal and supportive framework favoring the right to free expression and 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 the isolated and marginalized.
- The Roundtable recommends research that addresses how to achieve and sustain the process and outcomes of ComDev. This requires a participatory approach, a shared framework between development agencies and local stakeholders and community involvement in design, implementation and dissemination.
- Evaluation and impact assessments should include participatory baseline and communication needs assessments. They should also include self-evaluation by the communities themselves and be socially useful. They should be used to feed back at policy level.
- Training initiatives should be focused on collaborative learning in ComDev, encouraging experiential, value-based, culturally sensitive training in Participatory ComDev and fostering a community of practice across the regions.
- Information and consultation mechanisms should be set up to ensure coordinated action among UN agencies and other stakeholders at international level.

Furthermore, five cross-cutting issues emerged as priority areas for collaboration among UN agencies, NGOs and Academy:

- **Advocacy** –to foster the scaling up of ComDev initiatives and ensure that adequate attention and resources are devoted at the policy as well as at the field level. ComDev has to be recognized as a central component in all development initiatives.
- **Learning and Capacity Building** -Training initiatives should focus on collaborative learning, encouraging experiential, value-based, and culturally sensitive training in ComDev across the regions.
- **Building Alliances** -Effective linkages and joint communication initiatives to give voices to the poorest and to influence decision-making on sustainable development issues. Special attention should be given to fostering national and regional ComDev strategies and initiatives.
- **Research, Monitoring and Evaluation** - Applied research and ComDev monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodologies have to be fostered. An evidentiary base about the impacts and how to achieve and sustain ComDev policies and projects should be developed.

¹⁰ Communication for Development Roundtable Report. FAO, 2005

- **Information Sharing** - Information sharing is a strategic for advocacy, building alliances, and supporting capacity building. An information sharing mechanism should facilitate partnerships and contribute to the definition of a common agenda in ComDev and implementing joint initiatives at the global, regional and national level.

Finally, the 9th UN Roundtable endorsed the idea of implementing the WCCD that will provide the natural framework to follow-up to the issues and recommendations presented above. In particular, the sub-theme of Communication for Sustainable Development will ensure continuity to the efforts initiated by the 9th UN Roundtable in this field.

II. RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THEME

1. Communication in Food Security, Rural Development & Livelihood Strategies

Food security and rural development policies have been revised in recent years placing more emphasis on holistic approaches to rural livelihoods focusing on the sustainable use of natural resources, multi-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder participation in accessing rural assets. Inherent in these approaches is the recognition of the importance of an individual's balanced portfolio of assets in which knowledge, access to information and a means to communicate play a strategic role. Communication for Development has been acknowledged an essential and appropriate approach for addressing sustainable rural development. Furthermore, the spread of digital communication technology has made information and communication services an increasingly cost-effective option for providing basic information to dispersed rural producers, in particular to those settled in remote and poorly accessible areas. Nevertheless, the focus must remain on the needs of the rural audiences, rather than on the communication technologies and the media utilized, with the aim to enhance the capacity of local stakeholders to manage communication processes, to develop local contents and to appropriate the use of media and tools. Communication for development strategies and initiatives today are context specific and reflect values, perceptions and characteristics of the people and institutions involved. Within this framework, rural communication for development systems have been implemented in different countries integrating communication processes with the use of multimedia, often integrating traditional and local media, rural radio and the ICTs.

Despite increasing recognition of the central role that communication plays in promoting agricultural and rural development as well as supporting diversified rural livelihood strategies, national and local rural development plans hardly include communication components and there are limited examples of communication for development services to improve living standards in rural areas, providing access to natural resources and information on technologies and economic development options (including livelihood diversification), improving access and efficiency of rural development services (e.g. research and extension, communication), and fostering peoples' participation and inter-institutional coordination in the rural areas. Within this framework, special attention should be given in assisting governments and rural institutions in developing policies and programmes to foster Communication for Development Services in support of food security, rural development and rural livelihood.

- Session on Regional Perspectives and Priorities

The key for success in Communication for Development initiatives is to start with the participatory analyses of the needs of local institutions and stakeholders, taking into account local culture and values, and promoting a concerted action for development. ComDev can achieve relevant impacts and sustainability only if adequately inserted in national development policies and building on already existing experiences and capacities.

Over the years several communication centers and systems have been established to deliver services and provide technical assistance both at national as well as regional level. However, the economic sustainability has often been the weak point of their activities.

Nowadays, an increasing number of development initiatives emphasizes the use of communication as a strategic tool and new opportunities are emerging for mainstreaming ComDev into national policies for sustainable development, especially in agricultural, natural resource management, .Nevertheless, the promotion of adequate communication for development policies, including capacity building efforts should start with a reflection about trends, opportunities and priorities at the field level considering best practices, needs and opportunities for collaboration both at the regional and national levels. This analysis would also allow to build common understanding about the differences in applying communication in different political and cultural contexts, and to agree on strategies considering opportunities and resources already in place in each region.

Within this framework, a series of regional studies, consultations and workshops are being implemented in connection with the WCCD, to obtain views and proposals of local practitioners and institutions for mainstreaming communication into policies related to Sustainable Development. The specific objectives of the regional studies and consultations are:

- to identify key experiences, trends, needs and opportunities for policy advocacy, methodologies and capacity building, in order to include communication into agricultural, rural development, NRM, and livelihood initiatives at the national and regional levels;
- to develop regional perspectives and a recommended strategies for collaborative action to advance communication for development according to different cultural, economic, social and environmental contexts;
- to identify partnerships, means for collaboration and proposals and technical events in the field of communication for development.

Within this framework, a series of regional studies and consultation are being implemented in:

- South East Asia
- Near East
- Sahel
- Southern and East Africa
- Latin America: a) Onda Rural and b) Communication for Development in Central America
- Indigenous People's Communication for Sustainable Development

Each activity is being lead by local institutions and will serve as the basis for generating the lessons learned in terms of what works (i.e., best practices, impact and value added) and what

does not work (limiting factors, corrective measures, etc.). These in turn will provide the guide in the formulation of corresponding recommendations pertaining to advocacy, policy and institutional reforms, capacity building, and feasibility for implementing Communication for Development programs. Based on these results, proposals for recommended strategies for introducing communication in national development policies and programs will be drawn. The results of the above will be later presented at the WCCD in a specific session with the objective of sharing experiences and fostering cooperation for mainstreaming ComDev in each region.

It is therefore suggested that this thematic cluster focuses on capturing the main issues related to the applications of communication for development to the following **sub-topics**:

- Food Security & Agriculture
- Rural Development Services
- Rural Livelihood Strategies
- Sustainable Tourism
- Regional Perspectives and Priorities

2. Communication for Natural Resource Management and the Environment

One of the key challenges faced by rural development programmes is to address poverty alleviation and economic growth while conserving environmental sustainability in an integrated manner. Fighting land degradation and desertification, halting deforestation, promoting proper management of water resources and protecting biodiversity require the active participation of rural communities through communication processes. For many years however, communication initiatives in support of environmental and natural resources management have mainly focused on the dissemination and adoption of technical packages. These efforts have only yielded limited impacts. Communication for Development offers an alternative. Its participatory approaches can facilitate the dialogue and exchange of knowledge and information on NRM, increase the community knowledge-base (both indigenous and modern), promote agricultural practices which are compatible with the environment, and develop awareness in policy makers, authorities and service providers. Furthermore, participatory communication approaches can bring together different stakeholders and groups into conversation with each other, and to enable the poorest and most marginalized to have a powerful/influential voice in the decision and activities concerning to the access and sustainable use of natural resources. Communication for sustainable natural resource management involves establishing linkages among all stakeholders; developing common understanding, language and channels for participatory communication; and responding to information and training needs (Ramirez 1997).

Today environmental communication is used for addressing, global environmental issues that concern public opinion at large. Within this framework, communication, education, participation and public awareness approaches are used in an integrated manner to reach out effectively to the key groups who are needed to manage changes in the environment and society.

The emphasis of the present sub-theme will be placed in the comparison between communication approaches and experiences used to support collaborative natural resource management, to those developed for promoting awareness and participation about global

environmental and conservation issues as well as the approaches related to risk-communication (e.g. biosafety, risk management in disaster prevention and mitigation, etc.)

The proposed **sub-topics** for this thematic cluster are:

- Biodiversity & Conservation
- Climate Change
- Renewable Energies & Sustainable energy consumption
- Water and Sanitation
- Collaborative Natural Resources Management
- Communication for Risk-Management
- Bio Safety

3. Communication for Poverty Reduction and Equity Issues

"Empowerment is about people - both women and men - taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, increasing self confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. It is both a process and an outcome"¹¹

Communication can also play a decisive role in promoting the empowerment of women and girls. More specifically, communication processes can give rural women a voice to advocate changes in policies, attitudes and social behavior or customs that negatively affect them. Communication for development can support women empowerment, enabling them to take control of their lives and participate as equals with men in promoting food security and rural development. Without communication the voices of rural women for change will not be heard. Vulnerable groups in the rural areas of developing countries are on the wrong side of the digital divide, and risk further marginalization.

People's participation in directing the course of their own development are central tenets of both the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and National Poverty Reductions Strategy Plans (PRSPs). The issue of equal access to knowledge and information is becoming one of the key aspects of sustainable development. Several development agencies seek to narrow the gap between the information rich and information poor, and to provide a framework for international co-operation in developing common strategies, methods and tools for building a just and free information environment and to broaden the access to information and to communication technologies at the community level.

In the rush to "wire" developing countries, little attention has been paid to the design of ICT programs for the poor ignoring many lessons learned over the years by Communication for Development approaches which emphasize communication processes and outcomes over the application of media and technologies. 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. Local content and languages are critical to enable the poor to have access to the benefits of the

¹¹ *Women in Development and Gender Equity Policy Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 1995*

information revolution. The creation of local content requires building on existing and trusted traditional communication systems and methods for collecting and sharing information¹².

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 globalization of communication is threatening cultural diversity and the traditional values of minorities. Modern mass media and alternate or parallel networks of folk media or interpersonal communication channels are not mutually exclusive by definition. Poverty cannot be divorced from uneven power structures, and communication cannot substitute for structural change¹³.

Communication therefore, can contribute to the effective reduction of poverty as well as offering better opportunities for the active involvement of marginalized groups and isolated population into policy-development and decision-making. Within this framework, FAO and other agencies are working on the appropriation of communication for development processes and technologies by marginalized and vulnerable groups, including indigenous people¹⁴ to ensure that they claim their right to a voice in decision making which affects their lives.

The proposed **sub-topics** for this thematic cluster are:

- Communication for poverty reduction, MDGs
- Voices for Change – Gender Equality for Sustainable Development
- Local Appropriation of Communication processes and ICTs
- Equity in Access to external information and production of local content

12 FAO 2003. *Re-discovering the Magic Box: Case studies in local appropriation of ICTs*

13 Balit., S. 2004. 'Communication for Isolated and Marginalized Groups Blending the Old and the New' in *Communication for Development Roundtable Report* (2004)

14 see Yasarekomo. *Una experiencia de Comunicación Indígena en Bolivia*, FAO, 2004

ANNEX I

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