



Mapping the new field of Communication for Development and Social Change

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INTRODUCTION

All those involved in the analysis and application of Communication for Development and Social Change - or what can broadly be termed “development communication” - would probably agree that in essence communication for social change is the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned. It is thus a social process. Communication media are important tools in achieving this process but their use is not an aim in itself—interpersonal communication too must play a fundamental role.

The basic consensus on development communication has been interpreted and applied in different ways throughout the past century. Both at theory and research levels, as well as at the levels of policy and planning-making and implementation, divergent perspectives are on offer (for comprehensive overviews, see Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998; Lie, 2003; Servaes, 2001, 2003).

In this paper we attempt

- (a) to summarize the past of Communication for Development and Social Change;
- (b) to identify the roadmap for the future of Communication for Development and Social Change
- (c) by looking at the key purposes, functions and competencies needed to steer communication for social change.

This attempt builds on earlier exercises hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Pan American Health Organization, and the Change Project of the US Agency for International Development in 2002.

SUMMARIZING THE PAST

There are at least three ways of summarizing the past at three different levels: (1) by looking at the research priorities in different time periods, and by identifying the different theoretical (2) development and (3) communication paradigms (adopted from Servaes & Malikhao, 2004):

(1) Research priorities:

1. Development communication in the *1958-1986 period* was generally greeted with enthusiasm and optimism:
“Communication has been a key element in the West’s project of developing the Third World. In the one-and-a-half decades after Lerner’s influential 1958 study of communication and development in the Middle East, communication researchers assumed that the

introduction of media and certain types of educational, political, and economic information into a social system could transform individuals and societies from traditional to modern. Conceived as having fairly direct and powerful effects on Third World audiences, the media were seen as magic multipliers, able to accelerate and magnify the benefits of development.” (Fair, 1989)

Three directions for future research were suggested: (a) to examine the relevance of message content, (b) to conduct more comparative research, and (c) to conduct more policy research.

2. In the 1987-1996 period, Lerner’s modernization model completely disappears. Instead, the most frequently used theoretical framework is participatory development, an optimist post-modern orientation, which is almost the polar opposite of Lerner who viewed mass communication as playing a top-down role in social change. Also vanishing from research in this latter period is the two-step flow model, which was drawn upon by modernization scholars.

3. Both periods do make use of theories or approaches such as knowledge gap, indirect influence, and uses and gratifications. However, research appearing in the years from 1987-1996 can be characterized as much more theoretically diverse than that published between 1958-1986.

In the 1987-1996 study, the most frequent suggestion was “the need to conduct more policy research, including institutional analysis of development agency coordination. This was followed by the need to research and develop indigenous models of communication and development through participatory research” (Fair & Shah, 1997:19). Therefore, today almost nobody would dare to make the optimistic claims of the early years any longer.

However, the implicit assumptions on which the so-called dominant modernization paradigm is built do still linger on and continue to influence the policy and planning-making discourse of major actors in the field of Communication for Development and Social Change, both at theoretical and applied levels.

(2) Development paradigms:

1. After the Second World War, the founding of the United Nations stimulated relations among sovereign states, especially the North Atlantic Nations and the developing nations, including the new states emerging out of a colonial past. During the cold war period the superpowers—the United States and the former Soviet Union—tried to expand their own interests to the developing countries. In fact, the USA was defining development and social change as the replica of its own political-economic system and opening the way for the transnational corporations. At the same time, the developing countries saw the ‘welfare state’ of the North Atlantic Nations as the ultimate goal of development. These nations were attracted by the new technology transfer and the model of a centralized state with careful economic planning and centrally directed development bureaucracies for agriculture, education and health as the most effective strategies to catch up with those industrialized countries.

This mainly economic-oriented view, characterized by endogenism and evolutionism, ultimately resulted in the *modernization and growth* theory. It sees

development as an unilinear, evolutionary process and defines the state of underdevelopment in terms of observable quantitative differences between so-called poor and rich countries on the one hand, and traditional and modern societies on the other hand (for more details, see Servaes, 2001).

2. As a result of the general intellectual 'revolution' that took place in the mid 60s, this Euro- or ethnocentric perspective on development was challenged by Latin American social scientists, and a theory dealing with *dependency and underdevelopment* was born. This dependency approach formed part of a general structuralist re-orientation in the social sciences. The 'dependistas' were primarily concerned with the effects of dependency in peripheral countries, but implicit in their analysis was the idea that development and underdevelopment must be understood in the context of the world system.

This dependency paradigm played an important role in the movement for a New World Information and Communication Order from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. At that time, the new states in Africa, Asia and the success of socialist and popular movements in Cuba, China, Chile and other countries provided the goals for political, economic and cultural self-determination within the international community of nations. These new nations shared the ideas of being independent from the superpowers and moved to form the Non-Aligned Nations. The Non-Aligned Movement defined development as political struggle.

3. Since the demarcation of the First, Second and Third Worlds has broken down and the cross-over centre-periphery can be found in every region, there is a need for a new concept of development which emphasizes *cultural identity and multidimensionality* (further discussed in Robertson, 1992; Servaes, 2001, Sklair, 1991; Tomlinson, 1999). The present-day 'global' world, in general as well as in its distinct regional and national entities, is confronted with multifaceted crises. Apart from the obvious economic and financial crisis, one could also refer to social, ideological, moral, political, ethnic, ecological and security crises. In other words, the previously held dependency perspective has become more difficult to support because of the growing interdependency of regions, nations and communities in our globalized world.

From the criticism of the two paradigms above, particularly that of the dependency approach, a new viewpoint on development and social change has come to the forefront. The common starting point here is the examination of the changes from 'bottom-up', from the self-development of the local community. The basic assumption is that there are no countries or communities that function completely autonomously and that are completely self-sufficient, nor are there any nations whose development is exclusively determined by external factors. Every society is dependent in one way or another, both in form and in degree. Thus, a framework was sought within which both the Centre and the Periphery could be studied separately and in their mutual relationship, both at global, national and local levels. More attention is also being paid to the content of development, which implies a more normative approach. 'Another development' questions whether 'developed' countries are in fact developed and whether this genre of progress is sustainable or desirable. It favours a multiplicity of approaches based on the context and the basic, felt needs, and the empowerment of the most oppressed sectors of various societies at divergent levels. A main thesis is that change must be structural and occur at multiple levels in order to achieve these ends.

(3) Communication paradigms:

1. The above more general typology of the so-called development paradigms (for more details, see Mody, 1997; Servaes 2001, 2003) can also be found at the communications and culture level. The communication media are, in the context of development, generally used to support development initiatives by the dissemination of messages that encourage the public to support development-oriented projects. Although development strategies in developing countries diverge widely, the usual pattern for broadcasting and the press has been predominantly the same: informing the population about projects, illustrating the advantages of these projects, and recommending that they be supported. A typical example of such a strategy is situated in the area of family planning, where communication means like posters, pamphlets, radio, and television attempt to persuade the public to accept birth control methods. Similar strategies are used on campaigns regarding health and nutrition, agricultural projects, education, and so on.

This model sees the communication process mainly as a message going from a sender to a receiver. This hierarchic view on communication can be summarized in Laswell's classic formula, -- 'Who says What through Which channel to Whom with What effect?' --, and dates back to (mainly American) research on campaigns and diffusions in the late 40s and 50s.

The American scholar Everett Rogers (1983) is said to be the person who introduced this diffusion theory in the context of development. Modernization is here conceived as a process of diffusion whereby individuals move from a traditional way of life to a different, more technically developed and more rapidly changing way of life. Building primarily on sociological research in agrarian societies, Rogers stressed the adoption and diffusion processes of cultural innovation. This approach is therefore concerned with the *process of diffusion and adoption of innovations* in a more systematic and planned way. Mass media are important in spreading awareness of new possibilities and practices, but at the stage where decisions are being made about whether to adopt or not to adopt, personal communication is far more likely to be influential. Therefore, the general conclusion of this line of thought is that *mass communication is less likely than personal influence to have a direct effect on social behaviour*.

Newer perspectives on development communication claim that this is a limited view of development communication. They argue that this diffusion model is a vertical or one-way perspective on communication, and that development will accelerate mainly through active involvement in the process of the communication itself. Research has shown that, while groups of the public can obtain information from impersonal sources like radio and television, this information has relatively little effect on behavioural changes. And development envisions precisely such change. Similar research has led to the conclusion that more is learned from interpersonal contacts and from mass communication techniques that are based on them. On the lowest level, before people can discuss and resolve problems, they must be informed of the facts, information that the media provide nationally as well as regionally and locally. At the same time, the public, if the media are sufficiently accessible, can make its information needs known.

Communication theories such as the 'diffusion of innovations', the 'two-step-flow', or the 'extension' approaches are quite congruent with the above modernization

theory. The elitist, *vertical or top-down orientation* of the diffusion model is obvious.

2. The *participatory model*, on the other hand, incorporates the concepts in the framework of multiplicity. It stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities and of *democratisation and participation at all levels*—international, national, local and individual. It points to a strategy, not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional ‘receivers’. Paulo Freire (1983:76) refers to this as the right of all people to individually and collectively speak their word: “This is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every (wo)man. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can he say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words”.

In order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment, and a right attitude in development projects participation is very important in any decision-making process for development. Therefore, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by the late Sean MacBride, argued that “this calls for a new attitude for overcoming stereotyped thinking and to promote more understanding of diversity and plurality, with full respect for the dignity and equality of peoples living in different conditions and acting in different ways” (MacBride, 1980:254). This model stresses reciprocal collaboration throughout all levels of participation.

Also, these newer approaches argue, the *point of departure must be the community* (see, for instance, Fuglesang, 1982; Geertz, 1973; Servaes, 2001). It is at the community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed, and interactions with other communities are elicited. The most developed form of participation is self-management. This principle implies the right to participation in the planning and production of media content. However, not everyone wants to or must be involved in its practical implementation. More important is that participation is made possible in the decision-making regarding the subjects treated in the messages and regarding the selection procedures. One of the fundamental hindrances to the decision to adopt the participation strategy is that it threatens existing hierarchies. Nevertheless, participation does not imply that there is no longer a role for development specialists, planners, and institutional leaders. It only means that the viewpoint of the local groups of the public is considered before the resources for development projects are allocated and distributed, and that suggestions for changes in the policy are taken into consideration.

MAPPING THE FUTURE

In view of the above, what are the substantial components needed to identify the core for the future of Communication for Development/Social Change?

In my opinion, the best round up so far has been produced by Rico Lie (2000, 2003). He identified the following components: (1) the interrelated processes of the emergence of interdisciplinarity, (2) the increasing role of the power of culture, (3) the birth of a new form of modernization, (4) the changing role of the nation-state, and, (5) the emerging attempts to address the link between the global and the local.

(1) Interdisciplinarity:

Because of the complexity of societies and cultures, especially in a 'world-system' perspective, the future of the social sciences seems to lie in interdisciplinarity. Theory on the impact of culture on globalization and localization has become a truly interdisciplinary academic field of study. Marxists, anthropologists, philosophers, political scientists, historians, sociologists, economists, communication specialists and scholars in the field of cultural studies are attempting to integrate the field. The 'meeting' of different perspectives, or in Geertz's terms 'blurred genres' (Geertz, 1983), on socio-cultural phenomena seems to be the most adequate way to grasp the complexity. It is these united attempts that can provide fruitful insights and shed new light on old and new emerging problems.

(2) The power of culture in homogeneity and diversity:

Culture has long been regarded as only *context*, but more and more culture is becoming *text*. At the same time it looks as if culture is also the concept that constitutes the common interests of the different disciplines and is as such responsible for interdisciplinarity. Robertson (1992) termed this increasing interest in culture 'the cultural turn': "For not merely is culture increasingly visible as a topic of specialized concern, it is evidently being taken more seriously as a relatively 'independent variable' by sociologists working in areas where it had previously been more or less neglected" (Robertson, 1992:32). Moreover, culture is also increasingly seen as an important factor in international communication, social processes and social movements (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). More focus on culture, and the increased attention that is being given to culture and cultural identity, has changed the debate from its inception with modernization, dependency and 'world-system'-theory.

(3) A new form of modernization?:

Globalization represents a new form of modernization that no longer equals westernization. However, in the current age of modernism, post-modernism, late or high modernism, or whatever new prefix is used, to grasp the current modern state of the world, it is important to once again point out the linear implications of this thinking. Globalization, which is highly associated with modernisms, as a process of the changing cultural state of the world, is quite linear in its conceptualization. Although the process is less American oriented and no longer equals westernization as crudely as theories on cultural and media imperialism in the '70s did, it does not *fundamentally* change the thinking that the world has a modern end state which is determined by external forces.

(4) Nation-states and national cultures:

Nation-states are seen by most scholars, especially Marxists, as the basic elements in a world system and the main actors in the process of globalization, but

is this also true for cultural globalization? Does the globalization thesis automatically imply that national cultures are the main elements or actors in a 'global culture?' Are the nation-states and national cultures the central points of convergence and main actors in globalization?

On the one hand the globalization thesis centers the nation-state as the main actor. On the other hand different scholars try to escape from the limitations of state-centrism. This problematizing of state-centrism is in essence what the globalization thesis is all about. According to Sklair (1991) we must go beyond the nation-state and develop sociology of the global system. The same seems to be true for the cultural field. Discussions on global and local culture seem to go beyond discussions that centralize the nation-state and thus center national culture, national identity and nationalism. The nation-state might be the most significant political-economic unit into which the world is divided, but a cultural discussion on globalization must include other levels, because the nation-state is not the only cultural frame that is used for the construction of a cultural identity. Tomlinson (1999:70-75) also showed us by analyzing the discourse within UNESCO, where cultural identity seems to be seen as an equivalent to national identity, that this statement cannot stand ground, because cultural identity transcends national identity (Tomlinson, 1999:74).

If culture at the national level is identified as being only one level that structures and frames the construction of identity, we need to initiate a discussion on other levels that play roles in the process of identity construction. There is little discussion possible about what the global level incorporates. There is no bigger socio-cultural or economic-political analytical frame possible. But there seem to be some different interpretations possible about how local, 'local' actually is. Is it an extended family, a village, a tribe, a neighborhood in a town, a city, a county, a region, an island or even a nation-state? Or does it even go beyond a nation-state and does 'local' refer to populations like the Papuans, the Polynesians, the Pacific people, the Lapps in Scandinavia, the black European community? These are important issues that also need to incorporate discussions on macro-micro linkages in the social sciences.

(5) Linking the global and the local:

Globalization and localization are seen as interlinked processes and this marks a *radical change in thinking about change and development*. As Anthony Giddens (1995:4-5) observed: "Globalisation does not only concern the creation of large-scale systems, but also the transformation of the local, and even personal, context of social experience." Potentially, it integrates global dependency thinking, world-system theory and local, grassroots, interpretative, participatory theory and research on social change.

Obviously, the debates in the general field of 'international and intercultural communication for development and social change' have shifted and broadened. They have shifted in the sense that they are now focusing on issues related to 'global culture,' 'local culture,' '(post)modernity' and 'multiculturalism' instead of their previous concern with 'modernization,' 'synchronization' and 'cultural imperialism.' Therefore, in contrast to mainstream views on globalization, which

center on the political economy, the global industry and have a capitalist-centered view of the world, here, the focus is on *situating the field of globalization in the local*.

At the same time the debates have shifted from an emphasis on homogeneity towards an *emphasis on differences*. Therefore, the *total conglomerate of changes* accounts for something new, and especially the last issue of linking the global with the local can be identified as a central point of change. But how can this conglomerate of global changes be linked to development and political-economic and social change at local levels and from within local levels?

COMPETENCIES: SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ATTITUDES

Given all these changes and the need for a forward-looking understanding of the field of communication for social change, what kind of skills, knowledge and attitudes, -- in other words: competencies --, would a Communicator for Social Change need to possess or obtain?

(1) The Bellagio meeting, 2002:

In 2000 and 2001, representatives from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and USAID's CHANGE Project discussed the utility of applying competency models to the field of Communication for Development and Social Change. They envisioned a comprehensive set of competencies that could serve as a resource to design new, competency-based curricula for students learning to become communicators and training programs for those already working in the field.

These organizations invited leading experts from around the world to a conference in Bellagio, Italy, to identify competencies for Communication for Development and Social Change and begin the process of using competencies in curriculum development and design.

The conference, which took place between January 28 and February 1, 2002, had four objectives. Significant progress was made in meeting each objective:

Objective 1: Define competencies for Communication for Development and Social Change.

Objective 2: Define knowledge and performance evidence for each competence.

Objective 3: Review how a competency-based approach is used in curriculum design and delivery methods.

Objective 4: Decide on future steps for further consultation and dissemination of competencies and to complete the curriculum design.

The final outcome of this exercise was a Functional Map (see Appendix). In addition, the new MA Program in Communication for Social Change, offered by the School of Journalism and Communication at The University of Queensland, was designed according to the recommendations made at the Bellagio meeting (for more details, see: Maria Etienne Irigoien, Paula Tarnapol Whitacre, Dana M. Faulkner and Gloria Coe, 2002, or Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani & Lewis, 2002).

(2) Intercultural communication awareness, sensitivity or competence:

The Bellagio meeting was an important milestone in the search for Communication for Development and Social Change competencies. Other research (see below) confirms the main findings and recommendations of this meeting. It also broadens the issue to include challenges posed by intercultural 'problems' in our increasingly multicultural world. Therefore, a number of scholars (see, for instance, Chen & Starosta, 1996, 1997, 1998; Du Toit, Grobler & Schenck, 1998; Fuglesang, 1982; Gudykunst, 1994; Hofstede, 2005; Ruben, 1989; Shadid, 1998, Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1991) are trying to *identify factors that affect the course and effectiveness of the (intercultural) communication for social change process.*

1. Chen and Starosta (1996: 362- 369) synthesize different contributions into a model that aims at promoting people's abilities to acknowledge, respect, tolerate, and integrate cultural differences. The model represents a transformational process of symmetrical interdependence that is explained from three perspectives: (a) *the affective perspective represents intercultural sensitivity, promoted through positive self-concept, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental attitudes, and social relaxation;* (b) *the cognitive perspective represents intercultural awareness, which includes self-awareness and the understanding of one's own and others' cultures;* and (c) *the behavioral perspective represents intercultural adroitness based on message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills.*

The authors argue that these three perspectives form the three sides of an equilateral triangle: " All are equally important, and all are inseparable, forming a holistic picture of intercultural communication competence" (Chen & Starosta, 1996: 369).

2. Shadid (1998: 84-102) focuses on the *factors that influence intercultural communication processes.* He distinguishes between three categories: (a) *the cultural backgrounds,* (b) *the attitudes and image creation,* and (c) *the personal skills of the communication partners.* Also these factors are closely connected. Many personality characteristics, communication styles, attitudes and image creations strongly depend on the culture in which a person is brought up. Nevertheless, there are no two people to be found who behave identically or who perceive the world around them in an identical way, even if they have been brought up in the same culture. This means that personal characteristics are only partially determined by culture.

(a) The importance of cultural factors for the course of the communication process is based on the fact that communication implies making predictions and having expectations, with regard to a person's own behavior as well as that of the communication partner. *The greater the cultural similarities between them, or the better the knowledge of each other's culture, the more effective the communication will be.*

(b) The second category of factors, which can affect the intercultural communication process, concerns the attitudes towards and image creation about the conversation partner, as well as the group to which this person

- really belongs, or is considered to be part of. *People always divide their social environment in groups based on, for example, profession, place of residence, gender, religion, ethnicity, descent, language and age.* Everyone is simultaneously a member of a number of these groups, and takes from them a part of his/her social identity.
- (c) The third category of factors refers to *personal and social abilities, skills, motivations etc., which determine intercultural competence.*

3. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) distinguish between three levels: (a) the level of the individual, (b) the level of the encounter, and (c) the level of the personal relationship between the communication partners.

(a) The level of the individual includes the personal characteristics of people, which can simplify the competent interactions in a social-normative sense. This particularly concerns the factors motivation, knowledge and skills.

(b) The level of the encounter is about the communicative status of the interaction partners, or about the impression they have of each other's communicative competence and social status. More essential issues in this context are acknowledging each other's expectations, taking each other's fear for the encounter into account, and acknowledging the expectation that everyone has of a competent performance.

© The level of the personal relationship between the communication partners implies the extent in which the communication partners can fulfill each other's need for autonomy and intimacy, about their mutual attraction, their confidence and helpfulness, and the extent in which their social networks overlap.

4. Finally, the UN classifies three categories of competencies for its employees:

(a) Core or generic competencies for all staff (e.g., communication, teamwork);

(b) Managerial competencies (e.g., empowering others, decision-making); and

(c) Technical or specific competencies related to specific jobs (e.g., one job entails the competence to "receive, identify, register, and distribute letters, documents and/or other objects.").

CONCLUSION

After a brief summary of the past and possible future of Communication for Development and Social Change, we identified the key purposes, functions and competencies needed to steer communication for social change in an applied way.

An in-depth and integrated understanding and teaching of attitudes and values through inter- or cross-cultural communication are clear priorities for the future of this field.

Only through a greater sensitivity to, and competence of, intercultural communication can people from different cultures communicate effectively and appropriately in our multicultural global society.

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Appendix:

Communication for Development/Social Change

Defining the terms

In a functional analysis, competencies are defined and organized into a Functional Map. The analysis relies on a standard nomenclature as follows:

Key Purpose: The “raison d’être” of the organization, the profession, etc. being analyzed.

Key Functions (also called Major Functions): The main things that must be carried out to attain the Key Purpose.

Units of Competence (also called Basic Functions): Groups of productive functions related to a meaningful part of the work process.

Elements of Competence (also called Sub-functions): The tasks or activities that form part of a Unit of Competence.

Functional Map

