DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: TOWARD A RESEARCH AND INTERVENTION AGENDA

Guy Bessette

It is now increasingly recognized that people's active participation is an essential component of sustainable development. Any intervention with the intent of achieving a real and sustainable improvement in the living conditions of people is doomed to failure unless the intended beneficiaries are actively involved in the process. Unless people participate in all phases of an intervention, from problem identification to research and implementation of solutions, the likelihood that sustainable change will occur is slim.
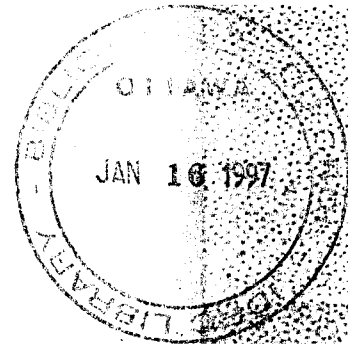
Development communication is at the very heart of this challenge: it is the process by which people become leading actors in their own development. Communication enables people to go from being recipients of external development interventions to generators of their own development.

This paper situates the concept of development communication and presents the development of an IDRC initiative in West and Central Africa.

Development Communication

Development communication is a rather broad area in which one finds many approaches and various ideologies. Beyond the differences in ideologies and methodological approaches, however, we may underscore that the lessons from experience in this field have demonstrated the importance of emphasizing interactive and participatory processes, rather than the production and dissemination of information separate from the community processes.

Although the term is sometimes used to indicate the overall contribution of communication to the development of society (communications in the service of development), or sometimes to highlight the use of the media to deal with development themes (media products), it generally refers to the planned use of strategies and processes of communication aimed at achieving development.

It is at the level of this "aiming at achieving development" that the differences abound: extend participation to decision-making and strengthen community institutions (AID 1993, p. i); compensate for gaps in terms of attitude and information (Boafo 1985, p. 83); produce a consensus among the participants in a development initiative (Balit 1988, p. 13); promote social justice and democracy (Beltrán 1993, p. 9); etc.

According to the definition we choose, we will also find the influence of very different approaches or methodologies competing to achieve the same goal: community animation, adult education, IEC (information, education, communication), and social marketing are some of the main approaches we found in the field.

The concept of development communication arose within the framework of the contribution that communication and the media made to development in the countries of the Third World. In the 1950s and 1960s, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and US AID (the American Aid Agency) sponsored numerous projects utilizing the media for communication, information, or educational purposes, with a view to facilitating development. Other major United Nations agencies, like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also got into the act, and subsequently promoted communication within the framework of development project implementation.

As for the expression "development communication," according to the Clearinghouse for Development Communication, it was apparently first used in the Philippines in the 1970s by Professor Nora Quebral (1985) to designate the processes for transmitting and communicating new knowledge related to rural environments. The fields of knowledge were then extended to all those likely to help improve the living conditions of the disadvantaged people.

What we have here, in fact, is more of an approach than a discipline. As far as its definitions are concerned, they usually consist of general statements. Thus, it is referred to as a combination of information and evaluation processes, as well as a combination of actions likely to solicit and motivate local participation in its own development (Seminar on Communication and Development 1983, p. 6), or

in any series of planned communication activities aimed at individual and social change (Middleton 1985, p. 31), or in the application of communication with a view to promoting socioeconomic development — that is, a type of planned social change (Rogers 1976, p. 73), etc.

There are also some definitions that give a more restrictive meaning to the way communication supports a development activity or a development project. We can then talk of development communication as a social process aimed at producing a common understanding or a consensus among the participants in a development initiative (Balit 1988, p. 13). The expression "development support communication" is in fact more correct, and designates, quite accurately, an effective methodology that has proved itself.

Finally, there are definitions that emphasize access by the population to the communication process with a view to promoting social justice and democracy (Beltrán 1993, p. 9). These various definitions — to mention only a few (see, in particular, Blake 1993, p. 8) — demonstrate the extent of this field of intervention.

Whatever the case may be, one will find, at the heart of this concept, the need for an exchange of information to contribute toward the resolution of a development problem and improve the quality of life of a specific target group, as well as to implement needs analysis and evaluation mechanisms within the communication process.

Trends in Development Communications

Our experience of the past forty years has demonstrated the crucial importance of communication in the field of development. Within this perspective of development communication, two trends developed successively: an approach that favoured large-scale actions and relied on the mass media, and an approach that promoted grassroots communication (also called community communication), promoting small-scale projects and relying especially on the light media (videos, posters, slide presentation, etc.).

These trends, which still coexist today to various degrees within the field of development communication, are linked to the evolution of the development and communication models that have marked development efforts up to now.

As a matter of fact, the first development models were defined exclusively by their economic variables. As the MacBride Commission report noted:

> The former models used communication especially for disseminating information, for getting people to understand the "benefits" promised by development and the "sacrifices" it demands. The imitation of a development model, based on the hypothesis that wealth, once acquired, will automatically filter down to all levels of society, included the propagation of communication practices from top to bottom...The effects were a long way from the effects that were expected
> (MacBride 1980, p. 6).

The trend toward mass communication initially marked the first two decades during which the media were utilized in the field of development. It espoused the idea that it was enough to disseminate the knowledge and the technologies of the North to ensure that they were adopted. Once adopted, they would achieve the development of the South. This first vision of development is referred to as the paradigm of "modernization."

These initial experiences, centred mainly around the mass media, relied both on a communication model based on persuasion and information transmission, and on a development model based on increasing economic activity and changes in values and attitudes.

The intervention paradigm of these two decades, which is found in two publications that had a decisive impact on the orientations adopted at that time — *The Passing of Traditional Society* by Daniel Lerner (1958) and *Mass Media and National Development* by Wilbur Schramm (1964) — consists of a very simple communication model that can be described in stimulus-response terms, based both on the logic of persuasion and on a development model linking the latter to increased productivity.

One of the models resulting from this paradigm that had a major influence on communication practices in the area of educational development is the innovation dissemination model. This model, resulting from an extension of agricultural practices exported to the developing countries, involves the transmission of information to farmers by a resource person and was formulated in theory by Everett Rogers in 1962. This theory rested on three main elements: the target population of the innovation, the innovation to be transmitted, and the sources and communication channels.

This model has been criticized by several people for its reductionism. It did not take into account the different types of target populations (e.g., prosperous farmers who own land and are open to new techniques versus other farmers who are illiterate, poor, and exploited). It also failed to take into account the impact of the economic and political structures on the capacity to adopt innovations. The same charge of blindness where social, political and economic factors are concerned also applies to innovations that require a process of diffusion. Finally, communication channels and sources were generally used within the framework of vertical, top-to-bottom communication. There was never any mention of horizontal communication between the groups in the communities affected by the problem that the innovation was meant to resolve, or of vertical, bottom-to-top communication, which would have made it possible to bring the people's problems to the attention of the decision-makers and the experts.

Since then, the development model as well as the communication models have evolved considerably. The vast amount of experience in the use of the media for educational or informative purposes in the development process has led to the development of new orientations and new practices. At the same time, several criticisms have been raised with regard to the first development models and to the functionalist vision of the development communication model.

A new model emphasizing the endogenous character of development has made it possible to define development as a global process, for which societies are responsible. In this new perspective, development is not something that can come from the outside. It is a participatory process of social change within a given society (Rogers 1976, p. 133). This model has also made it possible to extend the concept of development to nonmaterial notions by bringing into the equation notions of social equality, liberty, revenue distribution, grassroots participation in development, etc.

The conceptions everyone had of the role of communication in development have changed radically. In the first development model, the communication paradigm consisted of transmitting the technology necessary for the growth of productivity. In the second, it consists of stimulating the potential for change within a community. The concept of grassroots participation in the development process has become a key concept.

The first result of these changes in vision on day-to-day practice was the need to move from a relatively simple vision of a one-way transmission of technical information, to the promotion of bi- or multilateral systems based on grassroots participation.

At the same time as this change in communication and development models was taking place, two development paradigms were developing which helped to orient communication interventions.

On one hand, several people were questioning the modernization model because they saw that communication did not lead to development, and observed that in fact, the countries of the South appeared to be sliding further and further into poverty, low salaries, and poor living conditions. This criticism, which was developed above all in Latin America, emphasized the link between this situation and the situation of economic dependence on the industrialized North: the development of the countries in the North was conditional on the underdevelopment of the countries of the Third World, and the "centre" developed at the expense of the "periphery."

This situation is referred to as the paradigm of "dependence." According to this paradigm, obstacles to development come first and foremost from external, not internal, obstacles: that is to say, the international economic system. Consequently, the mass media cannot act as agents of change, since they transmit the western message, and the capitalist and conservative ideology. This paradigm, which is still in existence today, was also criticized because it put too much emphasis on the contradictions at the international level and not enough on the contradictions at the local and the national level. The resulting discussions and recommendations regarding the "new information order" related to this paradigm.

Its extension at the national level emphasized the relationship between communication and politicization. One of the models resulting from this paradigm, which exercised in the past, and today still exercises a determining influence on the development communication practices, is the consciousness model developed by Paolo Freire (1973). Freire, and several other communicators after him, identified communication as a process that is inseparable from the social and political processes necessary for development.

Freire insisted on the fact that the mere transfer of knowledge by an authority source to a passive receiver did nothing to help promote growth in the latter as a human being with an independent and critical conscience capable of influencing and changing society. According to him, for development communication to be effective, it had to be linked not only to the process of acquiring technical knowledge and skills, but also to the awareness-raising, politicization and organization processes.

In his model, which he explains in *The Education of the Oppressed* (Freire 1973), development communication can be considered as a tool that the grassroots can use to take control. This tool can be used for the following purposes: becoming aware of the various facets of the real development problems in their region; organizing in order to react collectively and effectively to these problems; bringing to light the conflicts that divide the various interest groups; becoming politicized — learning to provide alternatives to problem situations and finding solutions to various problems; and becoming "technicized" — obtaining the necessary tools to put to concrete use the solutions provided by the community.

This model and its applications have also been subject to criticism. It was stated, among other things, that politicization through the community media may constitute an adequate approach in countries that tolerate recourse to political action; but in most developing countries, this political action would lead to the overthrow of the governing, "have" élite without providing the means for changing conditions, and the confrontations that follow would commonly lead to repression and regression of democratic rights (on this point, see Berrigan 1981, p. 41).

Thus, rather than a direct politicization approach, many prefer an approach based on education, where the objective is not to cause a confrontation but to provide the tools necessary for organization.

A third paradigm orienting the formulation of development communication models and interventions is one that is generally called "the paradigm of another development." This paradigm emphasizes not only material development but also the development of values and cultures. Where development communication interventions are concerned, it emphasizes the small media operating in networks and the use of grassroots communication approaches. According to this paradigm, grassroots participation reinforces the chances that communities will adopt activities appropriate for them.

One of the models attached to this paradigm is the methodology of community media.

"Wherever carefully developed programs have failed," states a UNESCO study, "this approach, which consists in helping people to formulate their problems or to acquire an awareness of new options, instead of imposing on them a plan that was formulated elsewhere, makes it possible to intervene more effectively in the real space of the individual or the group (Berrigan 1981, p. 13)."

The concept of interactivity, with the light media as its operational instrument, makes possible the endogenous acquisition of knowledge and skills within the framework of a search for solutions and the communication process. This is referred to as a recourse to a methodology of community media, whose principal elements are:

- identification of needs by means of direct contacts with the groups;
- concretization: examination of the problem identified by the groups in the light of local conditions;
- selection of priority problems by the groups;
- formulation of a durable methodology for seeking solutions;
- identification of the amount of information required and access to this information;
- action: execution by the groups of the projects they have designed;
- expansion towards the outside to make known the points of view of the groups to other groups or to the authorities; and
- liaison with the communication system to make known their action (Berrigan 1981).

Other models combine different concepts. This is true, for example, of the practices for supporting communication in development projects, which combined the community approach and recourse to the small media with practices that can often be linked to a model for disseminating the innovations. This approach emphasizes the planning of communication activities as a support to a development project. Its aim is to produce a common understanding or a consensus among all the participants in a development initiative. It emphasizes the facilitation of exchanges of points of view among the various people involved in the development project and aims at taking into account the grassroots perceptions in the planning of the project and mobilizing them in the development activities set out in the project. The methodology results from educational technology and is characterized by the integration of needs analysis and evaluation mechanisms in the communication process.

Other practices are based on the community approach and the grassroots awareness-raising model. The same is true of the alternative for democratic development communication, which emphasizes grassroots access to the communication process for the purpose of promoting social justice and democracy. In certain cases, this is translated by an emphasis on participation by the most disadvantaged in the communication process (access to small media at the local level), and in other cases, by actions promoting cultural expression and the search for ways of taking control of the mass media.

Finally, we saw recently, notably in the case of the fight against AIDS and the promotion of condom use, approaches resulting from social marketing, having recourse at the same time to research techniques adapted to small groups, and to communities and the large-scale use of the mass media. We are also witnessing the renaissance of projects utilizing the mass media — for example, interactive school radio projects in Latin America and Africa, and the promotion of a television for development (project WETV and project SATURN GLOBAL). To these approaches we will also have to add all the practices related to basic education, informal education, distance learning, literacy, and post-literacy activities that have their own methodologies and community-level communication and media communication approaches.

In short, the field of development communication is vast and its divisions are numerous. The different paradigms that have marked its evolution are still active

to various degrees, and the models that are attached to them are as different as the ideologies and the orientations that inspired them.

In spite of the diversity of approaches and orientations, however, there is a consensus today on the need for grassroots participation in development and on the essential role that communication plays in promoting development. This is very well said in a popular FAO slogan: "There is no development without communication (Balit 1988)."

Where Are We Today?

Our development communication experience over the past 40 years has taught us a lot about the role of communication in development. The main lesson probably has been the recognition of the need to move from communication practices based on the one-and-only model of information transmission removed from the community processes, to practices involving the grassroots in their development.

Our experience shows us that the point of departure for development communication is not the dissemination of an innovation or of a new idea that is full of promise, but the grassroots expression of its needs. It follows that the communication models based exclusively on models of information transmission removed from community processes clearly are doomed to failure.

Participation, by putting the emphasis on the needs and the viewpoints of the individuals and groups, becomes the key concept of development communication. Recourse to a systemic methodology and the implementation of horizontal processes — in which the people are directly associated with the communication process and are thus more likely to formulate their problems themselves, become aware of new possibilities, and take their knowledge and their viewpoints into consideration in the communication process — constitute the major elements of its methodology. The implementation processes are essentially interactive and participatory at all levels, and coincide with the fundamental mission of IDRC — Empowerment through Knowledge: "Empowerment is often seen as something one can do to another person. This is not so. People are empowered by an environment that gives them the freedom to express themselves (Woods 1993, p. xiii)."

Where the orientations to be pursued are concerned, a major line is the communication support of the concept of "new development," as presented by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (*Development Dialogue* magazine) and several authors and researchers who emphasize decentralization, access to communication, and participation. Among the characteristics of the "new development," we find:

- action based on needs, including nonmaterial needs like social equality, democracy, etc.;
- endogenous and autonomous nature (change based on a community definition of community resources);
- protection of the environment (rational use of potential within the limitations of the local ecosystem);
- efforts to achieve structural transformation of social relations, economic activities and power structures; and
- exercise and promotion of participatory democracy at all levels of society (Servaes 1991, p. 66).

Several researchers also emphasize the reinforcement of institutional and individual skills, ways of approaching decision-makers, and grassroots communication. Thus, recently, Beltran proposed the following notes for "an agenda for the 20th century":

- combine the best of the development support communication activities with alternative means of communication (technical skills with political perception);
- aim increasingly to reinforce institutions rather than mount short-term operations;
- persuade the large communication schools to include development communication in their curricula;
- support research into communication aimed at democratic development;
- support the small communities, the NGOs, the small community and union organizations;
- place emphasis on communication aimed at health, hygiene, nutrition and the grassroots;
- insist that political planners and leaders use communication to reach development objectives;
- encourage basic communication training at all levels; and
- reinforce institutional regional communication (Beltrán 1993, p. 30).

The fact remains that to be durable, development must take into account human factors and make it possible for the communities in question to decide for themselves what objectives they want to aim for and what means they want to use. Development communication is the tool that makes this process possible. As a corollary, the directions to be pursued are predicated on knowing the needs of the target group and their channels of communication, stimulating the processes of community participation and decision-making, reinforcing the action of agents of change, and influencing the development of institutional and national policies.

In this perspective of durable development communication, what remains to be done is to identify the lines of research to be used.

Historically, where research themes are concerned, attention has always been paid to the effects of the mass media. This focus has corresponded to a modernization paradigm and the utilization of the media to create a global environment for development and the transmission of ideas, knowledge, and new attitudes. It has led to research and intervention with a view to intensifying and developing the contribution of the mass media to formal and informal education, as follows:

- radio schools in the 1950s and 1960s: ACPO in Colombia, Radio Santa Maria in the Dominican Republic, Radio ECCA in the Canary Islands, ACPO-Honduras, Radioprimaria in Mexico, etc.;
- educational television in the 1960s and 1970s: Samoa, Niger, and Salvador in the 1960s, Côte d'Ivoire from 1971 to 1980, Senegal in 1978;
- rural and community radio from the 1960s to the 1970s: radio forums in India and Ghana, rural radio and listening groups in francophone Africa (particularly in Niger, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Senegal); community radio in Latin America (particularly in Ecuador and Bolivia); and
- interactive school radio from 1974 to the present: Nicaragua, Kenya, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Lesotho, Bolivia, Ecuador, Papua, Belize, Swaziland, and Guatemala.

It is interesting to note that this trend is now coming back, with interactive school radio, television for development, and the utilization of the mass media in the fight against AIDS. Satellite television devoted to education and development is also the order of the day.

Subsequently, in the 1970s, people turned to the role of communication in supporting development activities and specific projects (family planning, oral rehydration, basic health care, agriculture, etc.). Attention then turned to the potential of small media and community media: participatory videos (Global Village in Bangladesh, Belkins in Tanzania, DNAFLA in Mali, CEPAC in Peru, CEDIP in India), audio cassette forums, and traditional media (theatre, puppet shows, stories, etc.). People also placed more emphasis on the contribution of communication to the promotion of democratic and social rights, which led to the development of community radio and communication agencies in the South dedicated to these aspects.

Finally, during these past few years, interest has focused on various areas like the impact of new communication technologies (satellite, telephone, E-mail, etc.), appreciation of the knowledge held by First Nations, implementation of communication units within government structures for the purpose of analyzing needs, training of personnel, and production of training materials.

Each of these areas has its respective importance and still contributes to stimulating and supporting development communication interventions.

Participatory Development Communication

Recognizing the importance of development communication, IDRC has started to develop a research program in that field. This program aims to support people's participation in their development by enabling groups and communities to diagnose the problems they face, make well-informed decisions, mobilize for action, and assume responsibility for their own development.

We choose to use the term "participatory development communication" to draw attention to this emphasis on two-way communication processes, and to distance ourselves from one-way communication approaches that involve disseminating messages, transmitting information, or persuading people to change their behaviour.

The program wants to give preference to horizontal approaches that involve encouraging dialogue centred on problem analysis and a search for solutions, as

well as bottom-up approaches that aim to raise the awareness of decision-makers. These approaches are based on a process of community communication.

By allowing for participation in development, participatory development communication becomes a tool for emancipating people and communities.

In terms of its overall thrust, the program takes an interactive and participatory approach and stresses the interrelationships that exist in practice among the main lines of action. We call this concept "CIME": **Communication** at the grassroots level, the exchange of **Information**, two-way **Media**, and nonformal **Education**.

CIME

Grassroots Communication

The program focuses on communication at the grassroots level in particular. Experience over the past 50 years has clearly demonstrated that if communication is really to help involve people in identifying a development problem, understanding its causes, proposing solutions, and organizing themselves to take appropriate action, it must start at the community level. It must also promote "horizontal" interchange among people rather than some kind of "vertical" transmission from an expert to his audience. It follows that we must not emphasize the use of the media (which plays an utilitarian role), but the processes and strategies for participatory grassroots communication (feedback processes in particular).

Exchange of Information

The program also attempts to link information to the process of communication. Information is of no use by itself, without a community communication process that allows people to grasp it and make it their own. We must also make use of proper channels of communication that will encourage the circulation and sharing of information flowing from the information source to the community, or from the community to the various levels in the decision-making process, or among groups and communities themselves.

Two-way Media

Under this aspect, the program tries to promote use of various media (including interpersonal relations and traditional means of communication as much as the modern media) within systems of interactive or two-way communication that can be appropriated by groups or communities, and that are based not on the transmission of information or hortatory messages, but on facilitating the exchange of ideas. In any given context, the use of these systems must be linked to a process of community communication that will define the parameters under which they are designed or introduced, the conditions for setting them up, and the ways in which they can be evaluated.

Nonformal Education

Finally, the program takes into account the fact that nonformal educational processes are closely linked to grassroots communication processes. Information by itself is not enough to produce the kinds of behavioral and attitudinal changes that development requires. This means that development communication has to do with the processes of knowledge sharing that allow individuals and groups to organize themselves and to make sense of the information, knowledge, and attitudes that flow through the communication process.

By stressing the interrelationships between grassroots communication, exchange of information, the two-way use of media, and the process of nonformal education, the program supports participatory development communication as a process for facilitating interaction targeted on a specific category of users and specific development problems, for the purpose of producing social change. In terms of research, therefore, the program encourages the kind of work that will help groups and communities identify and implement solutions to their own problems of development.

Establishing a Regional Development Communication Research Program

Considering its emphasis on participatory approaches and grassroots communication, the program has chosen to support NGOs practicing these approaches with communities and coming from various development sectors:

health, basic education, literacy, rural development, integration of women, etc. While other institutions (governmental, intergovernmental, universities) may also be involved in participatory development communication activities — extension services or specific projects — it is mostly the NGOs that are most active in that domain and in need of support to pursue and reinforce their action with local communities.

In a first step, the program also chose to concentrate its activities in a specific region: West and Central Africa. A participatory methodology was subsequently implemented to guide the design of the program. Initially, nine countries were selected, in order to represent regional disparities in this region: Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon.

More than 100 NGOs from these countries were invited to take part in the process of developing the program, and 70 were visited in the nine target countries during July and August 1994. These visits enabled the identification of the region's priorities and needs in the area of development communication and the preparation of the agenda for a regional meeting to develop the program. The following priorities were identified:

Training of NGO Workers in Participatory Communication

The NGOs recognized the necessity for two-way, interactive communication whose objective would not be to broadcast messages or to deliver the contents to the people in a unilateral way, but rather to associate these with the identification of problems, with the research, and the implementation of solutions. For this purpose, the NGOs need to train their members to allow them to develop and implement participatory approaches appropriate to their area of intervention.

Communication as a Support for Basic Education

Many stakeholders identified basic education as a priority for intervention in Africa, but they also emphasized that traditional means are not sufficient to meet the need. Faced with this situation, which has been accentuated by the demographic explosion, the constraints of structural adjustment, and the economic crisis, it is considered urgent to explore other avenues based on communication

and community-based media to support the processes of grassroots basic education.

Conditions for Effective Interventions

An awareness of the conditions for effective development communication interventions was also identified as a research theme. The many positive experiences of NGOs in development communication have been neither documented nor disseminated. To this end, it has been proposed that a review of positive experiences be undertaken and broadly disseminated.

Using Traditional Communication Channels or Strategies and Local Knowledge

The knowledge of traditional channels and strategies of communication used in the various environments where the interventions are made to induce the people to take responsibility for the communication process has also been identified as a priority research topic. Another was the identification and enhancement of local knowledge, to allow both for the bridging in of modern knowledge and the valorization of community knowledge.

Emphasizing the African Woman

Issues related to women and young girls appeared constantly among the priorities for action and research. Among the specific themes highlighted were the potential of women and girls as community communicators, effective strategies for establishing contact with them, and reinforcing their leadership role in the use of traditional knowledge.

Training in Participatory Communication for Grassroots Education

Following the analysis of mission data, a program development meeting was held on 9, 10, and 11 November 1994, at the Institut Panafricain de Développement (IPD) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The meeting brought together about 100 participants — more than 40 of whom were NGO representatives — selected on the recommendations of the missions.

At the end of this meeting, the participants chose a single theme for the program's future research and experimental projects, based on the priorities identified during the missions: "Training in Participatory Communication for Grassroots Education," with women and young girls as a specific target public.

Participants also identified a number of criteria for the election of members of a program committee, and of an African institution tasked with housing the committee. Following the meeting, five NGO representatives were selected to sit on the committee.

Finally, a first meeting of the committee was held in February 1995 to identify the main thrust of the program, within the broad framework outlined at the Ouagadougou meeting, and to discuss proposals on setting up a regional program secretariat in Africa.

To complement this process of developing a research program in Sub-Saharan Africa, IDRC brought together Canadian experts and practitioners working in development communication to a meeting in Montreal in November 1994, which led to a fruitful exchange of insights and experiences. A Canadian consultation on the IDRC development communication program in Sub-Saharan Africa was held in February 1995, just before the first meeting of the committee noted above.

This consultation was held to further develop the process of identifying program themes and to facilitate dialogue on the new research program between African and Canadian communicators. Discussion focused on participatory communication as a tool for nonformal, grassroots education; the program's emphasis on women; training needs in development communication; and establishing a regional program secretariat.

Participatory Communication and Nonformal Grassroots Education

Defining the role of participatory communication as a tool for nonformal grassroots education, as put forward by one of the discussion groups at the meeting, requires a sound understanding of the concepts of grassroots education and participatory communication.

First, it must be recognized that the concept of grassroots education is closely linked to that of basic education.

Basic education was defined by the World Conference on Education for All (held in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990) as education that seeks to respond to the basic needs for learning. It refers to providing basic formal education, nonformal education and literacy skills. The approach includes two key components:
i) basic learning tools — reading, arithmetic, writing, and development of analytical skills; and ii) content — the knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes, and values required in daily life. Basic education may be acquired through formal channels (schools), nonformal ones (outside educational structures), or informal ones (through exposure to the environment and the family).

The concept of nonformal education refers to organized and structured educational activities designed for the benefit of a specific target group, which take place outside the official educational system. Nonformal education seeks to make contact with people who do not normally have access to educational and training structures. It deals generally with subjects related to key activities, such as agriculture, health, community development, etc.

Participatory development communication, on the other hand, recognizes the importance of feedback and dialogue in the communication process. It encourages individuals and groups to voice their perceptions of reality and to act on these realities. As a process based on dialogue, participatory communication, supported by group media, mass media, or interpersonal interactions, may come to respond to the needs of nonformal, grassroots, or basic education. It may also lead to a rethinking of what is meant by nonformal education, as a result of action based on exchanges of knowledge, rather than linear transmission of content.

Several key questions still require further attention and discussion. Research efforts need to focus on: clarifying the boundary between nonformal basic education and nonformal grassroots education; means to encourage participation in nonformal education, particularly by women and young girls; ways to identify and respond to development communication needs in key development sectors; means to assist communities in developing and implementing programs that fulfill their needs; how to integrate traditional forms of learning and knowledge into current practices; etc.

The Emphasis on Women and Young Girls

It is also important to consider the contribution of participatory development communication in fulfilling the needs of women and young girls in the area of nonformal grassroots education.

In the most basic terms, and at the risk of generalization, African women are normally responsible for the majority of daily activities: domestic labour, food production, transformation and storage, animal husbandry, supply of drinking water and fuels, etc. We must add to this caring for children, and assisting their husbands in agricultural production and small-scale, commercial activities to earn extra income.

In this context, the needs to which participatory development communication may respond are numerous.

There is certainly a fundamental need to transform this situation and to change social roles. Women also need to raise their self-esteem and self-confidence and, as a result, change their image of their role in society. At the same time, they must assume a larger role in public life. Women also need communication support for nonformal education activities and increased participation in community development.

In terms of learning experiences, there are several sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers that restrict women's access to education. Often, access to education is largely reserved for boys; the education of girls is seen as a luxury, not a fundamental need. Sometimes school attendance is seen as presenting opportunities for danger (safety, unwanted pregnancies, etc.), when the school is located far from the village. Sometimes, as well, it is seen as a poor investment of the family's money, when girls with schooling do not find a job and leave their community. Sometimes, again, women's education is seen as a threat to traditional community values and culture, since education promotes alien values, and so on.

How, then, can participatory communication support educational efforts for women and help them overcome these cultural barriers? The ways are many, including: locating nonformal educational projects within communities; taking

women's working hours into account; promoting models that demonstrate the advantages of educating girls and women; establishing incentives; developing types of learning that are relevant to the needs of communities; and taking local knowledge into account.

Finally, focusing the program on women and young girls does not only mean identifying their needs and attempting to respond to them. There is also a need to identify their potential for acting as social communicators within their communities, and to seek to overcome the major obstacles that could hold them back. Women will be able to play a significant role in the community communication process only if these constraints are removed.

What Training?

NGOs participating in the Ouagadougou meeting placed the strongest emphasis on training. In fact, they identified the need to strengthen human resources capable of encouraging participatory communication activities for grassroots education as a priority. But the theme of training gives rise to three types of questions.

First, what type of training are we talking about? A traditional type based on content, or a participatory initiative based on the needs, experience and objectives of the learners?

Second, what objectives should be pursued and what contents given preference? We already know that the planning, implementation and evaluation of participatory communication are the three key areas for any intervention.

Aptitudes in the area of program planning, methods of analyzing needs, the grasp of local structures of traditional power and knowledge, and ways of taking into account considerations associated with male-female relationships, are all questions to consider in planning. Aptitudes for group leadership, methods for participating in the development of messages and grassroots educational programs, as well as mastery of the media, are crucial working elements for the communicator. Evaluation is a key aspect: communicators must learn to assess the results of their efforts, by means of criteria which respect the value of participation by people.

Training for groups taking part in participatory communication activities must also be considered. They must be able to recognize the value of their traditional knowledge. They must also be given the opportunity to learn how to clarify the goals and priorities of their community, and how to participate with confidence in participatory communication activities. This also requires a learning process.

Third, we need research on action to assist us in developing training programs and the participation of communication practitioners who can also enlighten us on community expectations. Finally, we need research on how to equip ourselves with communication activities to support nonformal grassroots education efforts.

Mechanisms for Implementing and Managing the Program

Setting up a secretariat geared to establishing the program in the field, as well as developing a mandate for the program committee were also the subject of discussion during the meeting.

Three main points were raised: questions associated with the implementation and management of the program (secretariat and program committee), the importance of communication, and the issue of sustainability.

The discussions largely centred on the structure of the mechanism to be established. The model proposed resembled the structure of a spider's web: a secretariat at the centre set up by an NGO, relying on the heads of networks in the nine countries targeted by the program, which themselves are dependent on the NGOs in their countries, which, in turn, are linked to the people.

In all, six levels were identified: the donors (IDRC and associated donors), the program committee (composed of five NGO representatives), the secretariat (represented by its coordinator), the network heads in the countries, the NGOs, and the communities.

In this structure, the responsibilities of the donors relate to program funding, as well as participation in giving broad direction to the program. The responsibilities of the secretariat are to act as an executing agent, to ensure the identification and approval of research projects from NGOs participating in the program, and to

manage the program. The coordinator attached to the secretariat is, in turn, responsible for operations and for communication between the various levels.

Finally, the program committee is a monitoring committee responsible for policy and program monitoring. It is a consultative mechanism, whose mandate is to provide advice to the IDRC program managers in the areas of program direction, development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It is specifically entrusted with the task of studying the development of the program's regional strategy, its formative evaluation, the selection of research projects from NGOs, their funding, monitoring and evaluation, the dissemination of the research results, and any other matters related to the smooth operation of the program.

The participants did, however, suggest adding two scientific advisers to the monitoring committee composed of NGO representatives. Another idea presented was to link the committee and the entire network to a Canadian consultative group and an international consultative group.

The participants also stressed the importance of establishing mechanisms for strengthening communication among the various sectors participating in the program and with external networks. They also emphasized the importance of planning these mechanisms at the very beginning of the project.

Finally, the issue of sustainability was posed, without the participants being able to agree on the identification of specific mechanisms. However, during a plenary session, a useful metaphor was voiced by a participant who was seeking to position this question of sustainability. This metaphor is worth repeating here: "There is a need to preserve the sustainability not only of butterflies, but also of the environments in which the butterflies are born, reproduce, and die." Hence, it would be more worthwhile, perhaps, to pose the question of research sustainability by the NGOs, rather than the more specific question of a coordination mechanism for these pieces of research work.

The First Program Steering Committee Meeting

Following the Canadian consultative meeting on the IDRC development communication program, the program committee held its first meeting, whose

purpose was to flesh out the details of the administrative structure for implementing the program.

The Program Steering Committee

The first decision of the members was to replace the concept, advanced to that point, of a consultative monitoring committee, with that of a program steering committee. This committee would comprise IDRC representatives (and possibly representatives of other funding agencies who could participate in the program later), five NGO representatives, the executive secretary of the host NGO, the secretariat coordinator, and two scientific advisers to the program.

The number of NGO representatives on the committee remains fixed at five. They are to be selected on the basis of their personal merit, skills, and membership in an NGO. These positions are nonremunerated and nonrepresentative. The members are made available to the committee by their home NGO, without any compensation, as an in-kind contribution from the NGO to the development of the program. However, they do not represent either their home NGO or their country. The representatives already selected are to remain, as long as they meet the two base criteria: working for an NGO, and working in the region.

The steering committee is to consider for approval projects preselected by the coordinator. It is also to be responsible for the policies and direction of the program, as well for monitoring its operations.

The Program Secretariat

The program secretariat is provided by the program's host NGO in Africa and consists of a coordinator and an assistant.

Program Implementation Stages

There are six stages involved in establishing the program:

*   establishing the secretariat — includes developing the work program, meeting with the NGOs, and implementing communication and information mechanisms;

- development of research projects — involves training NGOs in the preparation of research projects, as well as supporting project development;
- selection of projects — the research projects from NGOs should be linked to the main focus of the program theme of training in participatory communication for nonformal grassroots education: the selection committee will give preference to community-based proposals and seek to promote linkages between projects researching similar issues;
- execution, monitoring, and evaluation of projects;
- dissemination of the processes and results of the projects; and
- evaluation of program implementation.

Conclusion

At the end of all these initiatives, and at the moment of implanting the program in West and Central Africa, we may describe the IDRC research program in development communication as follows:

This program seeks to meet the challenges of participatory approaches to development. In shifting away from vertical approaches based on the unilateral transmission of information and persuasion to more creative approaches based on exchanges of knowledge and experiences, development communication provides space for groups and communities to diagnose their own problems, identify possible solutions, make well-informed decisions, acquire necessary skills, mobilize for action, and assume responsibility for their own development.

The program is currently targeted at West and Central Africa, and more specifically NGOs in nine countries: Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon.

Using a participatory methodology for program development, the NGO from the region singled out the lack of adequately trained personnel in participatory communication approaches as a major constraint in development communication projects. The use of participatory communication methodologies in the area of nonformal grassroots education for women and young girls was also considered a priority.

Accordingly, the core objective of the program is to strengthen, through research and experimentation, the capabilities of NGOs in the use of participatory communication as a nonformal grassroots educational tool, particularly for women and young girls.

There will be many projects, therefore, attempting to develop, experiment with, and assess the training objectives, content, strategies, and tools best suited to a given context or the needs of a community. NGOs may also raise other research questions related to this overall set of problems or objectives, including: analysis of the nonformal grassroots education needs of a local community; compilation and study of previous experience in participatory communication; experimentation with or assessment of existing practices; and cost analysis of participatory methods.

In fact, the training needs of NGOs in participatory communication support for nonformal grassroots education will require a clearer understanding of strategies and practices in this area, so that they can be incorporated into ongoing NGO training-action-research work.

With respect to methodology, participatory methodologies (research-action, research-training, participatory research, etc.) will be strongly encouraged. NGO research and experimentation work, in order to be supported under the program, will have to be linked to explicit field work, and involve community and grassroots participation.

The project strategy will consist of implementing a research network with the NGOs. To achieve this, a regional secretariat for the network will be established in Africa. This secretariat will be in contact with the program's nine target countries and be responsible for the following activities:

- helping NGOs develop research proposals in line with the theme of the project through a series of workshops in the target countries;
- funding and technical support to the projects selected by the program committee; and
- disseminating NGO research to, and facilitating exchanges with other NGOs, international organizations, and decision-makers at the national and regional level.

Naturally, over time, other crucial components will emerge to refine the definition and scope of the program and the mechanisms for its implementation. The entire process is iterative and in consonance with the philosophy of participatory development. In the meantime, it is our own hope that the program will provide impetus for strengthening the research capabilities of NGOs in West and Central Africa, leading eventually to valid answers to the many problems related to the use of participatory communication for nonformal grassroots education.

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A WEST AFRICAN AGENDA

EDITED BY
GUY BESSETTE AND C.V. RAJASUNDERAM

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
SOUTHBOUND

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