

Book Review

Wendy Quarry & Ricardo Ramirez. Communication for another Development – Listening Before Telling. Zed books, New York, 2009. ISBN-978-1-84813-630-4

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Wendy Quarry is, currently, working as an Associate faculty member in School of Communication and Culture at Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC. She has socially been an active participant for ‘development communication and social change’ since 25 years. She holds Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and also Economics from Queens University while she has done her Master of Arts in Rural Development from University of Guelph. Countries like Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria have applied her work in the field of development and social change. Furthermore, she is currently serving in International Development Research Centre (IDRC) as an active team member for the action research project. She has also served several institutions as coach and mentor for different research projects in Asia and Africa. She has designed communication strategies for various governments, non-profit organizations and several other organizations. Her major contribution in this dimension is distinguishing development communication from public relations.

And the other author, Ricardo Ramirez, is serving University of Notre Dame as an Associate Professor for the subject of Political Science. He has done his PhD degree in Political Science from

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Stanford University in 2002. His area of interest in research is local politics, state and political behavior, race and ethnicity based politics. His interest lies with examining the transformation of political and civic participation within the context of American democratic regime. Furthermore, his work covers effects of political scenarios on public participation, political mobilization of public including immigrants and other minority groups. His recent works include “Latinos during the 2006 Immigration Protest rallies”, “Why California Matters: How California Latinos influence the Presidential election”, and “Mobilization en Espanol: Spanish-language radio and the activation of Political Identities” etc.

The book under review talks about development communication. Development communication is significant in a way that it is considered as art and science of human beings. It is usually defined as the type of communication required to transform the whole society speedily while making possible the transition of people from poverty to better economic conditions. It can also be defined as the growth that assists in achieving social equality at larger level in a democracy.

This book comprises of three (3) different portions that are themed on “What We Know”, “What We Learned” and “What We Can Do Differently” respectively and includes 10-chapters overall. 1st chapter is “Communication for development setting the scene” which is focused on explaining the general concepts and problems communicators working in the field of development experience. For instance, it explains that ‘communication’ itself is contradictory for development experts i.e. there are several myths and interpretations

attached to this term. Sometimes it is misinterpreted as 'process of sending information' or sometimes 'it is confused with the medium'. Authors argue that it is the need of the hour to understand the essence of communication⁴. Moving forward, authors through their personal experience recommend development communicators that content matters a lot and the solutions for the problems should be designed and re-designed to fit the local situation. In the same chapter, authors through their experience of the field, unpack the debate by explaining different conceptualizations of development and how communication is 'polarized' i.e. how communication functions fit in one situation while not in other⁵.

Furthermore 1st section (What We Know) includes 3-chapters titled as "The meaning of another development", "Planners and searchers: two ways of doing development", and "Why communicators can't communicate". Authors being active practitioners of the development field have better understanding of the common challenges that development communicators and practitioners face. So they acknowledge the fact (in this specific section) that not all the communication results in 'good development' but they also argue that an innovative approach to development can lead to 'good communication'⁶.

1st chapter of this section is titled as, "The meaning of another development". As the name of chapter depicts, this chapter is focused on elaborating the concept of 'another development'.

⁴ Pg 11

⁵ Pg 18

⁶ Pg 25

According to writers of the book, it should be about poverty eradication, should be endogenous, autonomous, and should be fit for the situation. While in the 2nd chapter of this section “Planners and searchers: two ways of doing development”, writers claim that traditional development practices are not compatible with communication because the development experts are not accommodating people i.e. they do not listen to people, and they do not allow them to decide their needs on their own. Authors illustrate the ‘tellers’ and ‘listeners’ while quoting ‘planners’ and ‘searchers’ from *The White Man’s Burden* (2006)⁷. They further this argument in 3rd chapter of this section, “Why communicators can’t communicate” that ‘tellers’ interpret communication as “telling people what to do and about changing people’s behavior” while ‘listeners’ envision communication as “participatory communication, advocacy, and pursuit for shared meanings”⁸.

2nd section (What We Learned) of this book is composed of 4 chapters that are “Working in the grey zone”, “Early champions: uncovering principles”, “New activists: principles that travel” and “The forgotten context” respectively. Quarry and Ramirez in the 1st chapter have scrutinized the framework that they personally utilize for the analysis of effective communication during several development initiatives just by focusing on champions, scenario and the functions of communication. They pointed out a term ‘grey zone’ in this chapter which according to them is a situation in which circumstances are never appropriate, purposes are not identified,

⁷ Pg 38

⁸ Pg 41

but development communicators have to keep on trying anyway. So writers state that indicators that help communicators navigate through the grey zone include above mentioned champions, scenario and the communication functions.

In subsequent chapter, authors consider those development communicators as champions of the field who ignore 'traditional development' practices (concept of telling people), on the other hand, give respect to opinions and listen to needs of people who are actively trying to find out solutions for their problems. Quarry and Ramirez state that examples of such people are hard to find currently but there are few which they have already identified in this book. Subsequently, context and scenario is discussed in the next chapter i.e. geography, culture, history and communities etc. are very important to understand the outcome for a development initiative because context varies significantly. Authors concluded this section by highlighting the significance of communication functions i.e. telling is not important but listening is. They recommended utilization of exchange and dialogue instead of providing people with information.

Third and last section (What We Can Do Differently) comprises of only two chapters i.e. "Training and negotiating in the grey zone" and "Searching and listening: good communication, good development" correspondingly. This section focuses on recommendations for the future practitioners in the field of development communication. Writers emphasize on the importance of 'good development' instead of 'good communication'. Writers' point of view regarding good development is that it is a process in

which people are allowed to interact with each other and dig out their own solutions for their problems. For this reasons, Quarry and Ramirez have endorsed the need for training the development communicators to 'listen' and encourage people for arguments.

Overall, writers have successfully communicated their idea of 'another development' that takes communication as its essential. They have tried to develop a synthesis of issues, reasons, solutions and recommendations throughout their writing on the basis of their own practical 40-years' experience of working in the field. Their basic idea is 'practitioners should aim to learn from the mistakes of the past'. They have acknowledged the shortcomings and failures of development communicators on one hand while on the other hand, they have also identified the reasons that has played major role in limiting the effectiveness of these development practitioners.

Another significant feature of this book is the use of easy-to-understand and simple language throughout this book. It is very common practice of current writers (development and communication writers) that they use exclusive terms related to the field which creates difficulty for readers to understand the concept. But Quarry and Ramirez's usage of simple language to develop their argument is beneficial for readers to clearly and easily understand the concept of development communication. Furthermore, their ability to interweave storytelling of champions into their argument of how they had, have, and must continue to navigate the "grey zone" allows readers to understand exactly what the issues are in a practical sense. It is patently proved that they set themselves for the desire of social change so that it can produce a

shift occurring within the development view of the world because of the pressure taken out individuals who aimed for listening rather than working.

Quarry and Ramirez who emphasized for another worthwhile development which would aim putting an emphasis over interaction and communication with locals, got to be compared with policy oriented projects which produce unmanageable solutions. However, this shift has been seen as a higher goal which is not possible to achieve soon. They acknowledge the fact that development industry is based on planning as well as telling, which is quite hectic to change both large organizations as well as developmental norms. The couple of options are provided by them for the champions are: work when the context is quite right or say no as an alternative.

It can be concluded in the end that in this book authors have tried to describe and illustrate the struggle of 'communicators' that work in the field of development from which they went through during their professional lives. Most often, communication related to development is output-oriented that is why the goals and needs that are pre-requisite for development or social change are not achieved. But the strategies that are highlighted in this book by the authors Quarry and Ramirez are highly significant to achieve the long-lasting social change which is evidently supported through the examples mentioned in this book. For this reason, this book is equally helpful for a student, a communicator, or a development worker.