Community media approaches & communication for social change

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People are finding new and more direct ways to get involved in public life and decision-making – marking a shift from representative democracy to what is often called participatory democracy.

- Kumi Naidoo

Drafting strategy papers in Washington that are subsequently signed off by governments in the name of the people should be a thing of the past.

- James Wolfensohn
The cemetery of development

Half century of missed opportunities:

- Water pumps without water
- Roads that lead nowhere
- Hospitals without health staff
- Schools without teachers & books
- Dusty video & radio equipment
- Backyards full of rusty donated vehicles
- Immunisation rates down, HIV/AIDS up
- “White elephants” in Africa, Asia and Latin America
Who’s fault?

Planners
- Government corruption
- Vertical planning from development agencies
- No dialogue with beneficiaries
- Communication absent in the process
- Knowledge arrogance

Community
- Weak community organization
- Illegitimate local leadership
- Submissive relations with power structures
- No sense of ownership
- No capacity to voice community views
Models and paradigms

- Diffusion of innovations
- Social Marketing
- Health promotion
- Education & Entertainment

- Alternative, dialogic communication
- Development communication
- Communication for social change
Main differences

Hierarchic models
- Behavioural causes
- Vertical
- Persuasion
- Individual change
- Passive & “banking”
- Objects of change
- Massive diffusion
- General assumptions
- Short-term/messages

Participatory approaches
- Structural causes
- Horizontal
- “Concientisation”
- Social change
- Active & critical
- Agents of change
- Dialogue & debate
- Specific, diverse
- Long-term / process
Communication for social change

- Process of dialogue and debate, based on tolerance, respect, equity, social justice & active participation of all stakeholders
- Recovers lessons learned & experiences from developing countries
- People centred: rejects hierarchic & vertical mass media intensive models
- Demand driven: aims community empowerment & local decision-making process
The notion of process

- **Horizontal Vs. Vertical**  > People as dynamic communicators
- **Process Vs. Campaign**  > Democratic participation in planning
- **Long-Term Vs. Short-Term**  > Processes need to be appropriated
- **Collective Vs. Individual**  > Serving the interests of the majority
- **Specific Vs. Massive**  > Content, language & media specific to each culture
- **People needs Vs. Donor musts**  > Community based research to identify real needs
- **Ownership Vs. Access**  > Voice and opportunity with no restriction
- **Consciousness Vs. Persuasion**  > Deep understanding about social reality
CFSC Principles

[1] Sustainability of social changes happens when individuals & communities affected become owners of the communicational process & contents

[2] CFSC, horizontal & participatory, aims to strengthen community links and amplify the voices of the poorest; based on the notion of the appropriation of the communicational process and the development of local contents

[3] Communities should be the agents of their own social change and master the communication process

[5] The CFSC process should go beyond individual behaviours and take into consideration social norms, current policies, local culture & tradition, and the general context of development

[6] Dialogue & participation are key to strengthen cultural identity, trust, commitment, ownership of ideas & expressions, and community organisation
CFSC rejects the linear model of transmission of information from a central sender towards an individual receiver, and promotes a circular process of interactions where knowledge is shared and collective action is taken.
The new communicator

- Facilitator of dialogue & debate
- Theoretical & practical balance: process oriented
- Direct experience in development - community
- Knowledge of communication practices
- Strategic, long term thinking
- Understanding technology is just a tool
- Flexibility in the alternative use of media
- Role of amplifying the voices of voiceless
- Work rooted in cultural identity & dialogue
A question of power

- Communication for social change contributes to put the decision-making about development in the hands of the people.
- It consolidates the capability of communities to confront with planners their own ideas about development.
- Within the community itself it favours the strengthening of democratic process.
A question of identity

- Communication for social change contributes to emphasize cultural pride and self-esteem
- Reinforces the social tissue through strengthening indigenous & local forms of organisation
- Protects traditions and cultural values, while being able to incorporate new elements
Tales of diversity

- 50 years of participatory communication
- Thousands of simultaneous experiences
- Radio, video, print, theatre, internet
- Against all odds – globalisation, privatisation
- Surprising capability to survive and replicate
- Strength based in multiplication, not individual growth
- The will to empower their voices
Community media

- **Radio:** Radio stations (Latin America, Africa, Asia, South Pacific)
- **Video:** Maneno Mengi (Tanzania), tool to analyze and plan & SEWA illiterate women (India)
- **Theatre:** Promoting immunization (Nigeria) & Wan Smol Bag (Vanuatu)
- **New ICTs:** S.M. Swaminathan Foundation-knowledge centres (India)
Conditions for Community Media

[1] Community participation & appropriation
[2] Language & cultural pertinence
[3] Development of local contents
[4] Use of appropriate technology
[5] Networking & convergence
Delicate Balance
Integral Sustainability

**Institutional Sustainability**
- Enabling environment: Laws and regulations & Public policies
- Ownership of media – participatory planning
- Human resources & internal democracy - training
- Appropriate technology – the right choices

**Social Sustainability**
- Coherence of communicational strategy
- Social appropriation & ownership
- Role of local organisations
- Language and cultural pertinence, local contents
- Incidence, credibility and social impact

**Economic Sustainability**
- Local institutions: NGOs, cooperatives, unions
- Cooperation agencies & programmes
- Contributions from the community: in-kind or advertising
Limitations for collaboration

- No specialised staff in the field
- Improvisation: journalists, nurses, etc.
- Confusing language:
  - information / communication
  - communications / communication
  - access / participation
- Communication budgets mostly for mass media
- Managerial decision making based on criteria not related to communication
New directions

- Facilitate dialogue between academic, development organisations, communities
- Elevate hierarchy of communicators
- Need to develop the discipline of CFSC
- Master in CFSC - regional
- Body of knowledge - 2,335 entries
- Anthology - 100 authors [emphasis in “hidden” authors Africa, Asia, Latin America]
- Research on process indicators & evaluation
Going to scale

- Urgency leads to bad planning & frustrating experiences
- Confusing scale with short-cuts
- Looking at citizen media with the crystal of mass media
- Overestimating mass media
- Bypassing cultural specificities
The evaluator from the outer world

- “Prove” with data that you are worth
- Unfair vertical measurement of CFSC initiatives
- External evaluators use methodologies that are alien to social & cultural reality
- No specific indicators yet to evaluate process of participatory & citizens communication
- Need to evaluate qualities not just quantities
- New evaluation tools needed - new attitudes
- Less accountants and more social scientists
- Participatory evaluation – community should speak
Why communication and not “communications”?

One entry found for communication.

Main Entry: com·mu·ni·ca·tion
Pronunciation: kə-ˈmyü-nə-ˈkA-shən
Function: noun
Date: 14th century
1: an act or instance of transmitting
   2 a : information communicated b: a verbal or written message
   3 a : a process by which information is exchanged between
      individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or
      behavior <the function of pheromones in insect communication
      >; also : exchange of information b: personal rapport <a lack of
      communication between old and young persons>
   4 plural a: a system (as of telephones) for communicating b: a
      system of routes for moving troops, supplies, and vehicles
      c: personnel engaged in communicating