The Context of Communication for Development, 2004

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The context of communication for development in 2004

"…..if development can be seen as a fabric woven out of the activities of millions of people, communication represents the essential thread that binds them together.

On the one hand, communication as dialogue and debate occurs spontaneously in any time of social change. The increased freedom of expression in recent times has been almost simultaneous with changes in the global political structure.

On the other hand, it is communication as a deliberate intervention to affect social and economic change that holds the most interesting possibilities. A development strategy that uses communication approaches can reveal people's underlying attitudes and traditional wisdom, help people to adapt their views and to acquire new knowledge and skills, and spread new social messages to large audiences.

The planned use of communication techniques, activities and media gives people powerful tools both to experience change and actually to guide it. An intensified exchange of ideas among all sectors of society can lead to the greater involvement of people in a common cause. This is a fundamental requirement for appropriate and sustainable development."

Communication: a key to human development,
Colin Fraser and Jonathan Villet, FAO, 1994

1   Introduction

The importance of communication in the development process has been acknowledged for many years by the development community. FAO has more than a thirty year record of pioneering and promoting - both in thinking and practice - the centrality of communication in development.   The most essential ingredient of good communication – putting people at the centre of the communication process - has similarly been understood and documented for many years.

Despite this, the 2004 Communication for Development Roundtable takes place against a background where resources for communication activities continue to be difficult to mobilise, where strategic thinking and implementation of communication in development generally is going through a period of some confusion, including within several bilateral and multilateral agencies, and where development organisations continue to find it difficult to put people at the centre of the communication process.

It also takes place where the arguments for effective, professional and people centred communication strategies have arguably never been as compelling in the context of today's development challenges.

This paper seeks to provide a brief overview of the context of development communication, particularly in terms of some key trends and events since the last Communication for Development Roundtable in 2001, as well as a contextual link between the 2001 and 2004 roundtables. It does not claim to be comprehensive, and has sought to avoid duplication with some of the other papers prepared for the 2004 roundtable. It falls into four sections.

First, it examines the development context, particularly focusing on the principle strategies now being deployed to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and the relevance of communication to these strategies. It also outlines some of the other key development challenges where particularly strong arguments can be made for the centrality of communication with a particular focus on the subject of the last roundtable, HIV/AIDS communication.

Second, it examines the changing communication environment of the beginning of the 21st Century and looks at some of the implications of these changes for current debates on communication.

Third, it briefly examines the context of funding and resources available to communication.

Finally it seeks to identify, in the light of the current situation, some of the main obstacles which need to be tackled if communication for development is to receive a substantially higher priority in international development strategies

The specific issues of communication and sustainable development which form the main focus of the roundtable are covered in detail in other papers prepared for the roundtable and are only lightly covered in this paper. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not necessarily be taken as the views of FAO.

2   The development context

2.1   From globalization to global security

One dominant global event since the last roundtable has shaped almost everything else – the terrible events of September 11 2001 and their aftermath.   Never before has communication across boundaries and between cultures been more important, and never before has global security depended on the existence of channels that promote such communication.   Arguably those channels have rarely been more fragile.

The prevailing context for much development discourse work before September 11 was focused on globalization and the associated interdependence and interconnectedness of all people's, a process fundamentally dependent on and shaped by increasingly rapid flows of information around the world.   The events of and following September 11 heralded a marked shift in international political attention away from the issues and concerns raised by globalization, a shift accompanied by an increased parochialism in communication channels.

This was most clearly demonstrated in media reporting of the ensuing conflicts, especially in Iraq.   Several major western media organizations (including the New York Times, the Washington Post and CNN) have publicly questioned their own coverage of the run up to the Iraq war.   These events saw the increasing credibility and audiences drawn to new media players such as Al Jazeera who have, amidst controversy, constituted a major challenge to the previous dominance of western based news networks.   In the US the emergence and rapid popularity of other new players such as Fox TV, explicitly more patriotic in its news values in coverage of the war on Iraq and the war on terror, has reinforced a trend towards more fragmented media industry.   These are among many developments suggest a growing fragmentation and, in some cases, parochialism of mainstream media reporting at a time of international crisis.

At a time when the international community is so divided, these trends affecting the mainstream media might have been expected to prompt an increase in support from the international development community for organizations seeking to foster informed public

discourse and communication at national and international levels. Much evidence suggests that the contrary has happened.

At the international level, many of the main international NGOs dedicated to generating perspectives from developing countries and working to generate journalism and broader information flows across boundaries and cultures have suffered substantial uncertainty in funding. At the national level, a decisive shift of many donor organizations to provide budget support to governments, often resulting in a shift of resources away from civil society organizations, has similarly led to major problems for civil society and media support organizations dedicated to fostering informed dialogue in society.

Some donor trends in the field of communication are detailed in Section 4 but at this point it is worth noting how difficult it is to discern a significant strategic response to the world post September 11 among donors and development actors particularly in relation to building communication bridges and conversations across cultures. It is impossible in a brief overview to carry out a detailed analysis of these trends and issues, but global terrorism and the war on it are events where the communication community has a critically important role in making the world a less dangerous place. It is difficult to detect a concerted effort to support such a role and, as Section 4 on donor trends suggests, there appears to be a general and puzzling trend towards disinvestment in such communication.

2.2   MDGs and PRSPs: the central role of communication

The principal strategic reference points for the global development community are the Millennium Development Goals. Nearly all bilateral funding agencies, most multilateral agencies and many NGOs have explicitly aligned their strategic priorities to meeting the MDGs (see box).

UN International Development Goals
By 2015:

1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Reduce by one half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
		Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
2	Achieve universal primary education	Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling
3	Promote gender equality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015
4	Reduce child mortality	Reduce by two thirds the mortality rates for infants and children under five
5	Improve maternal health	Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio
6	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
		Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7	Ensure environmental sustainability	Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, reverse the loss of environmental resources
		Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
		Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020
8	Develop a global partnership for development	Open trading system, special needs of least developed countries (LDCs), debt, employment, access to medicines, ICTs

The goal given the highest priority and around which many of the others are focused is to halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015. The principal strategy adopted by the international community to achieve this goal is the development of poverty reduction strategy papers, a process initially promulgated by the World Bank and increasingly being used by most bilateral development agencies as the basis for their development strategies.

At the heart of the PRSP process, and indeed a founding principle informing all the MDGs and allied processes such as the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), is the principle of ownership. The World Bank has repeatedly argued that unless there is a genuine process of ownership of these strategies within countries, and real participation and dialogue with all sections of society in drawing them up, they will fail.

Achieving such ownership requires, as the Bank itself argues, a major focus on communication. "Participation, the keystone of PRSPs, relies on accurate, consistent and continuous communication that provokes response and encourages debate and dialogue leading to better understanding, the application of issues to ones own circumstances, and participation in all phases of a PRSP", argues the World Bank in its PRSP source book on communication. [1]

PRSPs (and their earlier incarnation, Comprehensive Development Frameworks) started to be developed in 1999. While billions of dollars of spending have now been shaped by PRSP processes, repeated criticisms have been expressed over inadequate participation in their design, particularly by civil society.[2], and the lack of public awareness and ownership of the process. Criticism was also expressed by the lack of public discourse of PRSPs, particularly through the media with surveys suggesting that very often few journalists or editors were even aware of PRSP processes being developed in their countries.[3]

The publication by the World Bank of a sourcebook on communication for PRSPs in 2003, which was itself compiled through a consultative process with communication NGOs and other organizations, marked a major acknowledgement by the Bank of the importance of communication in the PRSP process.

A frequent complaint made by the communication community over many years is that communication strategies are designed as an afterthought (rather than integrated from the start into development strategies), are accorded too few resources and implemented with insufficiently trained personnel. Certainly the central development strategy designed to meet the primary development objective of our times – halving poverty by 2015 – appears to back up the complaint. The evidence of the last five years suggests that the level of ownership, participation and public discourse required for PRSPs to be

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[1] *Strategic Communication in PRSP*, Masud Mozammel and Barbara Zatlokal, World Bank, 2003
[2] Many examples exist of such criticisms by international and national NGOs and others. One example is *Structural Adjustment in the name of the poor: the PRSP experience in the Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam* by Jenina Joy Chavez Malaluan and Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South, 2002
[3] *Reducing Poverty: Is the World Bank's strategy working* by Kitty Warnock, Panos 2002 and *Hearing the voices of the poor: encouraging good governance and poverty reduction through media sector support,* Dr Ann Hudock, World Learning Foundation 2003

successful requires a fundamental reassessment and reprioritization of the role of communication in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

2.3   Beyond Nicaragua: the continuing HIV/AIDS communication debate

2.3.1   A shift in the HIV/AIDS communication debate

The last Communication for Development Roundtable, held in Nicaragua in 2001, focused explicitly on the theme of HIV/AIDS communication, the success of which is fundamental to meeting the MDG of halting the spread of HIV by 2015. The roundtable welcomed the revitalized energy and funding being devoted to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and issued a declaration designed to capture the main conclusions of the meeting. Roundtable participants were both explicit and candid in their assessment that communication strategies had, for many various reasons, failed in preventing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In particular the declaration argued that:

"Existing HIV/AIDS communication strategies have proved inadequate in containing and mitigating the effects of the epidemic. For example, they have often:

- *treated people as objects of change rather than the agents of their own change;*
- *focused exclusively on a few individual behaviours rather than also addressing social norms, policies, culture and supportive environments;*
- *conveyed information from technical experts rather than sensitively placing accurate information into dialogue and debate;*
- *tried to persuade people to do something, rather than negotiate the best way forward in a partnership process.*

Progress in slowing the epidemic will require a multi-sectoral response and use of communication to tackle the behaviours related to the spread of the epidemic and to address its causes (inequality, prejudice, poverty, social and political exclusion, discrimination, particularly against women)."[4]

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[4] Communication for Development Roundtable Report: Focus on HIV/AIDS Communication and Evaluation, UNFPA, UNESCO, Rockefeller Foundation, Panos, 2002

The roundtable brought together a wide range of organizations and marked a decisive recognition that success in achieving sustained and widespread behaviour change of the scale required to tackle the pandemic was fundamentally dependent on achieving social change and communication strategies needed to focus on both.

Since the last roundtable the response to HIV/AIDS has continued to develop rapidly and the influence of the roundtable, and the debates surrounding it, are clearly discernible in several important developments. Unicef has been pioneering a new communication for social change (also known as communication from a human rights perspective) programme in Eastern and Southern Africa, particularly in Ethiopia and Zambia. The Rockefeller Foundation decided in 2003 to take forward its work in this field by supporting the establishment of the Communication for Social Change Consortium. The Panos Institute published a major appraisal of communication programming building on the arguments from the roundtable entitled *Missing the message: 20 years of learning from HIV/AIDS* – the report has been downloaded more than 100,000 times from the Panos website indicating a massive interest in the field. Dozens of other examples exist of an increasing move towards more social change approaches to communication in relation to HIV by a broad spectrum of organizations.

Despite this, there remains a significant sense of strategic confusion related to HIV communication. Much of the debate at the last roundtable focused on the need for long term strategies which integrated both behaviour and social change approaches, and a shift towards developing communication strategies that provided people with a voice as well as sending them a message. While there are important statements and expressions of intention by funding agencies, there is only occasional evidence that funding patterns and expenditure of resources have decisively altered to reflect this shift. Recent intense controversies at the XV International Conference on AIDS in Bangkok on the US government's insistence that their funds be focused on promoting an ABC approach (abstinence, being faithful, using a condom) demonstrated the continued disagreement on the most effective prevention and communication approaches to HIV/AIDS.

There has nevertheless clearly been a significant shift in emphasis on the discourse on communication strategies related to HIV/AIDS, a shift clearly reflected in a new Dfid strategy on HIV/AIDS published in July 2004.

"Mass media campaigns, using appropriate communication strategies and locally appropriate idioms,are an essential element [of our strategy]. Top-down information campaigns are rarely as effective as more inter-active media such as soap opera and theatre, where complex issues and differing views and perspectives can be fully explored and public debate encouraged………. Behaviour change, and other communication programmes, supported by a positive policy environment, can be an effective part of HIV control strategies and should be properly integrated into national HIV/AIDS control programmes. They need a coordinated approach to communication involving government, local and national media and civil society."[5]

2.3.2 ARVs and an integrated communication approach

HIV/AIDS strategies themselves have shifted strongly over the last two years with the availablility of substantially more resources, and the rapid development and falls in prices of anti-retroviral treatments (ARVs). The decisive shift in focus on the HIV/AIDS response to providing treatment for the millions infected with the virus, exemplified by WHO's 3 X 5 initiative (providing ARVs to three million people by the end of 2005) has led to some concerns within the communication community of a remedicalisation of the AIDS pandemic and a deprioritisation of communication and prevention strategies.

WHO itself however has emphasized strongly the importance of an integrated approach bringing together both treatment and prevention, and a set of communication strategies that can promote both behavioral and social change. In May 2004, WHO and UNAIDS co-hosted a major consultation of international agencies and developing country communication experts focused on producing an integrated communication strategy.

Even as the issue of treatment provision increasingly dominates the response to HIV/AIDS, informing and empowering people affected by HIV/AIDS remains the principal

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[5] Taking Action: the UK's strategy for tackling HIV/AIDS in the developing world, Dfid, July 2004 (www.dfid.gov.uk)

challenge in containing HIV/AIDS. A central argument stressed in the WHO/UNAIDS meeting for increasing treatment provision is the opportunity it also presents for communication and prevention (especially by normalizing and de-stigmatising the disease, by providing an incentive for people to know their status and by providing a catalyst for in country civil society and advocacy action around HIV/AIDS and allied issues). The report, *HIV/AIDS Communication and Treatment Scale-Up: Promoting civil society ownership and integrated approaches to communication*[6], is expected to available at the roundtable meeting.

2.3.3 Who is coordinating the HIV/AIDS communication response?

An increasingly urgent issue for communication practitioners and thinkers on HIV/AIDS is, when change is so rapid and debate so intense around different communication and prevention approaches, that there is so little coordination internationally of communication approaches. There has been very limited coordination capacity on communication within UNAIDS for several years, and coordination capacities of other UN bodies on HIV/AIDS have also been reduced at headquarters level. Many important lessons of communication have been learned over 20 years in the response to HIV/AIDS, but these lessons are arguably not being applied as well as they could because there exists so little focus on communication coordination within the international community.

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[6] Published by WHO and Panos

3 The Media and Communication Environment

3.1 Information and Communication Technologies

3.1.1 The World Summit

The paper prepared for the 2001 roundtable focused heavily on the increasing international attention being given to the potential of ICTs in development, highlighting in particular international reports, initiatives and meetings.

These included the UNDP Human Development Report of 2001, the Global Knowledge Conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2000 and an action plan produced by it, the G8 DOT Force (Digital Opportunities Task Force) and the UN ICT Task Force. The Millennium Development Goals make a specific reference to ICTs committing themselves "In cooperation with the private sector, [to] make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communication technologies."

The most important event since the last roundtable – and perhaps the largest meeting ever held on communication and development – was the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in December 2003. WSIS, and the series of preparatory committee meetings leading up to it, created an opportunity for a major debate on the role of information and communication technologies in tackling poverty. The greatest challenge for the summit, according to the official declaration, was to "harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration."

WSIS was a major conference gathering more than 11,000 people and was preceded by three preparatory committee meetings and an intercessional meeting, five regional conferences and a series of other parallel meetings and processes. The preparatory process to the conference was characterized by many debates and a strong engagement from developing countries, but the meeting suffered from a series of constraints.

The first was the credibility of the Summit process itself among important potential stakeholders, particularly donors and private sector organisations. The Summit event (with particularly important support from the Swiss Development Cooperation agency) itself attracted a large number of people with a heavy participation from developing countries, and consisted of a remarkable exhibition of innovation in using ICTs in the public interest and alleviating poverty, and a high energy series of parallel meetings to the formal summit (including the World Electronic Media Forum). But while the governmental Summit resulted in a formal declaration and the adoption of a 7,000 word plan of action, criticisms were made that the official declaration amounted to a lowest common denominator of agreement among the participating parties. Pre-summit debates were often preoccupied with issues of protecting existing freedoms, particularly on content and media rather than decisively moving the field forward. An attempt to create a new Digital Solidarity Fund received a luke warm response from donors and the summit received little international public attention compared to similar UN summits. The whole definition of an "information society", defined principally in technological rather than social terms, remains contentious. A second stage of the summit process is to be held in Tunis in 2005. While the plan of action from the Geneva process is shaping the work of organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union, there is limited evidence that the conclusions of the Summit have decisively influenced broader development policy. The engagement of the private sector in the WSIS process was very limited.

Question marks surround the extent to which the declaration of the WSIS represents a fundamental breakthrough and clear multi-stakeholder consensus in achieving a real impact on the ground. The critical ingredients for the success and credibility of other Summit and global policy process, particularly a dynamic interplay between government, private and civil society sectors is lacking, and limited concrete consensus existed between governments, particularly between Northern and Southern governments.

In principle a major two stage summit process sponsored by the United Nations whose theme is the global information society might be expected to dominate or at least substantially influence the agendas and debates of all organizations focused on the field of communication for development, but there is little evidence that this is currently happening.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE OFFICIAL DECLARATION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY, 2003

1. The Declaration recognizes that ICTs are an essential foundation for an inclusive Information Society and embraces the idea of universal, accessible, equitable and affordable ICT infrastructure and services as a key goal of all stakeholders that will help build it.

2. Boosting trust and confidence in ICTs including information and network security, authentication, privacy and consumer protection have been underscored as a prerequisite for the development of the Information Society.

3. ICTs are also important tools for good governance. The Declaration stresses the need to create an enabling environment at the national and international level based on the rule of law with a supportive, transparent, pro-competitive, technologically neutral and predictable policy and regulatory framework.

4. If universal access is the foundation of a true Information Society, capacity building is its motor. The declaration acknowledges that only by inspiring and educating populations unfamiliar with the Internet and its powerful applications will the fruit of universal access ripen.

5. They also recognize that resources must be channelled to marginalized and vulnerable groups, to ensure adoption and empower them.

6. Indeed, the Declaration reaffirms the universality and indivisibility of all human rights as fundamental freedoms in the Information Society, along with democracy and good governance.

7. On the question of Intellectual Property, the Declaration underlines the importance of both encouraging innovation and creativity and the need to share knowledge to spur such innovation and creativity.

8. Key principles also include the respect for cultural and linguistic diversity as well as tradition, religion. On the Internet in particular, that translates to multilingual, diverse and culturally appropriate content.

9. As for Internet management, involving all stakeholders and intergovernmental organizations to address both technical and public policy issues has been underscored. But, overall, the global Internet governance issue was too complex to resolve in detail. Agreement was therefore reached to set up an open and inclusive working group on Internet governance to investigate and make proposals for action prior to the second phase of the Summit in 2005.

10. The principles of freedom of the press, independence, pluralism and media diversity are also upheld.

11. And finally, the Declaration expresses an unconditional support and commitment to close the Digital Divide through international cooperation among all stakeholders.

From WSIS website

The second major constraint facing the Summit process was the debate over the engagement of civil society itself, with increasing frustration felt by civil society organizations at the lack of access to and interaction with the governmental process. In

the end, civil society organizations produced their own declaration from the Summit[7] stating that after engaging for two years in the preparatory process to the Summit that "our voices and the general interest we collectively expressed are not adequately reflected in the Summit documents".

A third set of debates and ones which divided civil society centred on the question of communication rights and demonstrated the continuing difficulties of holding formal debates over the roles and responsibilities of the modern media. This is described in more detail in Section 3.1.4.

3.1.2 ICTs: how wide is the divide?

The digital divide, the main issue designed to be addressed by WSIS, remains stark but its character is changing. According to a recent report from the ITU[8], "sub-Saharan Africa has about 10% of the world's population (626 million) but 0.2% of the world's one billion telephone lines.   Comparing this to all low income countries (home to 50 per cent of the world's population but only 10 per cent of its telephone lines), the penetration of phone lines in sub-Saharan Africa is about five times less that than in the average low income countries….fifty per cent of the available lines are concentrated in capital cities where only about 10 per cent of the population lives."

The same report however suggests a little more optimism in moving towards the millennium development goal on ICTs. "ICTs can alleviate poverty, improve the delivery of education and health care, make governments more accessible and accountable to the people and much more. Target 18 of Goal 8 [of the MDGs] calls upon the declaration's adherents *in cooperation with private sector make available the benefits of new technologies, specifically information and communications…..* Of all the different MDG targets, number 18 is the most open-ended (raising the questions of which ICTs should be made available, to whom and by when), but it is also the one where most progress was made during the 1990s. All of the developing sub-regions of the world have grown their fixed and mobile telephone networks (total teledensity) to greater extent since 1990 than the entire period before that date", says the report.

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[7] This declaration, together with the formal Summit declaration, can be found at www.itu.int/wsis.
[8] World Telecommunication Development Report, ITU, 2003

The spread of mobile telephony has been extraordinarily rapid. In Uganda, the number of mobile phone users has multiplied 131 times in six years – although most of this growth has been in urban areas.[9] Taking Africa as a whole, last year more than 13 million people were added to the mobile phone network. The 2003 World Telecommunication Development Report of the ITU also argues that existing statistics almost certainly underestimate access to both mobile telephony and internet in developing countries and new surveying techniques are suggesting substantially greater access to new technologies than had previously been supposed.

"Most references to the digital divide and the information society revolve around access to the Internet. Yet it is remarkable how little we know about the true extent of internet access, particularly in developing countries......A number of other countries that have started to carry out surveys have found that they had hitherto been underestimating the number of people who access the Internet. An Internet survey carried out in Jamaica in January 2003, for example, found that there were almost 675'000 users in the country, more than twice the figure suggested by previous estimates. A similar phenomenon occurred in Peru, with a November 2000 survey finding twice as many Internet users in the Capital (Lima) alone, than had been previously estimated for the entire country (Figure 2.3). Surprisingly perhaps, these findings suggest that the digital divide may not be as wide in some places as is assumed."

The same report also argues that "radios increasingly fall into the category of having achieved universal service………………Televisions too are on the way to being ubiquitous in many countries. The biggest stumbling block to penetration of these ICTs in the lowest income nations appears to be electricity." [10]

However, there is a very long way to go for new ICTs to even begin to approach a level of universal service or access. Even the radio in some countries remains a minority medium. The Hoot website in India, a respected and often irreverent commentator on media and communication issues in the country, claimed recently that

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[9] Completing the revolution: the challenge of rural telephony in Africa, by Murali Shanmugevelan and Kitty Warnock, Panos 2004
[10] World Telecommunication Development Report, 2003, ITU

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"Using data from Census 2001, a survey concludes that India may be shining but 81 percent of rural households in our country still cannot afford to buy even a black and white television set. And 68 percent of rural households do not own a radio or transistor set. In all the states in the east and northeast India rural television ownership is very low. In West Bengal one out of seven and in Orissa one out of ten rural households are lucky to possess a television set. In Bihar just one out of eighteen rural households has managed to buy a television set. So while TV may give a lot of coverage at election time, millions of voters will not see any of it."[11]

Considerable excitement and interest continues to surround the potential of ICTs. This is a large and complex field and, as has been seen, the subject of many conferences and reports – strategic trends are accordingly difficult to summarise. Nevertheless, a number of trends and questions are perhaps worth highlighting:

- The steady dissolution of the distinction between old and new technologies: increasingly the focus of debate on ICTs has moved towards assessing the importance of new technologies alongside existing communication technologies, particularly radio, and other communication channels. Development agencies and practitioners on the ground are increasingly assessing the whole range of new and old ICTs in the context of whether they meet the information needs of and provide a voice for the poor, and there is particular focus on the potential synergies between new and old technologies.   There are many examples of this approach, but FAO for example in 2003 produce an important book on the interaction between radio and new technologies.[12]

- Translating words into action: after an intensive programme of meetings, conferences, action plans and declarations at the international level over the last five years, questions surround the extent to which words are being translated into strategic action on the ground. Significant resources have been mobilized for deployment of ICTs and many donors have prioritized ICTs, but questions remain about the sustainability of many ICT projects, and the connection between international action plans and concerted action on the ground.

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[11] The media and the verdict of the election of 2004, Hoot Editorial, 13/5/2004, www.thehoot.com
[12] The One to Watch: Radio, New ICTs and interactivity, Ed: Bruce Girard, FAO and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003

- A growing focus on the broader policy and social environment, and creating a healthy environment for ICTs and other communications to flourish is apparent, a focus which complements approaches to directly invest in specific projects such as telecentres etc.

The digital divide remains real but its character is perhaps beginning to become as much one between rural and urban and rich and poor within countries as between countries. The bottom line is that interpersonal communication even in some of the poorest countries are proliferating exponentially and both internet and mobile telephony are contributing to profound social change within countries - perhaps even faster than realised.

3.1.3 Media in developing countries

The briefing for the last roundtable[13] focused on the role of the media in some detail. While debates over the impact and potential of new communication technologies and the digital divide have dominated international discourse on communication in the international arena over recent years, another information revolution has been developing. For the almost 3 billion people on the planet who earn less than $2 a day, it is the structure, ownership, content and reach of the media that is having the most profound impact. The most important trends shaping the media landscape over the last five years have been threefold[14]:

First, a thoroughgoing liberalization and commercialization of media over the last decade in many parts of the world has led to a much more democratic, dynamic, crowded and complex media landscape. This is opening up new spaces for public discourse and civic engagement, particularly in the field of radio; and to a more commercial, advertising-driven media where information and power divides within developing countries between rich and poor, urban and rural are growing.

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[13] www.comminit.com/roundtable2

[14] These arguments have been substantially expanded by this author and others in the Global Civil Society Yearbook 2002 published by the London School of Economics (www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook) and updated more recently in *The other information revolution: media and empowerment in developing countries,* by James Deane with Fackson Banda, Kunda Dixit, Njonjo Mue and Silvio Waisbord in *Communicating in the Information Society, Ed Bruce Girard and Sean O'Siochru,* UNRISD, 2003, full text available at www.unrisd.org.

Second, growing concentration of media ownership—at the global, regional and national levels—is squeezing out independent media players and threatening to replace government-controlled concentration of media power with a commercial and political one.

Third, developing countries are increasingly, not decreasingly, reliant on powerful northern news providers, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Reuters and Cable News Network (CNN), for their international news and information, particularly on stories of globalization, trade and international politics; and in newly democratic countries in the South, and particularly within civil society, there is a renewed and growing frustration at the Southern media's dependence on what are perceived to be partial, biased or at least fundamentally Northern-centric news organizations for international coverage and the setting of news agendas.

This is a complex, contradictory revolution marking an extraordinary transformation over little more than a decade. New freedoms, a blossoming of public debate, a resurgent community radio movement, a proliferation of channels and titles across all media, a dynamic interplay between old and new technologies, the increasingly globalised nature of information and communication industries and connectivities, the loosening of government control over information have all characterized this revolution.

Despite this, when viewed from the perspective of communication for development, a growing crisis may be emerging, a crisis marked by a collapse (or sometimes still birth) of public interest media. A new competitive market among media has brought innovation, dynamism and often greatly enhanced democratic debate, and has in a myriad of cases in many countries brought about profound social change, much of it positive. But while the proliferation of media in the wake of liberalization in many countries was initially marked by an upsurge of public debate on a whole range of issues, evidence is growing that, as competition intensifies, content is increasingly being shaped by the demands of advertisers and sponsors who pay for the newly liberalized media, and an increasingly intense focus on profitability. The result is a more urban biased, consumer oriented media which has diminishing interest in or concern for people living in poverty.

Uganda provides an example of the complexities of this revolution. Little more than a decade ago the country had two radio stations both based in Kampala. Today it has almost 100 mostly commercial, FM radio stations distributed across the country. Talk shows and particularly the Ekimeeza – hugely popular talk shows where as many as 400 people gather to take part in broadcast debates – have provided some of the most compelling programming. However, early enthusiasm for these developments is being tempered by growing fears of both political and economic interference. Newspaper editors have come under increasing pressure from the government when publishing unpopular stories, a draconian new anti terrorism law was passed in the wake of September 11th making it a capital offence to publish material deemed to be promoting terrorism, and earlier this year several radio stations suspended broadcasting when the government clamped down on non payment of license fees – overall there is an increasing focus across the sector on profitability.

Communication for development organizations and practitioners are beginning to adjust to the new environment. DJs are becoming as important as journalists in bringing development issues to public attention. Indeed, journalism as a profession is dramatically changing and concepts such as "development journalism" are arguably under siege. Journalists themselves who want to explore and investigate development stories - particularly issues affecting those from outside the capital, are finding it more and more difficult to get either resources or attention from their editors. Never a rewarding and always a difficult profession, investigative journalism is arguably becoming steadily less attractive and there is little incentive and decreasing inclination among many journalists to focus on development issues since this is a poor career move. With no paying market for poverty related content, incentives for journalists, editors, publishers and owners to prioritise it are also declining. Journalism training is also under pressure, particularly with a public interest remit, and journalism schools in some developing countries are finding that graduates are as often snapped up by the public relations and advertising industries as they are by news organizations.

The former state monopoly broadcasters and media organizations, who retain the greatest capacity to reach rural and marginalized populations, are facing intense competition from commercial organizations as governments reduce budgets. As a

consequence many are in crisis.   As well as a shift to more commercially and consumer oriented content, there are reports of cutting of language services, particularly in minority languages and of transmitter capacity. In this sense, the digital divide is being reflected in a much broader, deeper and perhaps more fundamental information divide between urban and rural, rich and poor.

Communication strategies are changing in other ways too. A decade ago it was often possible to reach an entire population through a partnership with one monopoly government broadcaster enabling the widespread dissemination of messages on development issues, as well as soap operas and agricultural extension programmes. With an increasingly crowded and fragmented media environment, together with the cuts in budgets and other pressures facing many former monopoly broadcasters, such simple dissemination is more difficult.

Many development agencies are responding to the new commercialized media market by actively entering it, and some of the most consistent customers for some radio stations are development organizations and donors.   Income from development organisations – in the form of payment for spots or sponsorship of programmes - is becoming an increasingly critical component of some broadcast organizations income, but fears are growing that an artificial market is being created and that public are receiving information determined by whatever organization – development or otherwise - has the most money, rather than through any journalistic or public interest criteria.

The two revolutions – in ICTs and in media – are offering important new opportunities as well as new and complex challenges. Above all else, the new environment demands a new approach to communication for development, one that reaffirms and builds on long held principles of participatory communication advocated by FAO, but also adapts to and develops new approaches which take full advantage of the opportunities of the new communication environment. In communication environments that are so increasingly networked, communication practitioners are decreasingly focused on disseminating messages and increasingly focused on catalyzing public and private dialogue so that communities can act collectively to develop solutions to their own problems.

The Changing Communication Environment	
Traditional	New
• Vertical patterns of communication – from government to people	• Horizontal patterns of communication – from people to people
• Unipolar communication systems	• Communication networks
• Few information sources	• Many information sources
• Easy to control – for good (generating accurate information to large numbers of people) and ill (government control and censorship)	• Difficult to control – for good (more debate, increased voice, increased trust) and ill (more complex, issues of accuracy)
• Send a message	• Ask a question

3.1.4 Media, Freedom and Poverty – a difficult debate

The trends and issues highlighted here over the relationship between media and the public interest internationally, including in developing countries, are poorly researched and mapped and receive little attention in discussions on communication for development.

The role of the media in the modern information society received scant attention at the World Summit on the Information Society, with new communication technologies having a much stronger focus. This is unsurprising given the sensitivities and concerns both of media and a broad cross section of civil society of governmental deliberation or interference in defining the responsibilities of media. Debates over the connection between media and poverty seem unlikely to progress substantially within the context of the next phase of the WSIS, and the opportunities of drawing into such a debate the essential participation of the mainstream media itself appear slim.

However if, as this paper suggests, some of the most urgent issues facing the communication for development field is the growing disinterest of much mainstream media in issues of poverty (a phenomenon common both to developing and industrialized countries), new ways of engaging in a dialogue with mainstream media organizations are increasingly urgent.

The long standing difficulties and problems associated with debates over the role of the media in relation to development surfaced prominently in the approach to WSIS. In the run up to the WSIS process, a significant number of information and communication NGOs had come together with a central vision "grounded in the Right to Communicate, as a means to enhance human rights and to strengthen the social, economic and cultural lives of people and communities. "

This grouping, Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS), was highly effective both in assembling a large number of civil society and media advocacy organizations globally working on issues of information, and in engaging positively and highly efficiently in the WSIS preparatory process. However, criticisms were expressed by some media freedom organizations over some articulations of this right to communicate, most notably by the World Press Freedom Committee and Article IXX who feared that successful establishment of such a right may lead to efforts to impose controls over an independent media (further information can be found at www.crisinfo.org, http://www.article19.org/docimages/1512.doc and a particularly strongly worded attack by the World Press Freedom Committee published on the US State Department website (http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/20101.htm).

The debates, redolent to some extent of those of the New World Information and Communication Order in the 1980s, were sometimes bitter and exemplified the continuing challenge of opening up a serious international public debate of the role of the media in the 21st Century. While social advocacy organizations continue to become increasingly concerned with the power and lack of accountability of an increasingly concentrated and consumer oriented media, media freedom organizations remain concerned about any formal attempt to erode hard won media freedoms.[15]

The intimate connection between public discourse and dialogue through the media and poverty and other issues of social concern has been highlighted for many years, but open and constructive discussion of these issues has often proved difficult. The rapidly changing communication environments in some of the poorest countries on the planet

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[15] In an attempt to reconcile some of these arguments, the Panos Insitute organized a symposium on *Media, Freedom and Poverty* at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio conference centre in October 2003 consisting of people expressing different perspectives on these issues. A statement from the meeting, one of a series focused on issues relevant to communication for social change, reflected a new level of consensus on this issue (see www.panos.org.uk).

and the growing importance of communication for alleviating poverty suggest that new ways of discussing these issues, with the central inclusion of mainstream media and affiliated organisations, is becoming increasingly urgent.[16] Currently however, credible fora which can bring together mainstream, alternative and social advocacy organizations, as well as government and development decision-makers on these issues are in short supply. Given the experience over the years such a debate would almost certainly need to be led by non governmental (particularly media) actors.

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[16] Such issues have been highlighted, particularly in relation to the promotion of alternative media, at the Our Media Conferences, most recently held in Porto Alegre in July 2004. More details can be found at www.ourmedianet.org.

4 The contradictory funding picture

As this paper has sought to indicate, there is no shortage of compelling arguments why the field of communication for development is becoming increasingly critical in meeting the millennium development goals.   Trends on bilateral and multilateral policy on communication have, with important exceptions, rarely been more difficult to discern.

Those organisations who have gone through a detailed strategic discussion on the role of communication in development have tended radically to increase both funding and staffing for it. The UK Department for International Development is the most prominent example of this. Five years ago, Dfid was an organisation with relatively little historical interest or expertise in communication for development. After a series of strategic discussions and reviews within the organisation, it came to a strategic conclusion that the role of communication had become essential to meeting its overall development objectives.[17] Dfid has very substantially increased its investment in the area, has sought to work in structured and strategic partnership with other donors, has substantially increased its staffing and in house expertise and supported and helped initiate a series of large scale information programme (including the Catalysing Access to Information and Communication Technologies in Africa [CATIA] programme and Building Communication Opportunities).   Perhaps most importantly it has substantially reorganised its internal structure to reflect both the importance of the issue and the multi sectoral character of communication for development programming and support. Creating an information and communication for development (ICD – a deliberate shift away from the earlier ICT or technology focus) team, the organisation brings together in one structure expertise on media programme support, HIV/AIDS communication, knowledge management, ICT programme support, research and external communication functions. The organisation is actively developing partnerships with other donors to work collaboratively and strategically in supporting information and communication for development activities.

However, officials in many other bilateral organisations particularly in Europe generally highlight a rapidly diminishing strategic engagement in the communication with several

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[17] See in particular *The significance of ICTs*

reports of a decreases in funding and policy confusion in relation to communication[18]. There are several reasons for this.

- Diminishing budgets: budgets are under increasing pressure, including for example in the Netherlands Foreign Ministry, one of the most prominent and experienced supporters of media and communication in development where overall development budgets have been substantially reduced. [19]

- Budget support in countries and reduction in internationally allocated budgets: There has been a rapid shift among many donors toward spending money through budget support to governments and through country level missions. This has often meant that strategic policy on issues such as communication, and global spending on communication, has diminished, sometimes very rapidly. Some of the Nordic governments in particular, all of whom have been among the most prominent, sustained and pioneering donors toward media and communication support over more than twenty years appear to be substantially reducing their commitment in the field. In Sida for example, many global programmes including those on media and communication have been very substantially reduced in 2004 as a result of reallocation of budgets from global to country missions.

- A diminishing interest in communication for development: there is little evidence of this with many organisations attaching a new priority to communication for development. Reductions in funding to this field where they have happened do not appear to have resulted from any considered strategic decisionmaking related specifically to communication for development.

- Results based management: there is a general and understandable trend towards results based management, value for money and a growing need to

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[18] These conclusions are derived from a presentation made at a Communication Initiative meeting of November 2003 by the author based on interviews with bilateral staff, and more informal discussions since. They are not the product of a rigorous survey and should not be taken to reflect the official position of any of the donors mentioned. Descriptions of policy are those made by the author, not necessarily those of the donors concerned.

[19]However, an overall reduction in development assistance budgets can no longer be seen as the generic trend that was established during the 1990s, particularly since the Financing for Development Summit in Monterrey, Mexico in 2002 where donors pledged an additional $16 billion in development assistance. See Reality of Aid report 2004 for more detailed mapping of trends of development assistance over the last decade, including severe criticism that neither the amount of aid nor development policies are sufficient to meet the Millennium Development Goals. www.realityofaid.org.

highlight benefits of development assistance for the spending country. Communication interventions can take a long time to achieve substantial and sustained benefits and benefits are often difficult to quantify. However, as several reports have suggested over recent years[20], impact measured over short 3 or 5 year project timelines is often not sustained in development projects, particularly in communication, whereas sustained impact on poverty over a period of 10 or 15 years can sometimes only be demonstrated through evaluation over that time. This creates real problems for results based management which is, according to some critics (including within donor organisations) sometimes more interested in products and outputs measurable over the project cycle than it is with lasting impact.

- Rapid staff turnover within many development agencies: communication is a complex field in need of clear and long term strategies and strong institutional memory. Policy is often weakened by rapid staff turnover.

- While donor organisations have become increasingly committed to listening to the voices of the poor and civil society generally, there can still be a real reluctance to surrender control of the communication process.

Part of the solution to these problems lies with the communication community, particularly the need for a clearer articulation of why communication is essential to meeting the millennium development goals, and for more effective evaluation mechanisms appropriate to new communication environments.

Nevertheless, given the long tradition and institutional expertise that resides among many European bilateral agencies, the growing recognition and relevance of communication to meeting today's challenges it is incumbent on major donor organisations to go through a much clearer strategic analysis of communication for development issues.

The picture of communication strategies and funding from the multilateral agencies will be discussed at the roundtable meeting.

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[20] See Missing the Message for example, ibid.

5 Conclusion: a fresh urgency is needed

Recent debates and much of this paper (and other papers prepared for the Roundtable) have been preoccupied with different models and approaches to communication. They have focused on diffusion, participatory, advocacy and many other communication models.

There is increasing evidence that those communication programmes that tend to attract the most resources – particularly those that promise to deliver concrete, quantifiable changes in individual behaviours over limited time frames – are too often unsustainable, insufficiently rooted in the cultures in which they operate, have limited lasting impact and run up against more fundamental social barriers to change. On the other hand, more participatory, bottom up models of social change communication sometimes fail to attract more resources because impact is so difficult to evaluate in the short term and because they are often difficult to programme at scale.

Such debates over different approaches to communication have been taking place for some time. The roundtable process has concluded repeatedly over many years that communication for development should by definition be rooted in and be dominated by the perspectives of people who have most to win or lose from the development process. The increasingly complex and horizontal communication environments in which development strategies are currently deployed, the ever increasing focus on the importance of ownership, as well as the lessons of recent failures of mainly vertical and top down communication strategies – particularly in substantially mitigating the HIV/AIDS pandemic - all strongly reinforce this perspective.

The increasing marginalisation of the poor from public discourse at a time when such voices are so critical, the critical role of communication in conflict situations and in creating bridges between cultures, the enormity of the HIV/AIDS and other public health catastrophes, the importance of creating more knowledge based societies, the challenges of making globalisation work for the poor – these and other urgent communication challenges prompt a fundamental question. Why does communication still attract comparatively few resources, and when it does attract such resources, why

are resources available principally for implementing short term difficult to sustain communication interventions? More fundamentally, how well equipped is the communication for development community to answer a simple question – what really works well now?

There is mounting evidence that a huge amount works well now. As the Communication Initiative website has revealed over recent years and continues to demonstrate (www.comminit.com),   there are an extraordinary range and number of high quality and innovative communication interventions being implemented by many thousands of organisations and practitioners worldwide. This is one of the most dynamic fields in the development arena. The problem in terms of investment and funding policy is its very richness, particularly because the true impact of much of the best current communication is rooted in its character as a complex mosaic of locally rooted but very diverse interventions.

One of the continuing central challenges facing the communication community is to find more effective ways of directing more resources to such communication in ways that large development organisations can support at scale. There are important examples of outstanding communication initiatives with extraordinarily detailed and impressive evaluation methodologies and which are being developed at scale.[21]   Nevertheless, communication for development suffers because of the difficulties of replication and taking to scale, and limited attempts systematically to review the best of communication for development experiences and apply the lessons and best practices more broadly.

Linked and underpinning all this is the continuing need (and resources) to develop better evaluation mechanisms and tools (including participatory evaluation) that can assess the real impact of the best communication without, by applying them, undermining the central value of the participatory communication approach.

There has probably never been a greater number and richness of communication for development activities being carried out in thousands of projects all over the world than there are now. The arguments for the importance in development of communication for

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[21] Soul City is one example of this: see www.soulcity.org.za

development have never been more compelling. Despite this, and with important exceptions, leadership and strategic cohesion at the international level are not keeping pace with the importance of communication for development in meeting the MDGs.

The Communication for Social Change Consortium

The Communication for Social Change Consortium is a network of practitioners and organizations dedicated to using more sustainable long-term participatory CFSC process rather than more short-term message-driven approaches to development communication. CFSC is a process of public and private dialogue through which people themselves define who they are, what they want and need, and how to act collectively in order to improve their circumstances. This work -- rooted in principles of equity, tolerance, justice, voice and participation – seeks to create enabling environments in which critical shifts in social norms, values and beliefs can occur within societies, leading to more sustained long-term social change. It works with others to develop and apply effective communication strategies which are rooted in the principles and long experience of participatory communication and it does so in ways that are adapted to – and can help shape – evolving communication environments. Among the challenges it is working to address is to develop more rigorous and effective evaluation methodologies and impact indicators for communication for social change approaches, and to explore ways where communication for social change can be more effectively programmed at scale and within the context of large development institutions and strategies.