

Bellagio Statement on the Role of Communication in Meeting the Millennium Development Goals

November 8 - 11, 2004

Preamble

In November, 2004 a group of representatives from bilateral, multilateral and nongovernmental organisations met at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy to explore how communication strategies could support the Millennium Development Goals. The meeting explored the potential of various types of communication (including media support, participatory and interpersonal communication, information and communication technologies and other communication strategies) in meeting the MDGs. The meeting was organised by the Communication for Social Change Consortium with the support of the Department for International Development (DFID), UK. This statement was developed and adopted at the meeting along with a set of Action Points (see separate document).

Rationale

In 2000, the world committed to the Millennium Declaration, and to meeting eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In 2004, prospects for achieving these goals are already in doubt.

To a large degree, success in achieving them rests on participation and ownership. Communication is fundamental to helping people change the societies in which they live, particularly communication strategies which both inform and amplify the voices of those with most at stake and which address the structural impediments to achieving these goals. However, such strategies remain a low priority on development agendas, undermining achievement of the MDGs.

For example:

- *The principal strategy for meeting the primary MDG of halving poverty by 2015 is the implementation of poverty reduction strategies. Despite an emphasis in the PRSP process on participation, poor public understanding, limited public debate and low levels of country ownership threaten successful implementation of this strategy. Similar problems threaten sector wide approaches and budget support programmes.*
- *The goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 will not be met unless rural poverty is addressed. Knowledge, communication and participation are essential to this process. Rural people need to be able to collectively identify and articulate their aspirations, to analyse the options available from rural service providers and to take action. Rural service providers face obstacles to engaging with rural people to identify their priorities and options, as well as to support the articulation of these issues to policy makers. Development agencies and international donors need information about rural poverty for policy development and implementation. Inclusive communication strategies can facilitate the participation and sharing of knowledge between these various stakeholders.*
- *The goal of containing HIV/AIDS by 2015, and allied efforts to increase access to anti retroviral drugs, will not be reached unless more priority is given to communication. Successful HIV/AIDS strategies depend on communication to help people construct a social environment in which behaviour change becomes possible. Through dialogue and discussion, they can convert stigma to support. Where less than 10% of people know their HIV status, communication is needed to ensure that ARVs reach and benefit those who need them. Strategies which place the voices of those affected by HIV/AIDS at the core are essential to effect community based demand for prevention and treatment.*
- *The goal of reducing child mortality is challenged by increasing, rather than decreasing child mortality rates. The global effort to eliminate polio, for example, has been undermined by anti immunization campaigns. Communication strategies that engage dialogue on the issues are critical to successful responses to this challenge. The development of new vaccines*

is likely to face a similar challenge, rooted in distrust, poor public understanding and lack of public debate if not introduced with appropriate communication.

- *High priority on the Development Cooperation agenda is given to enhancing democracy, enlarging participation and strengthening of human rights for poor people. To reach this goal the importance of a two way development communication where the poor populations are given possibilities to share information and have a channel to voice their needs cannot be overestimated.*

Several development agencies are reconsidering and reprioritising communication strategies in response to these and many similar challenges. A Communication for Development Congress, initiated by the World Bank, is planned in 2005. At the same time, communication strategies in many development agencies are fragile, fragmented and unstrategic.

New strategic thinking around meeting the MDGs is now taking place, and communication should be central to this thinking.

Principles

In this context, effective communication can no longer be seen as information dissemination alone. If communication practitioners create and nurture forums for public discussion, they can build support for the MDGs and produce social energy to achieve them. Communication is a two-way process rooted in principles of ownership, participation and voice. These principles were reaffirmed at the United Nations' Roundtable on Communication for Development held in Rome, Italy in 2004.

The changing and complex information and communication environment reinforces this emphasis and creates new communication opportunities, especially if information and communication technologies are used to support people-centred development. Attempts to achieve the MDGs should be based on core principles of development thinking, such as equity, gender sensitivity, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity. Such principles must be

reflected in funding and practice of the communication strategies used by development agencies to meet the MDGs.

Agencies represented were:

Communication for Social Change Consortium, Department for International Development, UK, Food and Agriculture Organization, FEMNET, Finnish Development Cooperation Agency, Netherlands Foreign Ministry, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Unesco, Unicef, US Mission to the UN (Rome), USAID, World Bank, World Bank Institute

This statement was developed by representatives from these agencies but has not been subject to formal approval processes and should not necessarily be taken to reflect the official policy of each of these agencies.