

CFSC Research

Tracking the Impact of an Advocacy Paper

Sponsored by the International Development Research Centre, with support from the Communication Initiative, this study by graduate students at Canada's University of Guelph lays out a methodology for evaluating the impact, effectiveness, dissemination of, and potential applications for, an advocacy paper. It also suggests how to improve the document itself. The authors are Cassie Barker, Heidi Braun, Marshall Gallardo Castaneda, Franklin Kutuadu, Richard Marfo, Pete Sykanda and Rosana Vallejos

1.0 Introduction

This report documents the activities and outcomes of three months of collaboration and evaluation surrounding the advocacy document *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management*. This has been an important exercise for all involved, as it served to reinforce the importance of such publications, and the efforts made by communication advocates in the field of Natural Resource Management (NRM) to emphasize its role and necessity. The experience also stressed some of the limitations of print and electronic media, and the communication of these messages, when measuring effectiveness and utility.

The report structure follows the process of this undertaking, from the background of the document and its evaluation; the activities completed in disseminating and generating feedback on the document; the findings and analysis of both our activities and the feedback; and our recommendations on future dissemination and feedback. This section examines the background and purpose of both the document and this project.

1.1 Booklet Background

The document *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management* was written by Ricardo Ramírez and Wendy Quarry, and published in early 2004 by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Ramírez and Quarry have been collaborating with the Communication for Development Group at FAO and IDRC to update a useful but outdated FAO communication advocacy publication, such as *Communication: A key to human development* (1994). Wendy Quarry explains:

Given that the document is at least 10 years old and that there have been many changes in thinking around communication since its production, we felt we needed something more up to date for the same purpose. That thinking and a lot of discussion with IDRC and FAO has led to the new version.

Communication for Development is intended to be the first of two updated publications focused on the function and planning of communication in Natural Resource Management (NRM). Its design started with an audience research phase, followed by inputs from several communication specialists, a peer review, a “field test”, and many rounds of editing and revising.

1.2 Booklet Purpose

This publication is an introductory resource for decision-makers in NRM, intended to be used by communication advocates as a support to a face-to-face discussion with NRM managers and decision-makers. As stated in the *Communication for Development* Foreword:

This document presents, through stories and examples, the experience of many people and projects worldwide where communication methods and approaches have been applied to address natural resource management problems. It is a joint effort between IDRC and FAO to help decision-makers, planners and practitioners understand why and how communication for development activities can support sustainable natural resource management and rural development efforts.

1.3 Initial Dissemination and Feedback

At the time of its publication, no strategy was in place for dissemination to key Communication for Development advocates, nor a feedback mechanism on its effectiveness as an advocacy tool. Initially, 2000 copies were printed; over 40 hard copies were sent to contributors. Hard copies were available at the United Nations Roundtable on Communication for Development, September 6-9, 2004, in Rome, and at

the Snowden Symposium on Communication for Social and Environmental Change at the University of Guelph, October 5-6, 2004.

The need for dissemination and follow-up was identified as important by the authors and by Guy Bessette of IDRC during the Rome Roundtable. They all shared concerns as to its limited distribution and usage in the field. Guy Bessette, Senior Program Specialist at IDRC, and Ricardo Ramírez identified listservs of NRM decision-makers for dissemination, and explained the possibility of facilitating a discussion about the document through an electronic forum (e-forum) with the Communication Initiative (see Text Box 2).

1.4 Project Justification

The School of Environmental Design and Rural Development and IRDC signed a contract with an understanding that a group of graduate students in Ricardo Ramírez's REXT*6311, Extension Theory and Methods course would take on the task, which is elaborated below.

2.0 Project Activities

The following section outlines our group's activities for the dissemination of the IDRC/FAO publication and the operation and management of the e-forum discussion.

The activities for this project were a direct result of the Terms of Reference outlined in our contract (No. 109295):

- a) Make the document known through a number of listservs and facilitate a debate around it.
- b) Design and implement a communication study to ascertain several questions such as:
 - How is this document being used/likely to be used?
 - Is it reaching/likely to reach its intended audience?
 - Is it having an impact/likely to have an impact in the form of decision-makers actively seeking more information on issues or allocating resources to communication efforts?
 - Is it being used/likely to be used in ways that were not foreseen?
 - What are the lessons we can derive in terms of the design, publication and distribution of advocacy papers?

- c) Propose a communication strategy to complete the actual distribution list for the publication and other publications in the same Devcom-ENRM field.

2.1 Dissemination

Our dissemination strategy for the publication consisted of the following steps:

- Identification of the listservs to target for dissemination. The listservs we targeted were those that served the interests of communication specialists and NRM decision-makers, the intended audience of the publication (see Appendix 1 for information regarding the listserv specialization).
- Contacting the Listservs. Once a list of listservs had been assembled, they were contacted to gain consent.
- Dissemination to the Listservs. Our goal with dissemination was to make the publication widely accessible in both the Communication for Development and NRM sector. Though the message was sent to several listservs, we were unable to obtain confirmation of how many actually distributed the message to their members.

Box 1: The Self-propagating Dissemination

Prior to the commencement of the e-forum, we discovered that a member of one of the listservs contacted had taken our e-forum invitation, altered it, and sent it on to another listserv he/she was affiliated with. This suggests that the dissemination and invitation will not stop at the listservs we contacted. Listservs and e-forums create an excellent opportunity for continued dissemination by raising awareness through networking and word of mouth.

We placed a great deal of emphasis and time on the wording and format of the dissemination letter in order to entice as many people as possible. In addition to dissemination, we also took the opportunity to begin the process of advertising for the upcoming e-forum. The dissemination letter included a link to the publication from the FAO server, as well as directions to the e-forum registration.

The first dissemination message was sent January 28, 2005 to the World Bank e-forum on Communication for Development. A message to the listservs and

publication contributors followed on February 18, 2005. (Refer to sections 3.2 and 4.2.1 for further information regarding the e-forum.)

2.2 The Process and Management of the e-forum

The process and management of our e-forum was as follows:

- **Invitations:** An invitation to participate in our e-forum was sent out to at the same time as the document was distributed (see Appendix 2). A personalized invitation was also sent out to those people who had received a hard copy of the publication at the time of printing (see Appendix 3). (See Appendix 4 for a list of those contacted with a personal invitation to participate in the e-forum.) Unfortunately, a number of these people could not be contacted as their e-mail addresses were no longer valid.
- **E-forum Timeline:** The e-forum began on February 28, 2005, and continued until March 16, 2005; a total of 17 days.
- **Generating Discussion:** Throughout the duration of the e-forum, we worked to stimulate discussion regarding this publication; we asked questions aimed at encouraging debate and discussion among NRM practitioners regarding the impact and use of communication in NRM. The questions asked of the participants in the e-forum were directed by those found in the terms of reference of our contract. These questions were designed to be direct and focused in order to solicit responses that were specific to this publication. The questions were posted in a particular sequence in order to solicit focused responses and to create a logical flow for the discussion.

Box 2: Why an e-forum?

The decision to hold an e-forum was made by Guy and Ricardo at the outset of this project. As a central objective of the project was to hear from as many policy makers, communication, and NRM professionals as possible, this format provides the easiest way to facilitate a discussion with people from around the globe.

An e-forum provides a convenient, low cost method for gathering and exchanging information for a publication, and an easy medium for dissemination. To our advantage, Chris Morry offered to donate his time and the Communication Initiative server (www.comminit.com) to host the e-forum.

Box 3: Our e-forum Questions

1st Question: How is the document *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management* useful for reaching policy makers in order to raise awareness of the importance of communication for addressing Natural Resource Management (NRM) issues?

2nd Question: What do you think could be the possible impacts of this document for development communication in NRM? And to those who have used this document what has been the actual impact of the use of this document in communication for NRM?

3rd Question: There is concern that this document is not being used for its intended purpose – communication and advocacy in natural resource management. What do you think are the major limitations of this document (format, design, dissemination, etc.)?

4th Question: Can you think of any other strategies that might be more effective for advocacy on the issue of communication in natural resources management?

5th Question: To help us evaluate this e-forum, we are wondering if you think that using e-forum discussions is an effective tool for discussing publications and communication issues?

Our group met regularly to discuss the progress of the e-forum, discuss recent postings, develop additional questions and decide on any other actions that needed to be taken. Summaries of the main points that arose from e-forum contributions were provided for participants at the end of week one and at the closing of the e-forum. Two of our group members served as moderators throughout the discussion, posting introduction messages (see Appendix 5) and summaries, presenting our questions, and facilitating the debate. As we approached the original closing date for the e-forum on March 11, 2005, we made the decision to extend the discussion for an extra five days to allow for further discussion and contributions.

Chris Morry and Dax Harvey from the Communication Initiative, and Deborah Heinmann from the online publication *The Drumbeat*, were all integral to the success of the dissemination and e-forum discussion. Chris acted as our e-forum guide, helping us with useful strategies for conducting an e-forum discussion, and warning us of the pitfalls. He kept us informed of the number of participants registered, advised us on the clarification of our questioning format and timing, and gave us general advice on process (the dissemination process, sending of reminders, opening letter format, etc.).

Submissions made to the e-forum were screened by the staff at the Communication Initiative, and a selection of the most relevant and interesting contributions were posted on the website.

3.0 Findings

The following are the results of our efforts to disseminate the document and invite participation in an e-forum discussion. A summary of the contributions and suggestions that were put forth during the on-line discussion is also included (analysis of these findings follow in section 4.0).

3.1 Dissemination of the publication

The booklet was widely publicized through selected listservsⁱ, the Communication Initiative Web site, the Drum Beat newsletter and the World Bank e-forum on communication.

Although it is difficult to conclude exactly how many people may have accessed the document as a result of the dissemination activities, the hit counter on the FAO site where the document is posted indicates that the number of visitors increased dramatically. Prior to dissemination, a total of 29 views and 22 visits were logged by the FAO server. (View is the number of times the page has been accessed. A visit is different from a view in that the visit counts only unique IP addresses that access the page. One might view the page three times, which would be tracked as 1 visit, 3 views.)

In February, following the dissemination and invitation efforts, 320 views and 198 visits were recorded. This *11-fold increase in views* and *9-fold increase in the number of visits* demonstrates a clear increase in interest, which can be attributed to the promotional activities carried out by our group.

3.2 Participation in the e-forum

At the start of the e-forum on February 28, 37 participants had registered. Participation grew minimally throughout the 17-day discussion and the final count of participants reached 42 on March 16, the closing date of the e-forum (see appendix 6 for a list of e-forum participants).

Overall, registration numbers were lower than we had hoped for considering the number of listservs contacted and their extensive distribution networks, and certainly low in comparison to the World Bank e-forum on Communication for Development, with 711 registered participants. This consequently had an impact on the number of contributions made to the e-forum. Throughout the 17-day on-line discussion, a total of 23 posts were made to the e-forum site. The posts included:

- Thirteen responses and comments relating to the e-forum questions, made by nine participants.
- Two informational posts related to another resource material of interest to participants.
- Eight contributions from the e-forum moderators including a welcome message, questions, summaries and concluding remarks.

These results indicate:

- A 21 percent participation rate (nine participants out of 42 contributing responses to the questions).
- Out of the nine respondents, three posted more than one contribution.

Based on an evaluation of e-forum participation by Piotr Mazurkiewicz (from the Development Communication Division of the World Bank) who has organized over ten e-discussions, he affirmed that a typical e-forum sees a 15-20 percent participation rate. Participation in our e-forum was therefore on par with this trend.

It was observed that the majority of participants who made contributions to the e-forum are specialists in the field of Communication for Development, though many also have a background or experience in the domain of NRM. The implication of this is further discussed in section 4.2.1.

Overall, we felt that the e-forum attracted a small group of participants and as a result, the number of contributions was few, relative to our expectations and in comparison to the World Bank e-forum. In spite of this, the quality of responses was quite encouraging and several insightful comments were generated.

3.3 Contributions to the e-forum

As outlined in section 2.2, the format of the e-forum worked to stimulate debate and discussion by posting specific questions to be addressed. The questions asked (see box 4 in section 2.2) addressed the following themes:

- Usefulness of the document for reaching policy makers.
- Impact of the document.
- Limitations of the publication.
- Suggestions for improvement and alternative strategies.

What follows is a synopsis of the main ideas and common issues expressed in the participants' contributions. A selection of direct quotes taken from the e-forum responses has also been included to allow the participants' words to underscore and add depth to the summarized interpretation of these findings. The full postings and archives from the e-forum can be viewed at:

<http://www.comminit.com/discussion.html?action=viewtopic&topicid>

3.3.1 Usefulness of the document for reaching policy makers

The respondents felt that the document presents valuable information, experiences and best practices relevant to a discussion on communication for development. The issues are presented in a clear and simple format, and key concepts that are useful to development workers, researchers and communication practitioners are highlighted throughout. Most of our respondents felt that the content provides excellent references, stories and perspectives that are essential for development communication. The document constitutes an important tool to complement or perhaps replace the old FAO document *Communication: a key to human development* by Colin Fraser and Jonathan Villet.

I think this document is particularly helpful in that it provides solid case studies in an easily readable format and places them in the context of innovative but widely embraced development thinking and theory. (Chris Morry)

The biggest strength of this document is its crisp handling of development communication in NRM. It introduces readers to the idea of innovation – a timely attempt, I feel. (Bharati Joshi)

I must say that Ricardo and Wendy's document (...) is crisp, clear, well presented and accessible. It uses graphics and photographs well and provides a good description of both the history and the challenges of developing

participatory communication. It finds a good balance of description and examples. (Iain McLellan)

Overall, most participants felt the document is a useful tool for raising awareness about communication and its importance in NRM issues. Moreover, it is deemed relevant to the current development context. Based on the responses received, this booklet is being used at seminars and workshops in conjunction with other publications from the FAO and the Communication Initiative. Many view it as an introductory tool for development communication in NRM. This booklet is also being used to strengthen the case for communication among practitioners and policy makers in the field of NRM.

3.3.2 Impact of the Document

Relatively few participants responded regarding the impact of the booklet. However, most participants observed that the booklet had potential to influence change and emphasize the importance of communication if coupled with complementary communication tools. The participants noted that the context and specific circumstances could affect the possible impact of the usage of the booklet. This was evidenced in the story contributed by one of the participants as captured in Box 5.

The participants indicated that the process of engaging policy makers' interest in participatory communication methods could be "messy" because they pose a challenge to existing procedures and norms. As these may be difficult to change, the greatest care should be taken in introducing such ideas.

Box 5: Contextualizing Usage and Impact

The following story, contributed during the e-forum, highlighted the unique contextual realities that affect the use of the booklet. Wendy Quarry refers to a meeting with a deputy minister in Afghanistan who read the booklet and offered his feedback.

He read the paper carefully and came back with 2 scenarios. First was his take on the ideas speaking as someone outside of government - he told me that he greatly enjoyed reading the stories. He also said that after reading each story he would sit back and ask himself - how could this be done in Afghanistan? Next he told me that he went through it again remembering his role in the government. Then he said that many of the ideas and stories seemed slightly fearful - that as a government servant he realized that some ideas might lead to loss of control for the government.

Wendy Quarry

3.3.3 Limitations of the Document

Despite the anticipated role of the booklet as an aid in the promotion of communication in NRM, the booklet is not without its own inherent limitations. Responses from the e-forum revealed that many people were not clear as to the intended audience of the document. In the words of one respondent:

I thought that it was more of a tool for project planners and they would use some of it for decision makers? Could someone clarify the audiences for this document please? (Heidi Schaeffer)

Another concern was the monolingual nature of the document, which restricts access to those who are not proficient in English. The online dissemination of the booklet was also criticized.

Participants' responses further indicated that the booklet was tailored to practitioners and policy makers with prior knowledge and understanding of communication and NRM, making it difficult for those without this background to use the document for policy advocacy. As one of the participants remarked:

Regarding the usefulness of the document with policy makers, I consider that the publication would have a limited "effect" unless the policy makers are already "converted" to Communication Development, or at least interested. Convincing policy makers normally depends on factors such as policy priorities, high visibility of the results, measurable outputs, etc. (Mario Acunzo)

The booklet alone cannot achieve the expected results, as there is a need for interaction between development practitioners and policy makers for the advocacy message to be heard. This was eloquently put forward by one of the participants, who stated that:

I think booklets of such nature are ideal for people already engaged in implementation who could use steps and ideas to deepen their experience- I think you always need the human interaction to make something stick. (Wendy Quarry)

The publication was criticized for portraying success stories, which indicate that the process is smooth sailing once you engage in it; they felt this was idealistic and not the reality. Hence, a shortcoming of the document was its failure to convey the learning aspect involved in communication processes, which involves conflict, making mistakes, and working to overcome such barriers.

3.3.4 Alternative Approaches

The participants proposed ways of improving the document and alternative strategies for communication in NRM. They expressed that the document should start with a general discussion on communication, emphasizing its importance and encouraging its usage, as opposed to the narrow focus on NRM:

I feel that the document should begin with “communication”, rather than natural resources management, and dispel straightaway any beliefs about communication being a one-way process, that the prospective reader(s) may have in her/his/their mind(s) when the document is picked up for a read. Also the power of communication should be brought out at the outset, more forcefully. (Bharati Joshi)

It was also suggested that other forms of media should be used so that efforts at reaching policy makers would be all embracing and encompassing. The stories could be packaged into radio and video messages as well as with a toolkit to reach the policy makers.

One item would be a guideline for organizing a special event, speech and press release to highlight the importance of Communication and NRM. My experience is that policymakers are susceptible to speech opportunities and press. It is a good entry point to communicate with them about a key NRM issue (eg. Water pollution/shortages, illegal forest excisions, etc.). What can be done is to encourage policymakers to see the issue as a relevant and important cause to champion. (Helen Hambly)

Some participants also recommended the translation of the document into other languages, and hard copy dissemination instead of an online version. Another proposed strategy was a complementary “how-to” document alongside the current one. One of the participants suggested that the publication be used alongside the similar FAO text entitled *Communication and Natural Resource Management* (2003) by Warren Feek and Chris Morry, incorporating inputs from these related documents. Finally, the participants stressed the need for a platform for interaction between advocates and policy makers to achieve the desired impact. This was stated unequivocally by one of the contributors to the e-forum:

...we are the first to realize that a document/paper/book rarely is enough to generate change or conviction. We intended that the document is for practitioners to use in their discussions with decision makers. (Wendy Quarry)

In conclusion, respondents commended the efforts made to bring communication in NRM to the attention of decision makers through this publication. Participants also expressed their desire to move beyond short booklets, with how-to pamphlets and toolkits, which employ many forms of media to encourage communication in NRM.

4.0 Analysis

In response to the findings detailed above, the following is a more in-depth consideration of the outcome of our efforts to disseminate the document and host an e-forum, and an analysis of the contributions made.

4.1 Dissemination

The initial dissemination of the booklet was not done strategically. Although it was made available online, only those with an Internet-connected computer could access it; and those who were somehow able to find out about this document and its location would be aware of its existence. Some of the 2000 booklets initially published have not been physically distributed. For instance, there are about 75 copies at Guelph that have not been disseminated. Also there are some copies still in stock at FAO and IDRC offices.

In terms of our efforts, we can safely say that the dissemination was successful. The FAO hit counter demonstrated a dramatic increase in traffic on their document page where the electronic copy is housed, corresponding to the dates of our dissemination messages (January 28 and February 18).

It is difficult to say, however, which avenues were the most effective in generating interest in the document. The listservs contacted initially agreed to forward our message, yet at least two of such listservs failed to notify their membership of our dissemination effort. However, some people took it upon themselves to generate their own messages to separate and unaffiliated networks (see Text Box 1).

Dissemination could have been that much more successful had we branched out from the specified listservs and explored other options, such as distribution to on-line libraries and resource lists.

4.2 E-Forum

Our expectations of this e-forum were high; however the number of responses generated was relatively low compared to that of the World Bank's. Yet, this was counterbalanced by the high quality of the contributions made by our participants.

Chris Morry suggested that e-forums be measured on the basis of their purpose. In the case of this e-forum he commented that:

The main objective as I understood it was to gather informed reflection on the overall advocacy usefulness of the document as it exists now and as it might be improved from people who had some experience both using the document and advocating for NRM Comm4Dev. In this I think you achieved some success.

There were several strong contributions that fit this bill. Whether more would have been better or whether there were serious gaps in the feedback sources is something I can't say, but I do feel you engaged a number of people to provide direct reflections that should help evaluate certain aspects of how genuine users feel about the document.

Chris Morry's comment echoes our general feelings about the e-forum outcomes. The following provides a more in-depth analysis of the various aspects of the e-forum: participation, invitation, topics, timing, accessibility and e-forum as a communication medium.

4.2.1 Participation

Even though the number of participants we had was low with regards to volume; it was not different from that of the World Banks when compared in terms of participation ratio.

Although we made efforts to attract communication specialists and NRM decision-makers, the target audience for this document, we did not necessarily succeed in engaging adequate representation from both groups. The participants who contributed comments represented a narrow group of communication for development specialists—some with experience in NRM, but most with a general knowledge and sensitivity for the issue. As a result, the discussion lacked balance and input from policy makers and those working exclusively in the NRM field.

We did not receive feedback from those directly involved in the NRM field and cannot ascertain if they have been exposed to this document in the past, or are interested in its message. It is not surprising that we failed to get such feedback, given the booklet's low initial dissemination and due to some NRM listservs failure to circulate our message. It is possible that the communication expertise brought to the discussion intimidated or excluded those who are new to the topic of Communication for

Development. This may have skewed the focus of the discussion and the perspective gained by our questions and tipped the balance toward a discussion based on communication issues.

Low rates of participation in the e-forum could be attributed to lack of commitment and low priority to contribute. The World Bank's e-forum could have been a contributing factor as it also dealt with communication for development issues. Those who took time to read the document may have felt it was interesting, but did not necessarily feel compelled or prepared to share their opinion.

4.2.2. Invitation

There was a demonstrated interest in the electronic copy of *Communication for Development* due to our dissemination efforts, yet the e-forum invitation—contained in the same message—drew less attention. This may speak to the message itself, as it could have been ineffective or unappealing to the audience (see Appendix 4). Also, as there was no feedback or confirmation mechanism to ensure the invitation was distributed and received, it is difficult to know whether this was an effective advertising tool.

An additional consideration is our “power to convene.” The hosts were graduate students at the University of Guelph, not professionals in the field representing an internationally known organization (e.g. the World Bank), and this fact may have reduced the incentive to participate in the discussion. Although some of the organizers were able to exploit their personal networks to help solicit discussion, the majority of our team were unable to attract additional participants and contributions due to our relative inexperience in comparison to other professionals or practitioners.

4.2.3. Topic

Unlike general conferences and forums that are relevant to a broader audience, such as the recent World Bank e-forum, our discussion was both focused and specific, as it was tailored to meet the objectives outlined in our terms of reference. The specific nature of

this e-forum is comparable to a focus group, as we sought participation from a particular group of people with experience and in-depth knowledge related to the topic. Despite our attempts to engage a wider network of participants in NRM, the specific topic addressed by the questions failed to stimulate as much debate as we had expected.

4.2.4. Timing

In terms of timing, there were a couple of limitations to our e-forum's success. As most contracts are limited by a rather strict timeline, this project was constrained by the university semester system, and our desire to produce the final product by mid-April. These factors compelled us to combine the dissemination and invitation messages, and to hold the e-forum at the beginning of March. This timeline may not have allowed adequate time for participants to read, understand, and reflect on the document, let alone use it in their work.

The unanticipated World Bank e-forum, which attracted 500 participants constituted similar audience and preceded our own e-forum, ran for three weeks and drew dozens of responses. The fact that our e-forum followed only weeks after the World Bank e-forum, may have caused some fatigue amongst contributors, and reduced people's willingness to sign on to a similar discussion.

4.2.5 Accessibility

The accessibility of this document has been criticised for only being available in English and disseminated electronically. The same concerns apply to the e-forum itself as participation was limited to those who can communicate in English and those who are able to access the Internet.

4.2.6 E-forum as a Communication Medium

The reasons for choosing an e-forum as our communication strategy were mentioned in section 2 (see Text Box 2). It is a convenient and cost-effective medium, whereby the discussion can be filtered, archived and conveniently retrieved. This medium has been frequently used, perhaps overused, and the participants' enthusiasm may not be as

high as when e-forum technology initially emerged. As such, its effectiveness and value as a communication medium are difficult to determine. In essence, the World Bank's forum may have led to e-forum burn-out.

Our moderators made frequent efforts to stimulate discussion and invite feedback, which was reflected in their high ratio of comments relative to the total contributions, yet their efforts were not rewarded. Perhaps it was their inexperience with facilitating this type of online exchange that accounts for the low number of responses.

4.3 Document Analysis

4.3.1. Usefulness

The utility of this booklet has been repeatedly acknowledged, and with the success of its dissemination there will likely be increased interest and potential for applying it in an advocacy capacity. However, the contributors who registered as participants, and have had hard copies of this document for over a year, had little to contribute in terms of practical applications. Given the many recommendations made by participants as to repackaging and reformatting the booklet and its messages, there are ways this publication could be enhanced and affect NRM decisions. This is particularly important when the limits of policy makers' time and attention are taken into consideration.

4.3.2 Impact

As mentioned above, the lack of feedback on the impact of the document may be an indicator of the weakness of the document itself, but it may also speak to the difficulty of promoting communication components in NRM projects and planning. The authors recognize that the document is not a stand-alone publication, and that a face-to-face meeting that uses *Communication for Development* as a reference document, could dramatically increase its impact on decision-makers. This document is just one tool at the disposal of advocates, but they must also deal with personalities, power dynamics, language barriers and issues of credibility when they are trying to make their case. These factors also have the potential to affect the usage and impact of the document.

4.3.3 Alternatives

The many suggestions for alternatives clearly indicated that the document alone is not enough to engage policy makers on the need for communication in NRM. A multi-media approach would help deal with a variety of advocacy needs and contexts. In addition to the positive experiences recounted in the booklet, other stories that reflected processes for dealing with the messy nature of problems, conflicts and failures could acknowledge the learning that takes place as part of communication initiatives.

Although the alternatives generated were innovative and creative, some were impractical from a time and budget perspective. In addition, some contributions revealed the opposing perspectives on what might be needed to guide communication initiatives. Some participants continue to call for a how-to book to guide planning and implementation; while others warn that following a recipe would not be sensitive or applicable in different contexts.

5.0 Recommendations:

The suggestions made here have been derived from both the feedback of participants and our experience in managing this e-forum initiative. The suggestions have been formulated in such a way that they account for limited resources such as time and money. However, some recommendations encourage an influx of funds for actions that are crucial for improving the dissemination and effectiveness of the booklet.

Some of the recommendations made here may stand alone while others require some level of networking and collaboration with other organization that could provide resources such as already established mailing list or listservs. Collaboration with organizations, such as AgNet, could greatly improve the dissemination of IDRC/FAO publications.

The following recommendations address the issue of dissemination, discuss ideas for the publication the publication and suggest alternative methods to invite feedback. The

recommendations aim to improve the distribution of the publication by suggesting ways to make it more accessible to a wider audience.

5.1 Dissemination Recommendations:

- **Strategy:** Design a dissemination strategy for the publication to resource libraries from the outset. This type of dissemination can be a physical mail-out of the booklet. Resource libraries often act as point of contact for both advocates of NRM and policy makers. This will imply the dedication and commitment of both time and money to implement the strategy. Organize public relations events and press releases with the launch of publications on the topic of NRM to market this booklet and highlight its importance to communication in NRM.
- **Online Distribution:** Further seek out online NRM Libraries such as the one found at Development Gateway Organization, resource lists, annotated bibliographies, and listservs to build networks and continue the dissemination of the booklet. However, it is important to double check with the listservs postings are actually sent to their membership.
- **Physical Distribution:** Distribute the existing hard copies of the publication in order to increase outreach to areas where Internet is difficult or impossible to access. Make the booklet available in conference halls and other organized events where participants can easily acquire a copy and become aware of the publication.
- **Language:** Publish the booklet in other languages in addition to English.

5.2 Document Recommendations:

- **Face-to-Face Interaction:** The publication must explicitly encourage the necessity of face-to-face interactions between Communication for Development and NRM decision makers. This is the one of the most valuable ways for this publication to be truly effective and contextualized.
- **Paring:** Supplement the documentation with other publications to strengthen the impact and learning processes the booklet conveys. Attach a note about other relevant IDRC/FAO documents have been updated.

- **Interactive Format:** Create a CD-ROM format of the publication where interactive menu options, which allow the reader to access individual parts of the publication, toolkits for various sections, and other resource links.

5.3 Feedback:

5.3.1 Alternatives

- **Funding:** Ensure from the outset that money is allocated to support feedback mechanisms, and that resources exist at IDRC and FAO that will be accountable to respond to the feedback
- **Hard Copy Feedback:** On the back flap of the hard copy, invite the reader to fill out mail-in and/or online feedback forms.
- **Electronic Feedback:** Create a permanent virtual space for the discussion of the IDRC/FAO publications. An excellent example of this can be found at www.developmentgateway.org. Unlike an e-forum, this can be sustained for a longer period of time and is not restricted by time or potential e-forum exhaustion. Provide a link to a feedback form at the point of download in order to increase ease of response.
- **Online Feedback:** Create a link to a feedback form after the publication has been downloaded from the FAO website.

5.3.2 E-forum

- **Advertising:** It is essential that advertising for intended e-forum be completed and verified well in advance of the starting date.
- **Accessibility:** An attempt should be made to include participants that speak other languages.
- **Tag along:** Where possible piggyback on other ongoing e-forums to draw attention to your own e-forum initiative. However, caution must be taken as potential participants may not be inclined to part take as a result of e-forum exhaustion.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Regarding the Listservs Contacted

i. Collaborative Management Working Group Listserv (CMWG)

Affiliated with IUCN the CMWG is a group whose members (about 400, but I am afraid some addresses may be expired) are about 1/3 women and about 50 percent from the South. The age spread is quite wide and several are relatively young. They share interest and engagement on co-management issues and are committed to learning about co-management and promoting it in policy and practice.

URL: www.iucn.org

ii. European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) Listserv

40 percent of the readers work with NGOs. The rest is fairly equally spread across research and university (23 percent), consultancy firms (19 percent) and government departments/donor agencies (14 percent). Only three percent are from media. Most have a senior management position from where they provide policy, or technical advice (41 percent). About 25 percent work on implementation, another 25 percent are engaged in research and training. Ten percent work in the area of information management and documentation. Some six percent engage in lobbying and advocacy. As concerns connectivity to the net, 61 percent of the readers have unlimited access and have high speed, connection. Thirty-seven percent have good access to e-mail (which allows them to download the PDF format of *Capacity.org*) but their internet connection is unreliable, slow or expensive.

URL: www.ecdpm.org

iii. Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) Listserv

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000, CTA has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information in this area.

CTA's programmes are organised around three principal activities: providing an increasing range and quantity of information products and services and enhancing awareness of relevant information sources; supporting the integrated use of appropriate communication channels and intensifying contacts and information exchange (particularly intra-ACP); and developing ACP capacity to generate and manage agricultural information and to formulate ICM strategies, including those relevant to science and technology. These activities take account of methodological developments in cross-cutting issues and the findings from impact assessments and evaluations of ongoing programmes.

URL: www.cta.int

iv. Agnet E-mail Forum

The AgNET conference was originally set up in order to extend discussion of the issues raised in Overseas Development Institute's AgREN Network Papers and to provide a

direct link between network members so that a dialogue could be maintained on issues of mutual interest. Whilst it may still be used for this function, the conference has more recently evolved into a 'bulletin board' for the sharing of information. Members are encouraged to use it to request information from other members, and post announcements about relevant publications and events.

To join the conference please send an email to:

agnet-request@odi.org.uk, stating that you saw the details of the conference on the ODI's web page.

ODI's Agricultural Research and Extension Network (AgREN) was established in the mid-1980s to link policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in the agriculture sector of developing countries. AgREN was founded on a strong belief in the importance of information exchange and learning from both positive and negative experience. It aims to provide its members with up-to-date information and the opportunity to maintain a dialogue with others who have similar professional interests.

AgREN currently has around 900 members in more than 100 countries. More than 60 percent of members are based in developing countries. Members come from: international and national aid agencies; national governments in developing countries; university and research institutes; non-governmental organisations, and the private sector.

URL: <http://www.odi.org.uk>

v. Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) Listserv

The Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) is a strategic alliance of members, partners and international agricultural centers that mobilizes science to benefit the poor.

The CGIAR has five areas of focus

- Sustainable production (of crops, livestock, fisheries, forests and natural resources).
- Enhancing National Agricultural Research Systems NARS (through joint research, policy support, training and knowledge-sharing).
- Germplasm Improvement (for priority crops, livestock, trees and fish).
- Germplasm Collection (collecting, characterizing and conserving genetic resources - the CGIAR holds in public trust one of the world's largest seed collections available to all).
- Policy (fostering research on policies that have a major impact on agriculture, food, health, spread of new technologies and the management and conservation of natural resources).

URL: www.cgiar.org

vi. Communication Initiative Online Publication – *The Drumbeat*

The Drumbeat is a weekly electronic publication exploring initiatives, ideas and trends in communication for development.

URL: http://www.comminet.com/drum_beat.html

Appendix 2: Copy of the invitation letter sent out by the listserv moderators

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and International Development Resource Centre (IDRC) recently co-published *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management* (2004)" to support advocacy efforts with policy makers on the role and value of communication in support of natural resource management. It presents, through stories and examples, the experience of many people and projects worldwide where communication methods and approaches have been applied to natural resource management problems. It is designed to help decision-makers, planners and practitioners understand why and how communication for development activities can support sustainable natural resource management and rural development efforts.

While focused on natural resource management many of the examples and ideas will resonate with people utilising communication for development approaches to solve other development problems.

The Communication Initiative, in partnership with seven graduate students in Rural Extension Studies at the University of Guelph, will host an e-forum from February 28th to March 11th to gain an understanding from practitioners and advocates on the various applications and potential effectiveness of this document as an advocacy tool.

We invite you to read the publication:

<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/006/AD661E/AD661E00.htm>

We also encourage you to participate in this discussion by registering for the e-forum on-line at:

<http://www.comminit.com/discussion.html>

Thank you for interest, and we look forward to your inputs.

Cassie Barker, Heidi Braun, Marshall Gallardo, Franklin Kutuadu, Richard Marfo, Rosana Vallejos, Pete Sykanda

Appendix 3: Invitation letter to those given a hard copy of the publication.

Hello,

Our records show that you have received a copy of the publication by Ricardo Ramirez and Wendy Quarry, *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management* (2004) and may have contributed in some capacity to its formation. The publication has been disseminated to a number of listservs that reach natural resource management professionals and communication specialists.

The Communication Initiative, in partnership with seven graduate students in Rural Extension Studies at the University of Guelph, will host an e-forum from February 28th

to March 11th to gain an understanding from practitioners and advocates on the various applications and potential effectiveness of this document as an advocacy tool.

It would be particularly interesting to have your input in this e-forum given your familiarity with this document.

If you would like to review the publication again, it can be accessed at:

<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/006/AD661E/AD661E00.htm>

We encourage you to participate in this discussion by registering for the e-forum at:

guelp@comminit.com

Please indicate your name, your home country, and your e-mail address in the body of the message. We will send you a notification just before the e-forum begins.

Thank you for interest, and we look forward to your inputs.

Cassie Barker, Heidi Braun, Marshall Gallardo, Franklin Kutuadu, Richard Marfo, Peter Sykanda, Rosana Vallejos.

Appendix 4: List of those Contacted with a Personal Invitation for the E-forum

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Appendix 5: Message sent out at the beginning of the e-forum.

Hello and welcome to the e-forum on Communication for Development in Natural Resource Management! The following message further details the objectives, background, guidelines, rules and procedures for this e-forum.

i) Objectives

The aim of this e-forum is to facilitate dialogue among the various stakeholders in the field of natural resource management on the issue of communication as a key component in natural resource management. The discussion will have a specific focus on the IDRC/FAO booklet entitled *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management*.

Specifically the forum seeks to:

- Inquire whether the booklet has been or will be an effective tool to encourage communication in natural resource management programs or initiatives.
- Understand the potential impact of the booklet on design and implementation for communication initiatives in natural resource management.
- Discuss opportunities for improving tools such as this document for communication in natural resource management.

ii) Background to forum

In 2004, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada published a booklet in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) entitled *Communication for Development: A Medium for Innovation in Natural Resource Management*. The booklet was designed as a document that would be shared during face-to-face meeting on the subject of communication between a communication advisor and a natural resource management decision maker. The publication includes stories and experiences that speak to the importance of communication in programs and projects with a natural resource management focus.

Electronic copies of the document are available on-line at:

<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/006/AD661E/AD661E00.htm>

In order to gain feedback from stakeholders, seven graduate students in the Master's program in Rural Extension Studies at the University of Guelph in Canada are hosting this e-forum, in collaboration with the Communication Initiative.

iii) E-forum guidelines

The e-forum will begin Monday, February 28th and run for two weeks, ending on Friday, March 11th. We look forward to your comments and feedback related to this document and its application as a tool to promote communication for development. During this first week of the forum we will focus on the application and impact of the document. In the second week we will address the constraints and evaluate the effectiveness of the format of the publication relative to its goal.

iv) Rules

This e-forum is moderated. The Moderator's role is to screen all messages before they are posted to ensure that they follow the rules and guidelines of the Forum and that they are relevant to the theme of the conference.

Rules of the Forum:

1. Personal Identification: Each Participant should include his/her name and country of residence in any message posted to a discussion.
2. Messages should be no longer than 600 words. For our members in developing countries, access and down-loading may be expensive. Therefore, please do not keep the body of the original text in your replies, except if absolutely necessary for reference.

Make the subject header as descriptive as possible about the message content. In that way, people can more easily decide what messages they want to read. When you respond to a message, keep the original subject heading intact unless it is no longer relevant to the message content.

3. Conduct: Participants may not post libellous or defamatory messages or materials, or links to such materials. Participants may not post messages or materials, or links to the same that are obscene, violent, abusive, threatening, or designed to harass or intimidate another person or entity. The Forum has a global membership. Please exercise tolerance and respect toward other participants whose views may differ from your own. Please remain courteous at all times.

4. Liability and Responsibility: Each Participant is legally responsible, and solely responsible, for any materials, or links to any materials, that such Participant posts to the e-forum. Each Participant agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the Sponsors of the e-forum from any and all liability, damages, costs or expenses, or any claim, action, suit or other proceeding arising out of either any posting that such Participant makes to this e-forum or any unauthorized use of material posted to any such conference by such Participant.

5. Attribution: Participants are assumed to be speaking in their personal capacity unless they explicitly state that their contribution represents the views of their organization. For this reason, Participants should not quote the postings of other Participants as representing the views of the organizations to which those other Participants belong.

6. Intellectual Property Rights and Fair Use: Each Participant retains the intellectual property rights, including copyrights, over any materials, or links to any materials, of such Participant's own creation that such Participant posts to the Forum. However, each Participant authorizes other Participants to make personal and customary use of that work, including creating links to or re-posting such materials to other internet discussion sites but not otherwise to reproduce or disseminate those materials unless such Participant gives permission. Each Participant agrees always to identify the source and author of materials downloaded from the Forum if such Participant re-posts them elsewhere. Additionally, each Participant expressly authorizes the moderators to

reference, summarize, quote and disseminate all or part of such Participant's postings to the e-mail conferences in any summary or other document(s) that may be subsequently prepared.

The moderators of Forum e-mail conferences retain the right to refuse to post any message that they consider to be in violation of the above Rules, to publish the messages posted to the Forum in whole or in part and to modify messages posted to the Forum to ensure compliance with the Rules. The Sponsors may deny access to future e-mail conferences to any Participant determined, in the sole discretion of the Sponsors, to be in violation of the Rules. The Sponsors also retain the right to make copies of the messages posted to the Forum as part of the normal process of archiving the discussions.

v) Leaving the e-forum

Participants can terminate their membership in this e-forum through the login process for the e-forum.

vii) Contacting us

Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions or concerns. We can be reached by email at guelph@comminit.com.

**Appendix 6: Final list of participants in Guelph discussion forum—
Communication for Development in Natural Resource Management**

1. Acunzo, Mario
2. Agnes, Adjabeng
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6. Bray, Ian
7. Brien, John
8. Chatterjee, Ashoke
9. Chaudhuri, Dhurjati
10. Dunn, Alison
11. Duvillier, Laurent
12. Garner, Margaret
13. Gurung, Narendra Kumar
14. Helen Hambly
15. Harvey, Dax
16. Heidrich, Günter
17. Heimann, Deborah
18. Huyer, Sophia
19. Joshi, Bharati
20. K, Sudin
21. Kirana, Chandra
22. Kolshus, Kristin

23. Lombard, Carol
24. Lyimo, Musa
25. Matsuert, Harriet
26. McKay, Blythe
27. McLellan, Iain
28. Morry, Chris
29. Mulhall, Abigail
30. Naikoba Odoi, Nora
31. Nibanupudi, Hari Krishna
32. Ocampo, Marina
33. Protz, Maria
34. Quarry, Wendy
35. Ramirez, Ricardo
36. Rueda, Manuel
37. Schaeffer, Heidi
38. Seiders, William
39. Stiles, Mark
40. Venema, Henry David
41. Wesseler, Gesa
42. Zuleta Palacio, Catalina Alejand