# Module 1 Unit 1

This is a **OPTIONAL READING.**

Mefalopulos, P. (2008). Development communication sourcebook: Broadening the boundaries of communication. Washington: World Bank. [excerpt: ~9 p.]

# DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION SOURCEBOOK

## Broadening the Boundaries of Communication

THE WORLD BANK

Paolo Mefalopulos

# Development Communication Sourcebook

Broadening the Boundaries of Communication

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THE WORLD BANK
Washington, D.C.

## 1.2 The Value-Added of Development Communication in Programs and Projects

The history of development has included failures and disappointments, many of which have been ascribed to two major intertwined factors: lack of participation and failure to use effective communication (Agunga 1997); Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos, and Moetsabi 1998; Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada 1998; Mefalopulos 2003). The same point is emphasized by Servaes (2003: 20), who states, "the successes and failures of most development projects are often determined by two crucial factors: communication and people's involvement."

No matter what kind of project—agriculture, infrastructure, water, governance, health—it is always valuable, and often essential, to establish dialog among relevant stakeholders. Dialog is the necessary ingredient in building trust, sharing knowledge and ensuring mutual understanding. Even a project that apparently enjoys a wide consensus, such as the construction of a bridge, can have hidden obstacles and opposition that the development communication specialist can help uncover, address, and mitigate.

A number of studies have confirmed that a top-down management approach to development is less effective than a participatory one. Bagadion and Korten (1985), Shepherd (1998), Uphoff (1985), and the World Bank (1992) are among those providing data to support this perspective. Development communication supports the shift toward a more participatory approach, and its inclusion in development work

often results in the reduction of political risks, the improvement of project design and performance, increased transparency of activities, and the enhancement of people's voices and participation (Mitchell and Gorove, in module 4, 4.6).

### 1.2.1   Adopting Two-Way Communication from Day One

Communication interventions are often used in ongoing projects, but managers should be aware that their effectiveness is limited by factors that might have emerged since the inception, such as the perceived significance of project objectives, the lack of support by stakeholders, or a number of other potential misconceptions and obstacles that might limit the impact of communication interventions. That communication assessments and strategies can still help when adopted halfway through a project should not affect the recognition that communication initiatives are most effective when applied early in the project cycle.

Even though many practitioners in the new participatory development paradigm advocate the active involvement of local stakeholders from the early stages of an initiative on moral grounds and from a rights-based perspective, participatory approaches have demonstrated their crucial role also in enhancing project design and results sustainability. Hence, participation can be considered a necessary ingredient for successful development, both from a political perspective (good governance and a rights-based approach) and from a technical perspective (long-term results and sustainability of initiatives). Successful communication interventions do not always need to rely on media to engage and inform audiences—they can also rely on more participatory and interpersonal methods, as in the case narrated by Santucci (2005) in box 1.1.

Participation in a project can be conceived in a number of ways—from the most passive (for example, holding meetings to inform stakeholders) to the most active form (for example, collaboration in decision making). Frequently what is often referred to as "participation" in many cases is not, at least not in a significant way. Box 1.2 presents a typology of participation (Mefalopulos 2003) compatible with others, including one used by the World Bank that is presented in module 2.

When not involved from the beginning, stakeholders tend to be more suspicious of project activities and less prone to support them. Conversely, when communication is used to involve them in the definition of an initiative, their motivation and commitment grow stronger. This applies not only in the development context but also in the private sector, as confirmed in a statement by a director of a major private corporation:[8] "It is incredibly irksome and terribly longwinded to get agreement to any action, but it does have enormous benefits—the meetings buy everybody in, and once they get behind the project they'll do anything they can to see it through."

The involvement of stakeholders in defining development priorities has advantages other than just gaining their support. It gives outside experts and managers

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> ### BOX 1.1    Getting Results through Interpersonal Communication Methods
>
> The Rural Poverty and Natural Resources Project, implemented by the Panamanian Ministry of Agriculture, was challenged to improve living conditions in the area of operations (556 communities) by devising microprojects relevant to their realities. Most of the project area had poor infrastructure and high rates of illiteracy. Due to this context, to some complexity in the content, and to the need for capacity building, the communication strategy relied mostly on interpersonal and group methods. Owing to the vast area and the size of the population involved, contracts were made with a number of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide qualified staff in addition to project personnel. These contracts were very helpful in achieving the expected project results, even though the differences in logos of different NGOs and occasional gaps in coordination generated some confusion among stakeholders.
>
> The project supported the creation of 75 Committees for Sustainable Development, which included 6,000 members, almost one per family. Assisted by NGO and project staff, the committees reviewed and approved 1,216 infrastructure and microprojects. In a number of other cases the committees became involved in seeking additional donors and sources of funding. Overall, the project was considered successful, and the communication strategy based on interpersonal relationships was instrumental in achieving such results, which would have been harder to achieve if adopting a media campaign approach.

valuable insights into local reality and knowledge that ultimately lead to more relevant, effective, and sustainable project design. The next example illustrates what can happen when stakeholders' perceptions diverge, and how major problems can arise because of these perceptions rather than because of actual facts.

According to the experts from the Ministry of Land and Water, the initiative was expected to increase crop yield, thus enabling higher food security, better nutrition, and higher income for poor farmers. Unfortunately, the experts did not involve the farmers in the identification, assessment, and planning phases of the project. This lack of proper communication at the initial stages generated suspicions in the farmers (the so-called beneficiaries) and led to misunderstandings and negative attitudes throughout implementation of the project. The cause of these problems, and ultimately of the project failure, was the lack of two-way communication. The end result was the opposite of what was expected—insecurity and frustration on the side of the farmers instead of increased confidence and a better quality of life, as shown in figure 1.1 (Anyaegbunam et al. 2004).
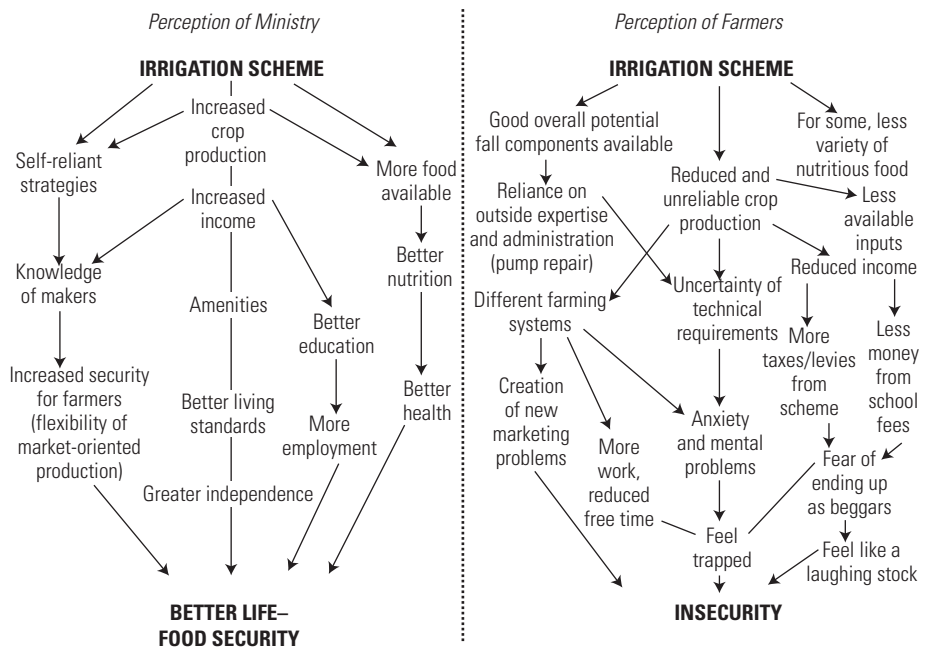
**BOX 1.2** **A Typology of Participation in Development Initiatives**

The table below illustrates a participation ladder, starting from the lowest form, which is merely a form of token participation, to the highest form, where local stakeholders share equal weight in decision making with external stakeholders.

| | |
|---|---|
| Passive participation | Stakeholders participate by being informed about what is going to happen or has already happened. People's feedback is minimal or nonexistent, and individual participation is assessed mainly through head-counting and occasionally through their participation in the discussion. |
| Participation by consultation | Stakeholders participate by providing feedback to questions posed by outside researchers or experts. Because their input is not limited to meetings, it can be provided at different points in time. In the final analysis, however, this consultative process keeps all the decision-making power in the hands of external professionals who are under no obligation to incorporate stakeholders' input. |
| Functional participation par- | Stakeholders take part in discussions and analysis of pre-determined objectives set by the project. This kind of ticipation, while it does not usually result in dramatic changes on "what" objectives are to be achieved, does provide valuable inputs on "how" to achieve them. Functional participation implies the use of horizontal communication among stakeholders. |
| Empowered participation | Stakeholders are willing and able to be part of the process and participate in joint analysis, which leads to joint decision making about what should be achieved and how. While the role of outsiders is that of equal partners in the initiative, local stakeholders are equal partners with a decisive say in decisions concerning their lives. |

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In summing up the body of evidence that has emerged since the 1980s, Rahnema (1993: 117) concludes, "A number of major international aid organizations agreed that development projects had often floundered because people were left out. It was found that, whenever people were locally involved, and actively participating in the projects, much more was achieved with much less, even in sheer financial terms." Other studies of operations in major organizations (Shepherd 1988), such as the United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank (1992), reported similar findings.

**Figure 1.1   Windows of Perception in an Agricultural Project**



*Perception of Ministry*

**IRRIGATION SCHEME**

Increased crop production

Self-reliant strategies

More food available

Increased income

Knowledge of makers

Amenities

Better nutrition

Better education

Increased security for farmers (flexibility of market-oriented production)

Better living standards

More employment

Better health

Greater independence

**BETTER LIFE–FOOD SECURITY**

*Perception of Farmers*

**IRRIGATION SCHEME**

Good overall potential fall components available

For some, less variety of nutritious food

Reliance on outside expertise and administration (pump repair)

Reduced and unreliable crop production

Less available inputs

Reduced income

Different farming systems

Uncertainty of technical requirements

More taxes/levies from scheme

Less money from school fees

Creation of new marketing problems

Anxiety and mental problems

Fear of ending up as beggars

More work, reduced free time

Feel trapped

Feel like a laughing stock

**INSECURITY**

*Source:* Anyaegbunam et al. 2004.

When adopted from the very beginning of the process, such as in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers or in projects formulation, communication activities are ideally poised to facilitate dialog and mutual understanding among relevant stakeholders. Early incorporation of communication allows the use of all available knowledge and perspectives in a cross-cutting investigation and analysis of the situation, minimizing both political and technical risks and, most important, enhancing projects planning and results.

With timely information in hand, project managers can refine a project's scope and objectives with a deeper understanding of the environment in which it will be implemented. In doing so, they can avoid most common mistakes, including those that Hornik (1988) characterized as "the political explanation of failures." Through the unveiling of political and other types of risks, and by seeking a broad consensus and mediating among various positions, development communication helps managers to identify the best strategy to support intended change.

United Nations agencies are increasingly acknowledging the key role of two-way communication in assessing the situation, mitigating risks, and building consensus toward change. In the 10th UN Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development (UNESCO 2007: 29), the various agencies proposed to embed the practice of this discipline in all "UN and international standardized program-based approaches and formats for project development."[9]

To use development communication effectively, managers do not need to know the nuts and bolts of this discipline. It is sufficient to understand its scope and basic functions. The most common obstacles to the effective application of development communication are to be found in the inappropriate timing of its inclusion (typically halfway through the project, once a number of preventable problems may have already emerged) and in relying on inappropriate professional expertise (that is, using a specialist with a different communication specialization other then development communication).

Although it is always advisable to involve a development communication specialist at the earliest stage of a project, assistance can be provided also at later stages. In ongoing projects, the strategic use of communication can help mitigate problems and get a project back on track. Therefore, a two-way communication assessment can be applied in two kinds of situations: explorative, to facilitate the appropriate design of development initiatives from the start, and topical, to support the achievement of the set objectives in ongoing projects (Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos, and Moetsabi 1998).

### 1.2.2  Development Communication for Communication Programs

The two main communication modes presented later in the module—monologic and dialogic—illustrate the expansion of the scope of communication beyond its well-known dissemination functions to include explorative and analytical cross-cutting features. This distinction is also useful in understanding how communication is of great value, not only in initiatives clearly and explicitly requiring communication components (i.e., those envisioning a specific communication component to disseminate information, carry out media campaigns, or advocate for a reform), but also in those that do not appear to have a need for communication (i.e., initiatives not envisioning specific communication or information activities, such as building a bridge or conducting a feasibility study about a reforestation project).

Projects that include communication components are usually related to the support of predefined development objectives. In such cases, the various phases of the communication intervention (that is, research, strategy design, and so forth) remain within the boundaries set by the scope of the project and its indicated goals. The communication assessment will then be focused on identifying stakeholders' needs, perceptions, and risks on the specific issues of interest for the project. On the basis of the assessment, a strategy will be designed to define the communication program aimed at helping to achieve the project goals.

For instance, an environmental project with the objective of preserving an endangered ecosystem might need a communication component to raise people's awareness and knowledge and encourage local people to adopt certain practices. To

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be effective, the communication strategy needs to be based on the stakeholders' knowledge, perceptions, and practices toward the ecosystem. Such information would have been collected during the research phase. This kind of research is usually referred to as communication needs assessment (CNA). It investigates exclusively communication-related issues—information gaps, communication needs and capacities, media environment, and so forth. This differs, or better, it has a narrower focus, from what in DevComm is referred to as CBA or communication-based assessment (see box 1.3), which is discussed in the next session.

### 1.2.3  Development Communication for Noncommunication Projects

Communication for a noncommunication project might seem like an oxymoron, yet this is hardly the case. It basically means that communication is used to investigate, explore, and assess various sectors (health, environment, infrastructure, and so forth), regardless of whether any communication component is envisioned. The dialogical and analytical features of communication are useful for any kind of assessment and for any kind of problem-solving strategy, thus helping managers of development initiatives to prevent conflicts and face unforeseen problems halfway through the project.

For instance, a road-building project might not seem to need the support of communication, yet, contacting the communities involved in the project, listening to their concerns and suggestions, assessing risk and opportunities, or tapping into local knowledge can be of crucial value to the success of the project. Road construction can involve the use of land with special sentimental value to local people (for example, burial grounds) and raising funds for longer-term maintenance, just to mention some issues where communication would make a difference.

Any development intervention involves change of some kind, and as the manager of the Development Communication Division of the World Bank said, "Development is about change and change cannot occur without communication."[10] The limited understanding of communication as a way to disseminate, inform, and persuade fails to embrace the spirit of the new development paradigm, in which communication is used to facilitate participation and generate knowledge.

The interdisciplinary nature of development communication becomes invaluable when conducting comprehensive assessments covering more than a sector. Even when different specialists are able to conduct in-depth assessments for each of the sectors involved (for example, environment, infrastructure, and health), it is often difficult to understand how the issues for each sector are intertwined and what the overall priorities are for different groups of stakeholders. Each specialist can give an accurate representation of his or her specific sector, but there is the need for someone putting together all the pieces in a single consistent frame to avoid the confusion or misrepresentation such as that presented in figure 1.2. In this picture

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**BOX 1.3**  **Comparing and Contrasting CNA and CBA**

CNAs, or communication needs assessments, are typically carried out to investigate, understand, and determine issues directly related to communication, such as the media environment, infrastructure and policies, institutional communication capacities, information gaps, formal and informal information flows, and networks. They can be effectively used either at the beginning of an initiative or once a project has already begun.

CBAs, or communication-based assessments, on the other hand, are carried out to investigate all relevant issues in any sector. Communication cross-cutting features are used to facilitate the investigation and assessment of key issues in one or more sectors, regardless of their relation to communication. Although a CBA can be used at different stages of the project cycle, its effectiveness is greatly enhanced if it is applied at the beginning of an initiative, since it can link the dots across sectors and compare and contrast different priorities. The following examples serve to clarify the way these two assessments can be adopted most effectively.

As presented by Cabañero-Verzosa (2005), in the Uganda Nutritional and Early Childhood Development Project, a communication needs assessment was carried out to investigate communication issues and understand people's attitudes and practices regarding nutritional patterns relevant to the project objectives. The objective was to identify which communication messages and channels could be applied effectively to induce the desired change. The CNA also included the investigation of the existing communication environment and of the institutional capacity to implement the communication strategy.

In the case of the Bumbuna Hydroelectric Project in Sierra Leone (Hass et al. 2007), instead, the investigation had a broader range and a CBA was conducted to probe stakeholders' perceptions and address negative attitudes and concerns, such as worry about corruption, while addressing some of the long-standing history of conflicts. Two-way communication was used to facilitate the participation of different groups of stakeholders and investigate several issues beyond the boundaries of communication. This helped the project to get back on track while providing communication inputs needed at a later stage to design a proper strategy. Once again, the main difference between the two resides in the communication-centric approach of the CNA, which is about communication issues, versus the use of communication as an investigative tool in the CBA, which uses communication as a two-way tool to explore all kinds of issues.

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each mouse draws the cow accurately from its own perspective, but no one is able to fit together all the various pieces in a coherent picture. In a development initiative, communication has the needed cross-cutting features to combine different perspective into a unified frame.

The adoption of two-way communication to involve stakeholders as partners in the problem-analysis and problem-solving processes of development initiatives, rather than treating them as mere receivers of information, is fundamental for making changes effective and sustainable. It also prevents making costly mistakes or investing in solutions that are technically sound but of little use to communities, as the story in box 1.4 illustrates. In this context, communication becomes the best method to investigate and facilitate a "communion of values and experiences" by most stakeholders, needed to achieve sustainable results, no matter what the sector of intervention.

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**BOX 1.4**   **When a Perfectly Appropriate Technical Solution Does Not Make Much Sense**

During a poverty reduction assessment mission in an Asian country, the team composed of various sector specialists identified a few solutions meant to improve the livelihoods of villagers in the community. Among other issues, the experts noted that women, who were doing a number of heavy chores, had to walk almost an hour to fetch water from the nearby river. If a water well was built by the village, the experts reckoned that women would save time and energy that were now required in the daily walks to the river.

As a result, a technically sound proposal was done, funds were made available and the water well was quickly built. One year later a follow-up mission returned to the same community. To the experts' surprise, the newly built water well was rarely being used by the women. When they asked for the reasons, after some initial resistance from the villagers, the experts learned that the walk to the river was one of the few daily moments in which women could be together and socialize. Taking away that walk meant taking away their only moments of sharing part of their lives and having some relaxed moments away from the other hard chores they carried out individually. If dialog and simple two-way communication had occurred before making the decision to build a well, this aspect would have probably emerged and a more culturally appropriate alternative would have been found.

**Figure 1.2    Mice Reconstructing an Image of a Cow**
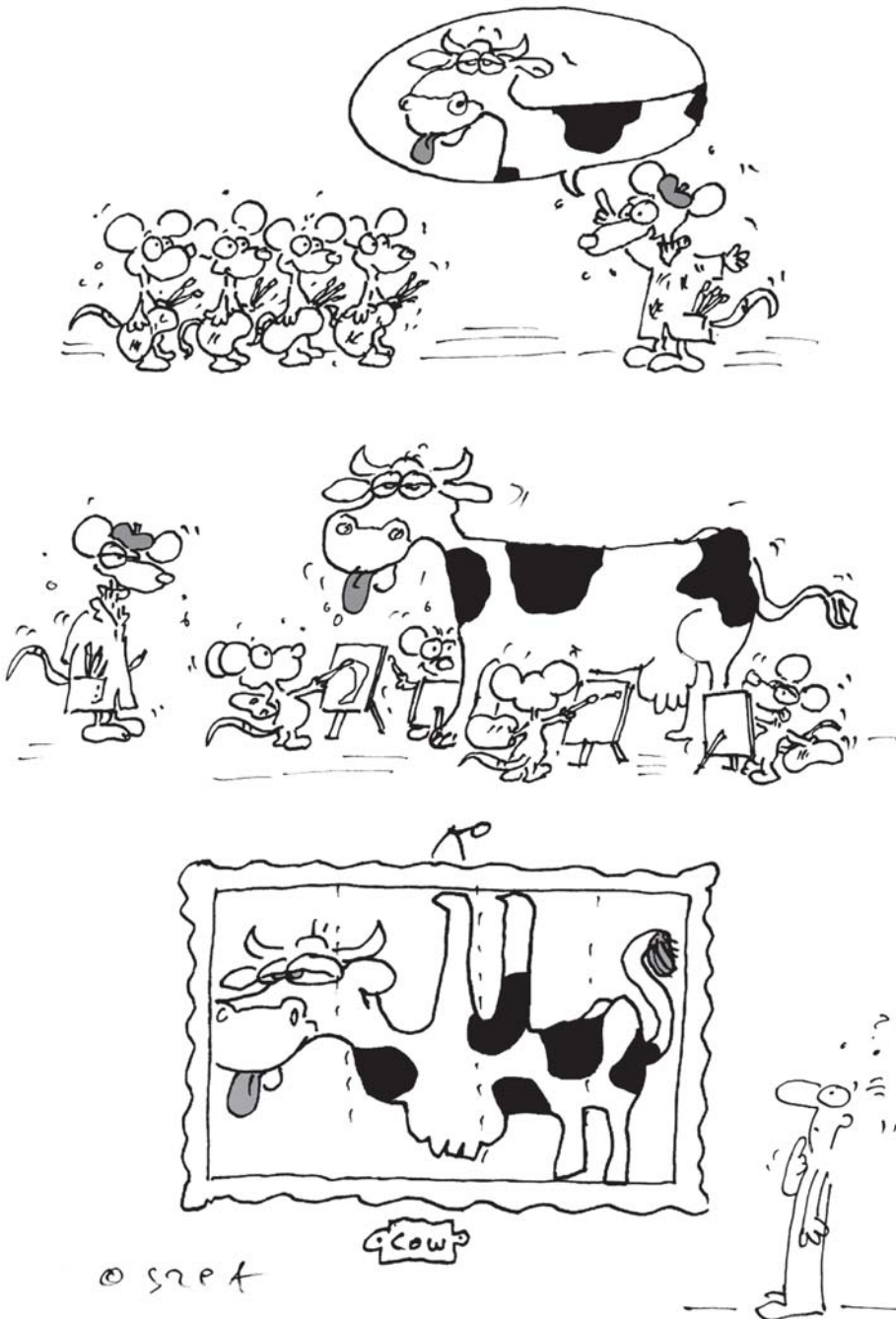


*Source:* Cartoon by Stefanos N. Tsekos. Used by permission.

## 1.3   Ten Key Issues about (Development) Communication

The 10 points presented in this section address some of the myths and misconceptions about communication, especially when related to the field of development. These misconceptions can often be the cause of misunderstandings and lead to inconsistent and ineffective use of communication concepts and practices. The first two points on this list are about communication in general, while the others refer to development communication in particular.

1. *"Communications" and "communication" are not the same thing.* The plural form refers mainly to activities and products, including information technologies, media products, and services (the Internet, satellites, broadcasts, and so forth). The singular form, on the other hand, usually refers to the process of communication, emphasizing its dialogical and analytical functions rather than its informative nature and media products. This distinction is significant at the theoretical, methodological, and operational levels.

2. *There is a sharp difference between everyday communication and professional communication.* Such a statement might seem obvious, but the two are frequently equated, either overtly or more subtly, as in, "He or she communicates well; hence, he or she is a good communicator." A person who communicates well is not necessarily a person who can make effective and professional use of communication. Each human being is a born communicator, but not everyone can communicate strategically, using the knowledge of principles and experience in practical applications. A professional (development) communication specialist understands relevant theories and practices and is capable of designing effective strategies that draw from the full range of communication approaches and methods to achieve intended objectives.

3. *There is a significant difference between development communication and other types of communication.* Both theoretically and practically, there are many different types of applications in the communication family. In this publication, we refer to four main types of communication, which are represented significantly in the work of the World Bank: advocacy communication, corporate communication, internal communication, and development communication. Each has a different scope and requires specific knowledge and skills to be performed effectively. Expertise in one area of communication is not sufficient to ensure results if applied in another area.

4. *The main scope and functions of development communication are not exclusively about communicating information and messages, but they also involve engaging stakeholders and assessing the situation.* Communication is not only about "selling ideas." Such a conception could have been appropriate in the past, when communication was identified with mass media and the linear Sender-Mes-

sage-Channel-Receiver model, whose purpose was to inform audiences and persuade them to change. Not surprisingly, the first systematic research on the effects of communication was carried out soon after World War II, when communication activities were mostly associated with a controversial concept—propaganda. Currently, the scope of development communication has broadened to include an analytical aspect as well as a dialogical one—intended to open public spaces where perceptions, opinions, and knowledge of relevant stakeholders can be aired and assessed.

5. *Development communication initiatives can never be successful unless proper communication research is conducted before deciding on the strategy.* A communication professional should not design a communication campaign or strategy without having all the relevant data to inform his or her decision. If further research is needed to obtain relevant data, to identify gaps, or to validate the project assumptions, the communication specialist must not hesitate to make such a request to the project management. Even when a communication specialist is called in the middle of a project whose objectives appear straightforward and clearly defined, specific communication research should be carried out if there are gaps in the available data. Assumptions based on the experts' knowledge should always be triangulated with other sources to ensure their overall validity. Given its interdisciplinary and cross-cutting nature, communication research should ideally be carried out at the inception of any development initiative, regardless of the sector or if a communication component would be needed at a later stage.

6. *To be effective in their work, development communication specialists need to have a specific and in-depth knowledge of the theory and practical applications of the discipline.* In addition to being familiar with the relevant literature about the various communication theories, models, and applications, development communication specialists should also be educated in the basic principles and practices of other interrelated disciplines, such as anthropology, marketing, sociology, ethnography, psychology, adult education, and social research. In the current development framework, it is particularly important that a specialist be acquainted with participatory research methods and techniques, monitoring and evaluation tools, and basics principles of strategy design. Additionally, a good professional should also have the right attitude toward people, being empathic and willing to listen and to facilitate dialog in order to elicit and incorporate stakeholders' perceptions and opinions. Most of all, a professional development communication specialist needs to be consistently issue-focused, rather than institution-focused.

7. *Development communication support can only be as effective as the project itself.* Even the most well-designed communication strategy will fail if the overall objectives of the project are not properly determined, if they do not enjoy a broad con-

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sensus from stakeholders, or if the activities are not implemented in a satisfactory manner. Sometimes communication experts are called in and asked to provide solutions to problems that were not clearly investigated and defined, or to support objectives that are disconnected from the political and social reality on the ground. In such cases, the ideal solution is to carry out field research or a communication-based assessment to probe key issues, constraints, and feasible options. Tight deadlines and budget limitations, however, often induce managers to put pressure on communication experts to produce quick fixes, trying to force them to act as short-term damage-control public relations or "spin doctors." In such cases, the basic foundations of development communication are neglected, and the results are usually disappointing, especially over the long term.

8. *Development communication is not exclusively about behavior change.* The areas of intervention and the applications of development communication extend beyond the traditional notion of behavior change to include, among other things, probing socioeconomic and political factors, identifying priorities, assessing risks and opportunities, empowering people, strengthening institutions, and promoting social change within complex cultural and political environments. That development communication is often associated with behavior change could be ascribed to a number of factors, such as its application in health programs or its use in mass media to persuade audiences to adopt certain practices. These kinds of interventions are among the most visible, relying heavily on communication campaigns to change people's behaviors and to eliminate or reduce often fatal risks (for example, AIDS). The reality of development, though, is complex and often requires broader changes than specific individual behaviors. Module 2 explains this in more detail.

9. *Media and information technologies are not the backbone of development communication.* As a matter of fact, the value-added of development communication occurs before media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are even considered. Of course, media and information technologies are part of development communication, and they are important and useful means to support development. Their application, however, comes at a later stage, and their impact is greatly affected by the communication work done in the research phase. Project managers should be wary of "one-size-fits-all" solutions that appear to solve all problems by using media products. Past experience indicates that unless such instruments are used in connection with other approaches and based on proper research, they seldom deliver the intended results.

10. *Participatory approaches and participatory communication approaches are not the same thing and should not be used interchangeably, but they can be used together, as their functions are often complementary, especially during the research*

*phase.* Even if there are some similarities between the two types of approaches, most renowned participatory approaches, such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) or participatory action research (PAR), do not usually assess the range and level of people's perceptions and attitudes on key issues, identify communication entry points, and map out the information and communication systems that can be used later to design and implement the communication strategy. Instead, these are all key activities carried out in a participatory communication assessment.

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## Summary of Main Points in Module I

- There are different types of communication, each of which requires a specific body of knowledge and a well-defined set of competencies.
- In the World Bank, as well as in many other international organizations, the most common types of communication are corporate communication, internal communication, advocacy communication, and development communication.
- The three main development paradigms that have influenced the role of communication are the modernization paradigm, the dependency theory, and the participation paradigm.
- The current conception of development communication is based on the two-way model, which is used first of all to involve stakeholders and investigate issues, before starting to design and implement a communication strategy. Two basic definitions of development communication are presented in section 1.1.
- Development communication approaches are often significantly participatory in nature and, to be most effective, should be adopted from the very beginning of the initiative.
- Development communication approaches can be used to support projects with specific communication components, as well as to enhance the overall design and sustainability—even in projects that do not have a specific communication component.
- Communication needs assessment (CNA) and communication-based assessment (CBA) are two substantially different applications. In the first case, the assessment focuses on communication needs and capacities, while in the second, it implies the use of two-way communication as a tool to investigate and assess the broader situation beyond its strict communication dimension.
- Ten key points have been presented to emphasize the broader role of the current communication paradigm and clarify some recurrent misconceptions.
- To facilitate the understanding of its concepts and practices, development communication scope has been divided into two basic modes: monologic, associated with the diffusion model, and dialogic, linked to the participatory model.
- The monologic mode, based on the one-way model of communication, is mostly used to disseminate information and transmit messages that persuade audiences to change.
- The dialogic mode, based on the two-way model of communication, seeks to engage stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions in assessing the situation and in defining priorities leading to change.
- The last section presents an overview of the main functions and services offered by the Development Communication Division—DevComm. It also provides an introduction to its methodological framework, which will be dealt with in more depth in module 3.