Module 1 Unit 1

This is a **REQUIRED READING.**

Fraser, C., and Restrepo-Estrada, S. (1998). Why communication? In communication for development: Human change for survival. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers. In pp.39-63.

CHAPTER 2

Why Communication?

Communication for social change is as old as organized society. The great philosophers and teachers, the custodians of people's spiritual well-being, and the leaders of great social movements in the past, have all used communication in various forms to influence the values and behaviour patterns of the societies in which they lived. Today, as we have seen, there is an unprecedented need for change to assure our future well-being on earth. But who plans such change, and how? And how do individuals, groups, and societies come to an awareness of the need for change and act accordingly? Communication through interpersonal, group, and mass media is at the heart of these processes, for people take decisions for change once they have been motivated and empowered by information they have internalized and found relevant to themselves and their interests.

Even though communication for development came into being in the 1960s, and has clearly shown its usefulness and impact in change and development actions, its role is still not understood and appreciated to the point that it is routinely included in development planning. Through a brief account of how communication for development started, and a description of how it has itself changed and been refined over the years, we hope to make its potential contribution and importance clearer. The case studies that follow in Part Two will show some of its applications in practice and in different contexts.

Early Strategies for International Development Assistance

Assistance from the United Nations and from industrialized to developing countries began in the mid-1950s, shortly after the highly successful Marshall Plan had been concluded. Under that aid programme, the USA poured resources into Europe to rebuild its infrastructure and economy after the devastation of the Second

World War. Generous American financing for reconstruction, capital equipment, and technology helped Europe to recover much faster than it could have done if limited to its own resources.

The Marshall Plan established a model for early international assistance to developing countries. Its thrust was to provide inputs of technology and economic investment to help countries of the Third World to 'modernize'. The underlying assumption was that development should follow the pattern of Western industrial societies, and that the 'backwardness' of developing countries could be overcome, and 'progress' achieved by external inputs. This progress would be measurable in relation to factors such as gross national product, levels of literacy, urbanization, and growth in the industrial base. In effect, development would hinge on accelerating, and cramming into a short time span, a process that had taken centuries in the industrialized countries.

Essentially, the approach was linear, or 'top-down' from donors to recipients. Leaders in developing countries, often trained in industrialized countries, were generally unquestioning about this strategy. But the modernization approach overlooked some important differences between post-Second World War Europe and the developing countries. In Europe, the aim had been to *rebuild* – with improvements of course – infrastructures and economies that had existed before the war, whereas in most developing countries, the need was to build and create where there had been little before.

However, perhaps the most important difference was that Europe had highly trained and motivated people who were willing and able to put Marshall Plan funds and technology to immediate and good use, while in many developing countries, there were few people with the same attitudes, education and skills. This was especially so in countries that were emerging from long periods of colonial rule.

A final and important difference was that in the circumstances of post-war Europe, and with the cultural affinity between Americans and Europeans, it was legitimate to make assumptions about the inputs people required. In Third World countries, with different cultures and values, and at a different stage of development, making assumptions about what inputs people would see as important, and could and would use, was problematic. And in fact, the planners' assumptions often proved wrong. Consultation and dialogue to determine people's real needs and possibilities as the foundation for development programmes could have prevented the mistakes, but this did not occur under the modernization strategy.

The fault was not only on the side of aid agencies; governments in developing countries were sometimes even more high-handed in making assumptions about what poor peasants and other underprivileged people needed. In the minds of many officials they were, in any case, far too ignorant, conservative, fatalistic, and stubborn to have any worthwhile ideas.

As a result of these attitudes there were numerous development projects in the 1960s, which met with apathy from their so-called beneficiaries. In many cases, local populations never identified with the projects, nor did they ever become properly involved in them. Such projects usually received international assistance for a few years only, after which it was supposed that the government would take them over, but many collapsed soon after the international support terminated. Sometimes this was because the government had not been able, or willing, to assume full responsibility for the project with its own technicians, but just as often, the project collapsed because it had never developed any dynamic process of involvement with the local population. They did not see the project as relevant to their needs; it appeared to be something that belonged to the government and some foreign organization, whose staff were busily running around promoting strange ideas or building things for unknown purposes.

The situation common to many projects in those years is well illustrated by a case in Thailand. In the late 1960s, the Thai government wanted to increase fruit and vegetable production to meet the needs of the cities, and so a horticulture project was designed for the area near Kalasin in the north-east of the country. UNDP would finance the project and FAO would operate it.

The project took the form of a demonstration farm that would grow vegetables using irrigation, which had recently become available in the area. The FAO team, all Dutch horticulture specialists, did an excellent technical job, and quite soon had a flourishing demonstration farm growing a variety of high-quality vegetables the whole year round. The assumption of the project planners had been that local people would come to visit the farm and, inspired by what they saw, would themselves want to grow vegetables. But in the event, almost no one even came to see the demonstration.

Faced with this lack of local interest, the project team began to make some enquiries. They found out that the tradition of the people was to work hard growing rice during the rainy season and to lead a more relaxed life or undertake some non-farming activities during

the dry season. They had no particular interest in spending the whole year working in the fields to grow crops of which they had no experience. Furthermore, the economic incentive of growing vegetables was of limited interest because the farmers were increasing their rice yields by using the newly available irrigation water to supplement rainfall during their traditional cropping season. They were making more money than ever before, so why should they work in the fields the whole year round to grow vegetables?

This belated understanding of the human, social and economic environment caused years of time and effort to be lost before some local farmers could be induced to take an interest in vegetable growing. A prior communication and consultation process would have revealed the farmers' attitudes and helped to identify where the farmers' interests and those of the government overlapped. This area of overlapping interests would have been the starting point for negotiating an agreed horticultural development programme. If no common or overlapping interests could be identified during the dialogue, it would have been better to propose the project somewhere else.

There are many examples of projects that installed expensive infrastructure, especially for irrigation and drainage, only to find that the local people never used it or maintained it properly. In some cases it fell into total disrepair. One case of a grandiose infrastructure project that largely failed on the human front was Plan La Chontalpa in the State of Tabasco, Mexico, which is described in some detail in Chapter 4. There were many others like it, and we have seen an irrigation scheme in Tunisia where concrete flumes raised on stilts to carry water had collapsed. Nothing had been done to repair them, and many of the waterways were choked with mud. The irrigation scheme was in an area of traditional livestock production, where the people had no experience of irrigated agriculture, and no real interest in it.

There were also some cases of physical violence by local people to development projects. One occurred in the late 1960s in what was then Yugoslavia. It involved a drainage and land reclamation project in the delta of the Neretva River. The rationale for the project was that Yugoslavia was rapidly building a tourist industry on its spectacularly beautiful Dalmatian coast. The hotels and restaurants needed fresh horticultural produce, but the coast is cut off from the agricultural interior of the country by a range of mountains through which transport is difficult. The government therefore wanted to

reclaim parts of the Neretva delta, which is close and easily accessible to the main tourist areas of the coast, and turn them into horticultural land. After much technical study, a UNDP-financed project began dredging operations and the construction of pumping stations.

For centuries, the people living near this beautiful area of marshland surrounded by limestone mountains had lived from fishing in the channels that meander through the reed beds, and from hunting the numerous aquatic birds. They were never consulted about the project, nor were they informed that they would have a chance to cultivate the newly reclaimed land. Not surprisingly, they saw drainage as a threat to their traditional livelihood. And so one night, a group of them protested by severely damaging one of the newly constructed pumping stations.

The Birth of Communication for Development

Evidently, development initiatives based on the modernization philosophy were often out of tune with people's interests and needs, and they did not take sufficiently into account the human behavioural aspects. It was against this background that the ideas of an Irishman called Erskine Childers began to take on importance.

Childers came from a prominent political family in Ireland. His father had been a cabinet minister in most of the development sectors in his country, and his mother was a social worker. From them, as Childers told us just a few months before he died in August 1996, aged only 68, he had 'acquired the distinct conviction that *people*, and *communicating* with them, were essential in any sustainable development process'. And he added: 'This seems so crashingly obvious that one can only shake one's head at how neglected it has been.'

In the 1950s and 1960s, Childers was a researcher and an author/broadcaster on international affairs, and also a periodic adviser to the UN. He studied communication in development processes, notably in India and Tanzania, and also in Egypt, where he made a detailed tracing of what he came to call the 'human communication aetiology of bilharziasis'.

Bilharziasis, an ancient scourge depicted even in Pharaonic tombs, is caused by a parasite carried by snails that breed in slow-moving rivers, lakes, and irrigation canals in most of the African continent. The larvae of the parasite penetrate people's skin, usually of the

feet and legs, while they are working in the water, for example washing clothes or de-silting an irrigation channel. Once inside the body, the parasite lodges in one or more of the internal organs and multiplies. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in connection with rice growing in the Ivory Coast, bilharziasis is severely debilitating as it slowly but surely destroys the organs where it is lodged, especially the liver.

At the time of Childers' work in Egypt, about 47 per cent of the population, mainly in the area of the Nile delta, were affected by bilharziasis, and preventing infection was the only cure in those days. But the prevention, Childers discovered, would be riddled with human behaviour and communication problems. To begin with, since time immemorial, the Nile had been 'the gods' gift to Egypt'. Every child's blessing was to be exposed to its waters. As everywhere else, it was customary to wash clothes in the river and irrigation canals, exposing those doing so to penetration by the larvae.

Then, as Childers recounted, it seemed as if all possible behavioural problems were being assembled around a single scourge, for it was traditional to urinate and defecate into the river and canals, thereby returning larvae to the water to be picked up by the host-snail and renew the cycle. Any attempt to control the disease would call for enormous communication efforts to change entrenched behaviour patterns, in addition to building latrines, providing alternative sources of drinking water, and creating places for washing clothes.

Such experiences in the field increasingly convinced Childers of the importance of introducing communication into development, so he began to speak to senior UN staff during his frequent visits to New York. He badgered everyone he could with his ideas. He was particularly keen to convince the administrator of UNDP at the time, Paul Hoffman, and the executive director of UNICEF, Henry Labouisse, of the importance of communication. He was also able to speak to U Thant, the UN secretary-general.

Childers was a highly articulate and persuasive man, with a gentle demeanour and a soft Irish accent, and his messages finally struck home in 1966. U Thant told him the time had come to do something about his propositions, and Paul Hoffman told him that he had become more and more convinced that communicating with people was the key to the development process. Henry Labouisse was equally supportive because Childers' proposals could help UNICEF to reach parents with specific messages for improving the condition of children.

The outcome of Erskine Childers' propositions was that the UN, UNDP and UNICEF jointly sent him to Asia for further research, to organize some demonstrations of communication in development, and to produce a major policy paper on the subject. In Bangkok, he met a Thai sociologist, Mallica Vajrathon, who was UNICEF's regional information officer and later became his wife. They found that they had precisely the same ideas about development, and they jointly set up a project called the Development Support Communication Service (Asia) in Bangkok in 1967. This was financed by UNDP and UNICEF. In effect, its purpose was to serve other development projects throughout Asia by advising them on communication strategies, and by producing communication materials for them.

The policy paper that Childers had been asked to produce appeared in 1968, and is so perceptive and innovative about change and development that it is almost as important and relevant today as it was then. Childers' general proposition in those early days was to use communication to create wider and better understanding about projects, both among the local people and among society in general, and to apply audio-visual media to information and training. As he wrote in that paper:

> No innovation, however brilliantly designed and set down in a project Plan of Operations, becomes development until it has been communicated. No input or construction of material resources for development can be successful unless and until the innovations – the new techniques and surrounding changed attitudes which people will need to use those resources – have been communicated to them.

In his paper, Childers also described the way a community may react to projects that are parachuted in from above. A particular UN-assisted project he knew inspired him to write the following:

> From the moment a stranger appears in someone's field bearing government authority, a theodolite, and some stakes, and drives the stakes into that ground, a long chain-reaction of communication has been launched. It begins with the first villager who sees the stake, wonders about it, speculates with a neighbour, begins asking questions that ripple out to a rapidly increasing community of profoundly concerned people. Is 'Government' going to take their land? Will they get any compensation? Is it something to do with water? Will an ancestral burial ground be flooded? Is the new water for the landlord, or for us? When will 'it' happen? ... 'They' want us to build a new school house: will we be here, on our land, in five years' time; and if not, why put energy into a new school?

> The engineers who drew up the design and specifications ... for this UN-assisted project were not asked – and should not have been asked – to contemplate such immediate consequences from the first act of construction. But was anyone else asked to contemplate, to draw up an accompanying information plan – a plan for purposive support communication both to explain 'the stakes' and all that would follow ... and to begin the diffusion of needed innovation among [the community] in time?

It will be evident from the passages just quoted that the focus of Childers' early communication thinking was in the framework of the then current modernization approach to development, with decisions being taken by governments and development agencies. His emphasis in those early days was principally to use communication to explain those decisions to the communities concerned, and to try to enlist their informed involvement in the development programme. He also saw communication as essential for telescoping the time-span of change – which would normally take generations – into just a few years by diffusing innovations among large numbers of ordinary people as fast as possible. In addition, communication, and especially audio-visual media, would help in the accelerated training of new cadres.

Development approaches have generally changed since those days, but governments even today, and even when democratically elected, may still behave as they did three decades ago, taking decisions that affect people deeply without informing them. They even do it with their own staff, as we saw when we were working in Argentina in 1994: a whole sub-section of a ministry was abolished overnight, and the first the staff heard about it was when they saw the news on television. They were sent to work in other parts of the ministry, but they were given no terms of reference and had to invent their own jobs.

Childers' influence was such that in 1969, UNDP sent a circular to all the UN agencies requesting that they give attention to communication inputs in projects they were operating with UNDP funding. As a result of this, and of Childers' work in Asia, the idea that communication and information could help in the implementation of development projects was quickly adopted by a number of international agencies. For example, FAO created its own Development Support Communication Branch in its Rome headquarters in 1969; UNICEF set up a unit in its headquarters in New York, and later began appointing communication specialists in its country

offices; and when the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) began operations, also in 1969, it gave importance to communication and encompassed it in what it called 'Information, Education, and Communication', or IEC.

Most early communication work had to follow the top-down development approach of the time. Information was directed to people to make them understand a project's objectives and to try to enlist their participation, or to convince them of the benefits of a new health or agricultural technique. In FAO headquarters, for example, the technical staff and the extension specialists thought of communication as the use of mass media and audio-visual materials as a way of reaching more people, more effectively, and more persuasively with ideas and information generated by others who believed *they* knew best what people needed. 'Diffusion of innovations' and 'transfer of knowledge' were two phrases that summed up the underlying hypothesis of development work at the time.

However, some of the people working in communication for development soon began trying to promote wider functions beginning with communication processes at the village level before any development plans were laid. But most development technicians, with their top-down conditioning, did not accept this and continued in the belief that communicators were merely producers of materials to help them diffuse their messages more effectively. This often led to conflictual situations between, for example, traditional agricultural extension people and the new communication specialists, for the latter saw their main role as promoters of social processes, although the production of materials also played an important part in their work. And meanwhile, the development technicians continued to come along to the communicators and say, 'I want you to produce a film for my project on how to build latrines' – or on whatever the subject of their work was.

These requests for the production of some isolated piece of material, whether a radio programme, or a video, or a leaflet, usually resulted in stand-alone items. As such, they made little impact, for it is now proven that communication is most effective when it is based on qualitative research with the intended audiences, and on a strategy that uses different media and channels in a coordinated way.

In truth, development communicators in those early days often accepted their limited role as producers of materials, for they were still developing their own insights, strategic thinking, and experience. They had been given an empty canvas on which to start work, and

it took some years before they developed the capacity to become involved in studying the whole human and behavioural situation faced by a development proposal and to come up with an integrated communication strategy and plan. Today, they see this as their mission.

Towards New Development Approaches

By the late 1960s, the first voices of dissent against the modernization approach to development were being raised, especially in Latin America. The first reason put forward was, quite simply, that it was not working. But Latin American intellectuals, predominantly with Marxist leanings, also advanced the notion that development in the industrialized countries went hand in hand with underdevelopment elsewhere; or in other words, that underdevelopment was really caused by global power and economic structures. The only solution that the proponents of this so-called dependency theory could suggest was that developing countries should withdraw from the world's market and economic structures and opt for self-reliance. This was hardly practical for all developing countries.

At about the same time, the Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire provided some new insights about approaches to development. In his 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he coined the word 'conscientization' as the educational process the poor needed to help them improve their condition and take charge of their own destinies. Conscientization resulted from a group communication and active education process during which people would be stimulated by a facilitator to discuss and analyse their reality, learning through this process and from each other. This was quite distinct from traditional education, which Freire termed the 'banking system', in which people remain passive while information is poured into their heads by a teacher or technician with superior knowledge.

By the mid-1970s, other development thinkers, mainly in northern Europe and Scandinavia, also began proposing new conceptual approaches and priorities. The Dag Hammarskjold Foundation in Sweden was a leading light in promoting this new development thinking, which is still generally in force in the late 1990s and which effectively opened the door for a much wider role for communication than it had under the modernization model.

The premise of the new thinking is that the first priority should be to satisfy the basic needs of the dominated and exploited. Those basic needs are considered to be material – food, shelter, clothing,

education, health, and so on – and non-material – the need for expression, creativity, equality, conviviality, and the ability to understand and master one's own destiny.

This thinking also holds that there is no universal recipe for development, that it must be seen as an integrated, multi-dimensional and dialectic process that can differ from one society to another. However, even if the process may vary in different circumstances, it will have certain common criteria. Among these criteria is that, in addition to aiming to meet basic needs, development should be endogenous to a society, that is to say, it should originate from that society's values and its perceptions of its own future. It should be as self-reliant as possible, in that each society should draw on its own resources and strengths to the maximum practical extent before using external resources. It should make optimum use of natural resources, taking into account the potential of the local ecosystem, as well as the present and future limitations imposed by global considerations for the biosphere. Last but certainly not least, it should be based on participatory and truly democratic processes of decision-making at all levels of society.

This approach recognizes that the development process will often require changes in social relations, economic activities, and power structures before people can be enabled to participate in decisions that concern them and assume responsibility in self-management. Furthermore, this new approach does not limit itself to developing countries, for its proponents see its criteria as being equally valid for industrialized societies suffering from the negative effects of consumerism and social disintegration.

Almost all of the development criteria just outlined depend on communication for their practical application. For example, if a society is to take development actions rooted in its perception of its own future, it will need communication processes to achieve that common perception. Similarly, it cannot take decisions about its use of local natural resources, and the possible global implications, without full knowledge and understanding on which to base those decisions. Similarly again, communication is the basis for participatory and democratic decision-making. And finally, the changes in social relations, economic activities and power structures that this approach to development foresees will often lead to conflictual situations that can be resolved only through communication processes and negotiation.

In effect, the new thinking about development brought increased

emphasis on its human and social dimensions. By the late 1970s, 'participation in development' had become a key phrase. But what is participation? For some years, the concept had different meanings for different people, usually according to their particular perspective on development work. Some of them, in rural and agricultural development, saw it as creating associations, cooperatives, and the like. In the health sector, 'participation' sometimes had the connotation of people paying part of the costs of their own health services. There were others, with leftist inclinations, who described 'participation' as the mass mobilization of people, as in Mao Tse-tung's China, for building infrastructures, such as earth dams or irrigation systems.

However, there were also those who believed that 'participation' is achieved only when people become involved in the planning and decisions that affect their lives, and in putting those decisions into practice. A good example might be when, say, a group of people organize themselves for a joint horticultural project, negotiate for land with the village authorities, get advice from a horticultural specialist, and start to grow vegetables to raise funds for some community service, or to go into business for themselves.

A Global Seminar on Participatory Development held by UNICEF in Florence in 1990 agreed that only the last case is *true* participation. Today this would be generally accepted in development circles, for in the example, people are making decisions for themselves, creating new resources of vegetables and money, and, almost certainly, learning new skills. They are involved in an activity that will change and improve their lives and that of their families. The problem with the other types of participation mentioned above, even though they have positive aspects, is that if people do not gain a voice in planning and decision-making for an initiative that affects them, they may think that it is irrelevant. In addition, they will feel less ownership of the initiative and will be less likely to sustain it over time.

Talking about participation in development programmes is easier than actually achieving it. It was obvious, however, to more clear-sighted development specialists that prior consultation and dialogue with intended beneficiaries of such programmes should be a first step, in effect giving people a voice in decision-making. Thus, the concept of development from the bottom up, as opposed to the earlier top-down impositions, belatedly became part of development strategy, at least in theory.

Participation – constraints and opportunities

Although the new development thinking had opened the door for democratic and participatory development, in reality, the top-down focus remained for years, and still exists in many cases. Indeed, two decades or more after the human problems of the modernization approach began to become evident, there are still cases of project design based on assumptions about behaviour, rather than on communication and participation.

For example, in 1990, the Investment Centre of FAO, which prepares agricultural projects for the World Bank and similar lending institutions, carried out a review of 75 of the projects it had designed in various parts of the world in the 1970s and 1980s. The review states that 'problems attributed to poor project design ... have, since 1981, represented the highest proportion of all issues raised in the project post-evaluation reports'. It went on to say that 'design problems now represent by far the most important single reason for the unsatisfactory performance of World Bank-financed agricultural projects'.

The review identified several aspects of weak project design, and it also found that 54 per cent of the projects had failed to reach their production goals, mainly due to deficiencies in the technology being proposed and to slower adoption by farmers than had been assumed by the planners. It mentioned a project in India where farmers in a traditional livestock and rain-fed farming area were slow to pick up the appropriate water management practices when irrigation was provided. The project ran a year over time and terminated showing a negative economic rate of return. The review also singled out a case in Tanzania where 'drovers ... failed to use stock routes developed under a livestock project, largely because of justifiable concerns over the vulnerability of their stock to predators'.

These situations persist because, even if development people talk much about planning projects in participation with beneficiaries, in practice the process is not given the importance it deserves, with the result that the necessary time and resources are not made available. Furthermore, in the existing situation, projects usually have to be prepared to meet fixed schedules for their approval by the funding agency, whereas participatory planning cannot be so constrained.

Occasionally donor agencies do specify that time and resources must be spent on participatory planning, and even then it does not work out properly. This was the case in some FAO watershed

management projects, funded by the government of Italy, in the early 1990s. Despite the commitment to participation, in the event the international project technicians seldom had the necessary attitudes or the patience to see the process through. When the participatory planning took longer than expected or ran into difficulties, they tended to take the easy way out by reverting to the old 'top-down' model of imposing their own solutions.

There are also strictly local reasons why participation in development may be difficult to achieve. One is that power structures and relationships, which are always present, will often be threatened when the people of a community are empowered to take decisions and implement development actions. In other words, the empowerment of some people will usually disempower someone else, at least when some sort of productive or economic activity is involved.

One real-life example of this, among many, took place some years ago in an FAO project in Rajasthan, India. The project introduced the grading and auctioning of wool along Australian lines. Wool had never been graded for quality in Rajasthan, and merchants had traditionally paid the same rock-bottom prices for all of it. In addition, they often cheated the simple herders, or offered extremely harsh credit terms to permit a man, for example, to marry off his daughter. It was hardly surprising that when the grading and auctioning of wool began, providing the herders for the first time in history with fair prices linked to the quality of their wool, the merchants reacted. They stopped two trucks carrying bales of graded wool to auction, tipped them off the roadside, and cut the bales open to scatter the wool to the winds.

At the political level too, participation may be difficult to tolerate, for it threatens the established order. As a high official in a UN agency said to us during an interview: 'If I were a politician, I would feel uneasy about participation. People should have a voice – but only up to a point!'

Yet another problem with participation is that development agencies lack flexibility in their procedures. For decades they have worked on the basis of projects that have predetermined and time-bound objectives, a schedule of activities, inputs and outputs, and a finite budget. Some agencies call this a logical framework, but it is illogical for participatory development, because when people truly become involved and can take decisions in a dynamic process as a project evolves, it may easily go in directions that were not foreseen – and in fact were impossible to foresee – during the planning process.

Participatory development needs more flexible systems for planning, managing, and financing projects, systems that can adapt to a process of evolution throughout a project's life. Development agencies could perhaps set broad budget provisions for a certain number of years, but allocate funds on a yearly basis, increasing them or decreasing them as a result of participatory monitoring and evaluation with the beneficiaries and other stake-holders. Projects that were making no progress could even be terminated and the funds transferred to more promising ones. The real possibility of closing down a project would also motivate communities to pull together to achieve success.

It is still early days in the efforts to bring about community participation at all stages of a development programme, and the obstacles are considerable. Most development agencies declare such participation as an objective, but also admit that they have not progressed as far as they would like. But on the positive side, some worldwide tendencies of recent years now favour participation. One is the collapse of authoritarian regimes almost everywhere, but equally important are the rapid processes of decentralization in many countries. Governments are passing the responsibility to local authorities for most of the functions that were previously conducted from the centre. This brings the planning of development down to a more local level where people's voices have a better chance of being heard, and where the local authorities are more in tune with the circumstances. Even so, there is often a need to democratize the attitudes of local authorities to make them better disposed to enter into dialogue with people.

The Evolution of Communication for Development

After starting out in a rather unstructured and piecemeal fashion, communication for development gradually became more ordered and professional, and more strategic in its application. This was at least in part because it began to draw on some of the precepts of marketing. The usual definition of marketing is 'identifying a need and satisfying that need, with a profit'. Its relevance to development lies precisely in that principle of identifying needs and satisfying them.

In the minds of many people, marketing, promotion, and advertising have negative connotations linked to selling, and so they are often thought to be vulgar and commercial. It is often forgotten that marketing theory and practice draw on a mix of elements

borrowed from the respected fields of anthropology, social psychology, behavioural science, and communication theory. These are then linked to skilful use of communication media. *True* marketing sets out to discover unfulfilled demand, not to create demand, and its theoretical basis has nothing whatsoever to do with selling soap and cigarettes.

It was logical that some marketing specialists began to promote the idea that their methods could help to achieve social objectives. They could provide valuable insights into group behaviour, people's motivations, target audiences and their characteristics, and into the design of media strategies and messages. Marketing specialists were particularly interested in the areas of health and nutrition, where they believed that their concepts and practices could be powerful allies in helping people to change their attitudes and behaviour. The essence of their logic was that if useful commercial products could be promoted by marketing techniques, why could the same techniques not be applied to social aims and behaviours? This concept came to be known as 'social marketing'. It could be defined as 'identifying a socio-economic need and helping people to satisfy it, for their own profit'.

The main proponent of social marketing was Richard Manoff, the head of a successful New York marketing agency. He first became involved in public health and nutrition in 1965, when he was part of a US delegation to FAO. A few years later he began to apply marketing techniques to promote changes in health practices, nutrition, and family planning in a number of developing countries. Manoff's proposals and his expanding experience in social marketing caught the attention of several important development agencies, including WHO, UNICEF, and USAID. Since then, USAID's numerous programmes in communication for health and for population have been based almost entirely on social marketing strategies.

The health sector, in fact, has used social marketing more than others, but communication for various development sectors has now borrowed many social marketing principles and techniques, without necessarily using the whole package.

The first of these principles is *audience segmentation*, which is the practical recognition of the fact that people's beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, and behaviour are conditioned by their circumstances. These include education, occupation, gender, social status, income, and so on. It follows that under a broad generic title, such as 'rural women' or 'fishermen', there will almost always be several distinct audience

segments that need to be identified and worked with, in line with the specific communication and development objective.

Qualitative research is another marketing principle that has also been increasingly adopted by communication for development. It is used to determine audiences' perceptions, attitudes, and motivations about a particular issue and what they consider to be obstacles and resistance points to any necessary changes in their practices. Another function is to find out how they express themselves, what terminology they use, what information channels they prefer, and the importance and credibility each one has. This provides guidance on how to formulate messages to achieve maximum comprehension and acceptability by the audiences and on what media channels would best reach them.

Such research often reveals authoritative information sources that are not media *per se*, but other sectors within the community, especially opinion leaders. These sectors then become relay audiences who can be reached with appropriate information that they will pass on to the primary audiences. Furthermore, it is often found that behaviour patterns are being influenced by opinion leaders and unless they change, there will be no change by the main target audience.

In practice, audience segmentation and qualitative research might work in the following way for promoting, say, family planning in rural areas in a Muslim country, and where the health sector is offering the necessary services. One might begin by singling out women who already had at least three children under the age of 6 as the primary target audience. Qualitative research with such women might show that they are interested in spacing their children and limiting their numbers. They want to be able to bring up their children properly and are concerned about specific aspects of their own health related to frequent childbearing. They want more information about the various family planning services and methods available. They use some particular phrases when talking about different aspects of family planning and health. They listen to the radio most days while they are preparing the evening meal, and this is the only media channel they use.

The women might also say that many of their husbands are resistant to family planning, or even hostile towards it, mainly because the religious authorities in the community are against it. The women might make it clear that they need their husbands' approval before they can go to a family planning clinic. Furthermore, it might emerge that for traditional reasons many of the women's elderly mothers are also against family planning.

In such circumstances, it would be a waste of effort mounting communication activities aimed only at women with at least three children under the age of 6. Communication would also have to reach husbands, religious authorities, and elderly women. Therefore, further qualitative research would be needed with these other audiences to determine the most suitable content of messages and the best channels for delivering them. For mothers who already had three children under 6, it would already be known that the message content should be the various family planning services and methods available, health aspects should be stressed as motivation, and a suitable channel would be radio programmes when they were preparing the evening meal.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are a classic technique for doing qualitative research. In brief, an FGD sets out to create a situation in which a small group of 8–12 people of the same social, economic, and educational level, and who share similar lifestyles and problems, discuss a particular issue of concern. An FGD has a facilitator and an observer, both playing a low-profile role. The facilitator gets the process started and guides it gently with some predetermined, open-ended questions, usually beginning with factual matters, but gradually going into increasing depth and analysis. The key to the process is to get the group participants to discuss among themselves and not with the facilitator. The observer listens, watches the body language in the group, and takes notes of what is said.

The FGD technique may be informal and loosely structured, but with a skilful facilitator, it can generate a group interaction that is uniquely effective in penetrating deep-seated attitudes, and finding out how people's minds work about some specific issue. The process usually takes on aspects that are similar to group therapy.

FGDs have been used for several years for participatory analysis with people concerned with health issues. The agricultural sector has lagged behind, but we have used them in a variety of agricultural situations, from large-scale farmers in Argentina to bare subsistence farmers in Zambia, Uganda and Bolivia. In all cases, they have provided a wealth of useful information that can be used to help farmers to help themselves and to plan what outside assistance is needed.

Another feature of social marketing is careful *message design* to appeal to the concerns and perspectives of the specific audience segments. In the Muslim country of our earlier example, strategic message design for the religious leaders resisting family planning

might involve selecting passages from the Koran relating to the moral obligation to preserve life, and setting these against the mortality of mothers and babies during childbirth. One might also use the passages that refer to proper child-care, set against the difficulties of caring for large numbers of children. This material, when woven into messages for the religious authorities, could provide legitimacy for family planning and help persuade them to support it. Real examples of communication with religious leaders will be found in Chapters 3 and 6.

Pre-testing of communication materials with groups that are representative of the target audience before putting them in final form for broadcasting or distribution is another social marketing principle. It helps to ensure that the materials are comprehensible and that their messages are appropriate for the specific audience.

Other key principles of social marketing are *monitoring*, *feedback*, and *adjustment*. Even after good qualitative research and pre-testing of materials, one needs to confirm that the communication activities are on course. So, continuous monitoring and feedback are conducted to check that the messages are being received, understood and accepted by the intended audience. Any misunderstandings or undesired effects being caused by the messages and materials are corrected.

A good example of this process took place in Honduras some years ago when a USAID-supported programme for oral rehydration therapy (ORT) for infants was under way. The rehydration solution was called Litrosol and it was intensely promoted by communication media. However, ongoing monitoring with mothers revealed that most of them thought there were two different types of diarrhoea that affected their children. They had local names for each, and they were only giving their children Litrosol for what they perceived as one of these types of diarrhoea. The communicators wanted to adjust their media messages and use both the local diarrhoea names, but the doctors refused to let them, on the grounds that to do so would reinforce unfounded, traditional beliefs. The compromise solution was to recast the messages to say that Litrosol was good for *all* sorts of diarrhoea attack.

Even if marketing has provided communicators for development with better organized and systematic approaches, there are many who abhor social marketing. They consider it to be top-down and manipulative, for they say that it uses refined social science skills and powerful mass media to try to change people's behaviour patterns to conform to criteria established by outsiders with superior know-

ledge. On the other hand, those who defend social marketing point out that few development interventions, even those based on community participation, do not involve manipulation of some groups by others. There may also be manipulation within peer groups. Furthermore, even in socially advanced and democratic countries, such as Denmark or Sweden, governments are constantly issuing manipulatory exhortations to their people to use car seat-belts, to eat more bread and less fat, or not to drink and drive.

Those in favour of social marketing also argue that the themes to which it is applied are usually of undoubted health or social benefit, and seen in this light, some of its protagonists jokingly call it 'ethical manipulation'. They consider that it is morally defensible to use all the skills – and even wiles – available to us to induce behavioural change when it concerns, for example, reducing infant mortality, curbing teenage pregnancies, or preventing the spread of infectious diseases such as AIDS.

The truth about the merits or otherwise of social marketing surely lies somewhere between the extreme positions for and against it. Those who state that there are certain behaviour patterns that should be changed, in the interests of people themselves and of society in general, certainly have a point. Most of these desirable changes lie in the areas of health, nutrition, and safety. AIDS is a good example. Limiting the spread of HIV is undoubtedly of vital importance to individuals and to society, and this must surely justify any form of communication, manipulatory or not, to try to change behaviour. The real ethical problem with social marketing would be evident if it were used to manipulate people towards a behavioural change, or the adoption of an innovation, without the *total certainty* that it was in their interests, and in the interests of society to do so.

As an illustration, taken from UNICEF's area of work, one can hardly object to social marketing to promote the use of ORT to save infants from death. However, to use it to persuade a group of women to adopt a particular income-generating activity would be an unjustifiable imposition; and it would be dangerous too because it might fail, with long-term negative consequences. In such circumstances, a communication process without a predetermined behavioural objective should be used to help the women analyse the alternatives and make their own decision about what they want to do, and can do.

Overall, marketing has provided communication for development with a number of valuable strategies and techniques, and they can be used without relation to top-down approaches or the persuasive

inducing of behavioural change. Qualitative research, audience segmentation, proper message design, pre-testing of communication materials, and ongoing feedback are valuable tools in any communication activity.

Communication in Today's Development Strategies

Marketing certainly provided a number of approaches and techniques, but it was the notion of 'bottom-up' development and the aim of achieving participation that caused the greatest evolution in the conceptual aspects of communication and its potential role. Many of the early practitioners of communication soon propounded the view that there is a direct connection between communication and true participation – in effect that they are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, before people of a community can participate, they must have appropriate information, and they must follow a communication process to reach a collective perception of the local situation and of the options for improvement.

However, people often have difficulty in conceptualizing and articulating their view of their problems, needs, and possibilities, especially in poor communities of low educational levels. Nor do they have access to the information they need to form rational opinions and to take coherent decisions. Hence the usefulness of communication inputs, which may use media such as video recording and playback, or local radio broadcasts, or just group communication work with simple aids such as flip-charts. In reality, when communication processes are used to inform people, enable them to contribute their points of view, reach consensus, and carry out an agreed change or development action together, it can be said that communication *is* participation.

The need for people to acquire new knowledge and skills is as important as ever in development programmes, but information and training activities should be based on people's interests and needs, as identified in consultation with them. The traditional role of audiovisual media to improve the effectiveness of information and training programmes is obviously still as valid as ever. Great progress has been made, and experience gained, in using what were once considered delicate and sophisticated media, such as video, with local populations in harsh technical environments, as described in Chapter 4. Much has also been learned about how to structure and present information to make it accessible to people of low educational levels.

Bottom-up and participatory development approaches have introduced changes in the way mass media should be used. Bombarding people with messages has gone out, at least in principle. Greater access to the media by ordinary people, and participation in programming, have become the aim. For example, in the area of broadcasting, more emphasis is now placed on community media, with much participation from the audience in the programming, as described in Chapter 7.

Similarly, improving interpersonal communication between development workers in the field and their client populations has become necessary. This is in the sense of making field workers more effective facilitators of change, listening more than they talk, and helping people to help themselves, as opposed to making them better preachers of some development sermon.

Qualitative research techniques, such as Focus Group Discussions, used originally just to investigate people's perceptions and attitudes, have been found to be a perfect technique for participatory diagnosis of problems, planning, and evaluation with communities.

In general terms, for today's change and development strategies, the communication aims are to stimulate debate and 'conscientization' for participatory decision-making and action, and second, to help people acquire the new knowledge and skills they need. A third aim is to use communication to promote better teamwork, cooperation and coordination between various governmental, or non-governmental, organizations involved in multidisciplinary development programmes.

Is Communication for Change and Development Utopian?

Some people may think that communication strategies for democratic decision-making, change, and development, are too idealistic to be put into practice, and that they have little relevance in the reality of today's world. Fortunately, however, there have been a number of experiences to prove that these concepts can be made to work.

The first of these noteworthy experiences took place in Canada, which has always been a leader in communication for development. As long ago as the 1930s, Canada pioneered radio programming for farmers and organized group listening, or Radio Farm Forums as they were called. These later became the model for numerous rural broadcasting projects in developing countries. Equally innovative was

the setting up of a unit in the mid-1960s called Challenge for Change, as part of the Canadian National Film Board. The objective of this unit was to use film – and video when it became available later – for social development purposes. When Challenge for Change became involved in a place called Fogo Island, off the east coast of Newfoundland, the experience proved so important that it set a precedent for much communication for development in the future.

In the late 1960s, Fogo Island was in serious economic and social decline. Its people lived mainly from fishing, but their boats were small and their markets on the island were limited. Mainland-based fleets were able to roam further and had assured markets for their catch when they returned to port. This and other factors had led to such a decline in Fogo that the provincial government began working on a proposal to help the inhabitants evacuate to the mainland. At that point, the Extension Department of Memorial University of Newfoundland, in St Johns, and Challenge for Change stepped in and asked if they could carry out an experiment in the island.

On arriving in Fogo, the team told the islanders that they would like to make some films with them and show them to the community. They assured the people that no films would be taken away from the island without their permission, and that anyone interviewed on camera would have a chance to see the resulting film first and have changes made before it was shown to anybody else.

They began to shoot films in pairs, usually to show both sides of an argument concerning the future of the island. For example, they made one film with a young man who explained why he was convinced that the only hope he had of making good in life was to leave for the mainland. They made the opposing film with another young man who had managed to build a long-lining fishing boat, was content with his life, and had no desire to leave.

These and many other films, and later videos, were shown to the community during evening meetings to spark off a debate. The results were striking. People argued and became emotional, but they also became involved in a serious analysis of the situation affecting their community. In addition, the filmed interviews drew attention to excellent insights and ideas held by people who would normally not have the chance or the inclination to express them in public.

Over the months, what communicators have come to call the 'Fogo Process' took hold. The people began to see themselves and their situation more clearly. The films were providing a mirror image, and the discussions that followed were opening their minds to

problems and their causes and to possible courses of action. In effect, this was the same sort of process as 'conscientization', invented by Paolo Freire at about the same time.

The culmination on Fogo was that the people were able to develop a well-articulated proposal to stay on the island, but with help from the provincial government to provide certain key things to make it possible. For example, they required training facilities for young fishermen, credit to build fishing boats, and so on. The authorities were able to meet the requests, and the people decided not to leave the island.

The imaginative way communication media were used to stimulate this process of participatory problem diagnosis and development planning remains a shining example of what can be done. Other examples will be described in the rest of this book, but one must raise one's hat to the team who worked in Fogo, and equally to the Canadian authorities who were willing to listen to the people and help them with development as they, the people, wanted it.

This and similar experiences in development are important because they illustrate that the essence of involving and mobilizing people is the sharing of knowledge and ideas between them, and between them and development workers, through communication processes. Such sharing of knowledge implies an exchange between communication equals: on the one hand, technical specialists and the authorities learn about people's needs and possibilities, as they see them, and on the other, people learn of the ideas of the specialists and the authorities. The ultimate purpose of knowledge-sharing is to help people develop the capacity to take increasing control over their environment, agriculture, health, habitat, family size, and the other factors that so critically impinge on their quality of life.

The Functions of Communication for Development

In practical terms, communication for development has three separate but related components: *social communication*, *educational communication*, and *institutional communication*.

Social communication

In the community promotes dialogue, reflection, participatory situation analysis, consensus building, decision-making, and planning of actions for change and development. In essence, it is the process of

mobilizing people and communities, and helping them to gain the insights and confidence needed to tackle their problems. It is also used for participatory monitoring and evaluation. It may employ audio-visual media to stimulate the process of group discussion and to record the outcome, but it may also be conducted using aids such as simple flip-charts to help people visualize and keep track of the points of the discussion as they go along. Mass media services may support the process, and even become involved in it, especially when they are locally based. Traditional media, such as theatre, music and dance, can also be successfully used.

Educational communication

Is used to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be able to put change and development decisions into action. It takes educational content from specialists and presents it in various media forms, particularly using audio-visual technology, to help people understand, learn, and remember. It is an essential element in training programmes at all levels.

Institutional communication

Creates the flows of information inside and between all the partners involved in a development action, including government departments, parastatal organizations, NGOs, and the communities. The aim is to improve coordination and management by creating a common understanding among the various partners of the project's objectives, activities and progress. Such common understanding is the basis for good teamwork.

The point needs to be made that despite the increasing use of the word 'communication' in many countries to cover the press and public relations functions of a corporation or institution, the concepts of communication that we present in this book have nothing whatsoever to do with institutional image building. That said, we might sum up with a definition:

Communication for development is the use of communication processes, techniques and media to help people towards a full awareness of their situation and their options for change, to resolve conflicts, to work towards consensus, to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and that of society, and to improve the effectiveness of institutions.