

Module 1 Unit 4

This is a **REQUIRED READING**.

Mefalopulos, P. (2008). Implementing the Communication Program. In Development communication sourcebook: Broadening the boundaries of communication. Washington: World Bank. pp. 129-134 (5 p.)

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DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION SOURCEBOOK

Broadening the Boundaries
of Communication

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THE WORLD BANK

Paolo Mefalopulos

Development Communication Sourcebook

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THE WORLD BANK
Washington, D.C.

3.3 Phase 3—Implementing the Communication Program

This phase encompasses the activities necessary to implement the work plan (for example, design of communication materials, training of relevant staff, and so forth) and to produce and distribute media and information products. This part of the process is the most resource-intensive in both human and financial terms, but it is not necessarily the most crucial phase. If the work in the previous two phases was done properly, the implementation is the most straightforward phase, needing only the professional application of tasks and competencies identified to ensure the achievement of the objectives. Usually this is done through an action plan, which can be considered a map indicating what needs to be done, by whom, when, and at what cost.

The activities presented in table 3.6 provide a model of reference to define a basic sequence of special value for instructional purposes. The actions in this phase, however, can vary greatly and depend mostly on the strategy design. Starting from

Table 3.6 The Communication Action Plan

Activities	Explanation	Example
1. Objective(s) (SMART)	Review and confirm objectives (possibly SMART)	Vaccinate 70% of the children under five in area X
2. Audiences/ stakeholders	Who are the audiences or groups being addressed (primary, secondary, etc.)?	Primary: mothers Secondary: sons/daughters (students) and fathers
3. Activities (and approaches)	What are the activities needed (media production, message design, etc.)?	Information campaigns (audio-visual and printed materials), field visits, meetings
4. Resources needed (human and material)	Experts in audiovisual design and production (experts in training, related materials, etc.)	Design information campaign, pretest and produce materials; provide training to health promoters
5. Party responsible (action promoter)	The source/initiator responsible for the action	Field officers of the Ministry of Environment
6. Time frame	The sequence and time needed for each activity	6 months to design the campaign, 2 months for training, 6 months to implement, 8 months for field visits and meetings
7. Expected outputs (outcome indicators)	What is expected by the communication initiative?	70% of children under five being vaccinated

Source: Author.

the set objectives, typically an action plan details intended audiences, selected activities, inputs needed, expected outputs, and the time frame for each activity. Table 3.7 illustrates a way of drafting such an action plan—one way among many possible ways. It intends to provide a scheme of reference, which can and should be modified according to the situation. To make the process clearer, the last column relates the various steps to actual practice.

The communication objectives (possibly expressed in SMART form) constitute the “North Star” of the strategy when drafting the action plan, thus shaping the activities to be implemented. The action plan should state clearly who is responsible for each activity and what is the expected outcome once the activities are implemented. In other words, the action plan is a way to organize and enhance the management and implementation of decisions taken in the design of the strategy. Table 3.7 provides a simple and linear presentation of an action plan, but complex projects and programs would need more articulated and multifaceted action plans.

One should not assume that for each objective there is a single corresponding action: for a specific objective, there might be five activities, two expected results, and a great and diversified number of resources needed. This network of activities should be implemented under the direct supervision of a communication specialist (for example, video producer, campaign expert, or trainer) who verifies that the communication outputs are directly and effectively linked with the objectives.

In the example in table 3.7, the communication objectives and communication outputs coincide, but this is not always the case. The objective of a training workshop, for example, could be to provide the skills to extensionists for a new cropping method. The expected results, however, could be that the extensionists are successful in promoting the new methods among farmers. Outputs and outcomes are not the same things. Evaluation should focus also on the outcome of an intervention—and not only on the outputs, as is often done.

Before the implementation of the planned activities can begin, there are usually a number of preparatory actions to be carried out. These can be divided broadly into two types: production of materials and training of relevant personnel. According to the needs identified in the research and defined in the strategy, it might be necessary to produce posters, brochures, radio programs, and other kinds of audiovisuals. It is not within the scope of this publication to address the production aspects of such materials. What is important is that each medium has certain characteristics that should be considered when project leaders decide what, how, and when to use it, and they should make sure they hire specialists with the proper production competencies.

3.3.1 Pretesting Communication Materials

Most important, communication specialists should always pretest the materials being produced, no matter how well done they are and how carefully they are

revised by other experts. Pretesting should be conducted with pilot groups and representatives of the intended populations before reaching the stage of mass production. It is astonishing to find out how many messages have failed to reach their intended audiences simply because no pretesting was done, and the assumptions of experts were proved inadequate by real experience.

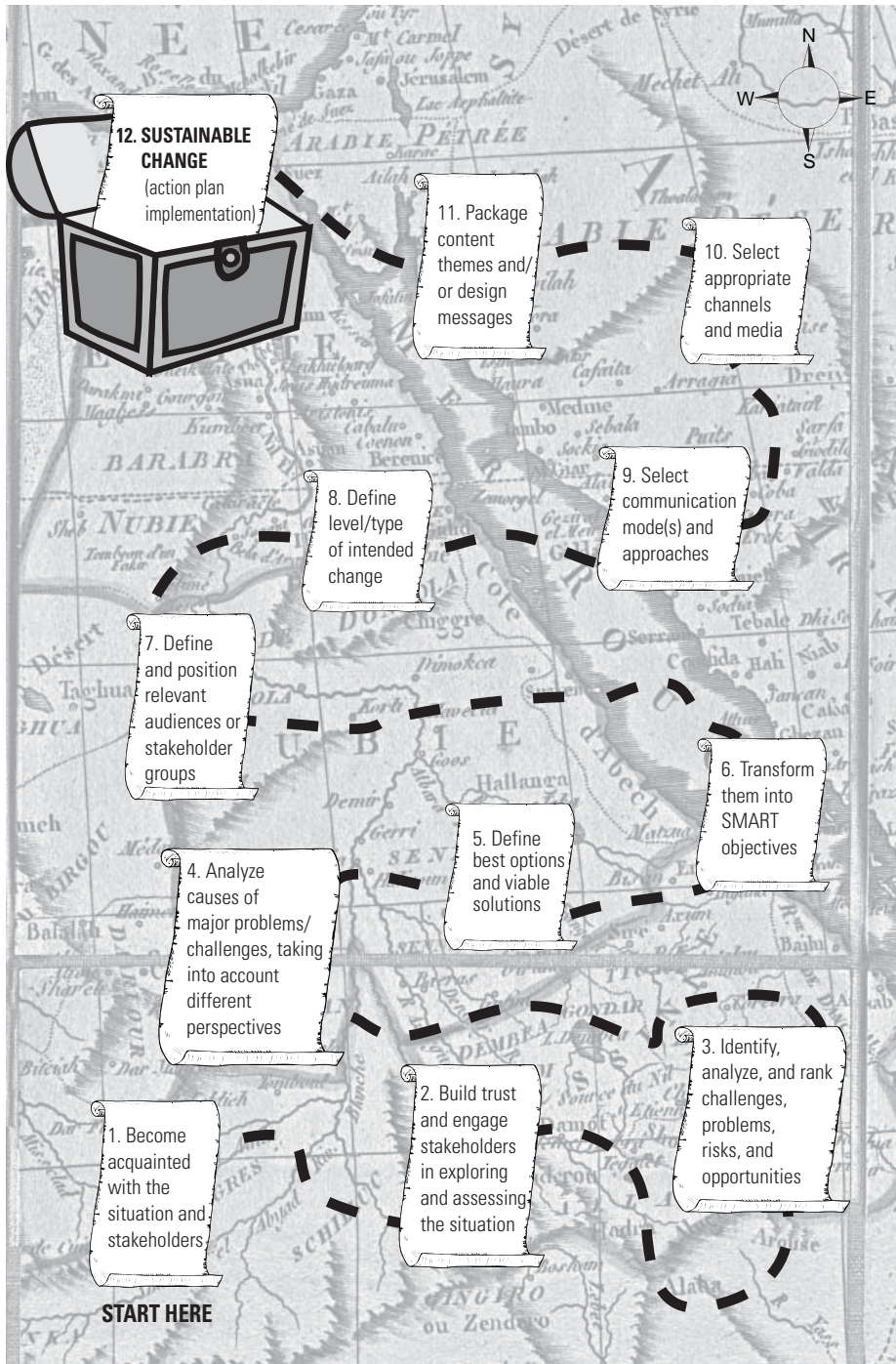
Bella Mody (1991) told about one of the most famous of these cases. Villagers failed to respond in the expected way to the dangers of malaria presented to them in a film on the subject. For dramatization purposes in the film, mosquitoes were depicted as much larger than they are in reality. As a result, the villagers did not recognize them as a threat, and they assumed that there was nothing to worry about since there were no such big insects in their area!

3.3.2 Putting the Pieces Together: Drawing Up an Action Plan

The other parts of the process leading to an action plan have been described in previous sections. By combining the three main tables of each phase (table 3.3 on communication-based assessment, table 3.5 on communication strategy design, and table 3.7 on a communication action plan), the reader has an overall view of the entire process needed to design and implement a communication program. Figure 3.5 combines the steps of each table of the first three phases into a sequence leading to sustainable change. The figure is derived from years of experience designing and applying development communication projects and development programs in the field and it can be used as a road map for the overall process of the communication strategy, its inputs, activities, and expected outcomes.¹⁵

In the map in figure 3.5, each specific step relates and interacts with other steps, usually the ones above and below. The information presented in this part of the Sourcebook aims to make clearer the overall sequence of a communication program from the research phase to the strategy design and the relative action plan. Practitioners can use the sequence in the map as a basic checklist to guide the implementation of strategic activities in operations, as also illustrated in narrative form in box 3.4.

Figure 3.5 The Communication Program Design and Implementation Process



Source: Author.

BOX 3.4 A Communication Road Map to Change

Figure 3.5 illustrates the process that is usually adopted to design the strategy and the implementation of a communication program. The presentation of the road map, step by step, is carried out here in narrative form. The context within which a strategy is defined needs to be considered as well. The starting point is always about getting acquainted with the situation, but if communication is included at a beginning of a broad process (such as Poverty Reduction Strategies) it will have a broader range of action than if it had been included in a program whose main objectives had been already defined.

In all cases step 1 requires reviewing available documentation and conducting interviews with individuals of relevance. Step 2 is where the genuine field research begins by engaging stakeholders in order to build trust and mutual understanding. The investigation usually begins in a broader manner, gradually zooming in on key issues in the next steps. In step 3, communication is used to uncover risks and opportunities while probing stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions about the main problem(s). In step 4 a communication specialist is expected to identify the main causes of the problem(s) that need to be solved. Looking at the causes is often more important than accurately defining the main problem, because to be successful the solutions devised need to address the root causes of a problem, rather than the problem itself. Step 5 is where viable options and solutions are assessed and identified. These are then ranked in terms of best choices.

Step 6 is critical because, based on all relevant data from the previous steps, it aims to transform the top solutions identified into SMART objectives, that is, objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. This step marks the end of the research phase (or CBA) and the beginning of the strategy design phase. Step 7 requires the definition of primary and secondary audiences of the communication strategy, taking into account their background, knowledge, opinions, and ways of life and other relevant information collected in the CBA.

In step 8 the communication specialist defines the level of change that is targeted by the communication strategy. As stated earlier, it is very important to make absolutely clear the type of change that communication is expected to achieve. It can be knowledge, behavior, or empowerment, among others. Whatever it is, it should be defined clearly at this point, as each type requires different communication approaches. Step 9 is concerned with the selection of the communication approaches, which are naturally linked with the type of change defined in the previous step. Social marketing, information dissemination, and community mobilization are some of the most frequent approaches.

Once the approaches have been defined, in step 10 the communication specialist can proceed to select the right media and channels for the intended objective(s). Once again, this decision is taken reviewing all the

BOX 3.4 A Communication Road Map to Change (continued)

information collected during the research phase. A similar approach is required for step 11 about message design. To be effective, messages must be developed having in mind the audiences' needs and ways of thinking. In other words, the design of the message, no matter how creative, should be derived from local stakeholders' world view, not from that of the specialist.

Finally, step 12 indicates the end of the journey. While each step can be different according to the situation and the objective of the initiative, the overall process remains the same most of the time. The main tip to remember is to make sure to analyze the issues properly and not to assume that the best technical solution guarantees the highest rate of success. Quite often sustainable change is about social ownership and local knowledge,

3

Communication Toolbox for Implementation

Operational managers for projects and programs usually oversee most implementation activities. With information and recommendations from the development communication process, the managers can work directly with the various specialists, such as radio and video producers, training specialists, and graphic designers. DevComm staff consult with many of these specialists in the research and design phases of the process, even if they are not usually involved in the implementation stage of communication activities. A professional development communication specialist should know the characteristics and potentials of each medium and the criteria for its best utilization, but he or she is not necessarily the person involved, for example, in the production of a radio show or in the printing of posters.

The tools used in this phase relate mostly to the specific media selected (for example, print, radio, video), and on the training needed to carry out the successful implementation of the activities. Considering the wide range of applications in the production of communication materials and media and the vast amount of publications available on this subject, a reader can easily access any of those publications dealing with any of the different media of interest, such as radio, video, print, or the Web.