

BOOK REVIEW

Servaes, Jan, *Handbook of Communication for Development and Social Change*
Acunzo, Mario; Pafumi, Marzia; Torres, Cleofe; and Tirol, Maria Stella,
Communication for Rural Development Sourcebook

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There is an important context for this review. It starts with a 2016 report by the World Bank that captured both the excitement and the frustration of using information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D). In the opening sentence of the Foreword to *Digital Dividends*, then Bank President Jim Yong Kim said: "We find ourselves in the midst of the greatest information and communication revolution in human history." However, he acknowledges that "With this great progress, many are still left out because they do not have access to digital technologies." The report notes that the lives of most of the world's population remain largely untouched by the digital revolution. Further, in a recent issue of the JDC in reviewing Unwin's book *Reclaiming Information and Communication Technologies* we noted the author's deep concern about underserved population's lack of significant access to the benefits of the digital world and communication that might change the socio-political landscape.

Two publications in this review may be helpful in the effortst to provide underserved people with access to constructive use of digital technologies. The books provide resources for training people on the frontlines of development with tools for bringing underserved people into the digital world and its links to better health, education, agricultural productivity and political access. The first, published in 2019, is the *Handbook of Communication for Development and Social Change* edited by Jan Servaes. The book contains 79 chapters written by persons who have been on those frontlines of communication and development. For example, the opening chapter, contributed by Silvia Balit and Mario Acunzo, is "A Changing World: FAO Efforts in Communication for Rural Development/" It describes relevant approaches, trends, and challenges of applying strategic communication to agricultural and rural development in a changing world. It focuses on the experience of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The authors suggest that new economic and environmental challenges affecting rural areas demand new communication approaches, including new policy and financial commitments on the part of development institutions and governments, as well as policy dialogue with interested parties, including producer and indigenous peoples' organizations, and representatives of women and youth. The authors stress the importance of participation, an issue that emerges in many other chapters in the *Handbook*.

A variety of case studies appear in the book. For example, Kriss Barker and Fatou Jah -- in a chapter titled "Entertainment-Education in Radio: Three Case Studies from Africa" -- explore in detail projects in Nigeria, Burundi and Burkina Faso that used a communication intervention approach advanced by the Population Media Center. Other chapters in the *Handbook* take the reader to Spain, Kenya, South

Africa, Kazakhstan, and beyond. Song Shi examines “ICTs and Modernization in China,” revealing that assumptions and theories of the modernization paradigm have significantly influenced the policies and projects on ICT4D in contemporary China. And, Song Shi writes, discussion on the potential of other approaches in ICT4D in China has also emerged among scholars. Hina Ayaz discusses the “Multiplicity Approach in Participatory Communication” in Pakistan -- wherein the country adopted the Global Polio Eradication Initiative – only to run into negative perceptions and banning of polio vaccinations. However, a shift to a more successful approach, grounded in UNICEF’s social mobilization and community-involvement communication strategy, brought significant success. While many of the *Handbook* case studies incorporate participation as a significant development factor, they also address a wide range of social and political issues including, for example, civic engagement, sexual harassment, empowerment, and community voices.

In addition to an abundance of case studies from around the world, the *Handbook* delves into various research methods that are being used to understand and design communication for development and social change interventions. In “A Community-Based Participatory Mixed Methods Approach to Multicultural Media Research, Rukhsana Ahmed and Luisa Veronis review and discuss the methodological approach of a project examining the settlement, integration, and well-being of four immigrant and ethnocultural communities in Ottawa, Canada: Chinese, Spanish-speaking Latin American, Somali, and South Asian. According to the abstract accompanying the chapter, it was carried out “in accordance with key principles of community-based participatory research in the hopes to influence policy and standards and to create a community action project for promoting newcomer well-being and inclusion, as these concepts are understood within specific ethnocultural and immigrant communities.”

Dealing with theory issues, Silvio Waisbord contributes a chapter on “Family Tree of Theories, Methodologies, and Strategies in Development Communication. Its goal is to clarify the understandings and the uses of the most influential theories, strategies, and techniques. *Handbook* editor Jan Servaes' own chapter (with Rico Lie), “Key Concepts, Disciplines, and Fields in Communication for Development and Social Change ” identifies five clusters of concepts and practices that are evident in the field today and which determine the activities and approaches in communication for sustainable development and social change interventions: The clusters are (1) a *normative* cluster of concepts; (2) a cluster of concepts that sets an important *context* for communication activities for development; (3) a cluster of *strategic and methodological* concepts; (4) a cluster of concepts that relate to *methods, techniques, and tools*; and (5) a cluster of concepts that addresses the practices of *advocacy, (participatory) monitoring and evaluation, and impact assessment*. The authors extend their discussion into three subdivisions: (1) *health communication*, (2) *agricultural extension and rural communication*, and (3) *environmental communication (including climate change communication)*. This leads the reader into issues related to (1) right to communicate; (2) *education and learning*; (3) *innovation, science, and technology*; (4) *natural resource management*; (5) *food security*; (6) *poverty reduction*; (7) *peace and conflict*; (8) *children and youth, women, and senior citizens*; and (9) *tourism*.

Some of the forerunners of development communication have not been forgotten. In “Daniel Lerner and the Origins of Development Communication”, Hemant Shah links Lerner’s 1958 book *Passing of Traditional Society* to today’s modernization and faith in technology to solve social problems. Also contributing to the foundation of this field is Paulo Freire who contributed much to idea that participation should be a vital part of the development dialogue. Ana Fernández-Aballí Altamirano’s chapter on “The Importance of Paulo Freire to Communication for Development and Social Change” highlights his main work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a “before-and-after” in the fields of education, research, and communication, initially in Latin America and later in both North and South. Particularly in the case of development communication and communication for social change, the author stresses, Freire’s work had a definitive impact.

This review covers only a small slice of an ambitious trip through the world of development communication. A complete list of the 79 chapters in the *Handbook* can be accessed at: <https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8#toc> with short abstracts accompanying each title. The book's approximately US\$600 price tag probably makes it a more likely a candidate for purchase by libraries, university and government departments, and other organizations rather than by individuals. However, in capable hands, it can contribute to projects and programmes that address the concerns presented in the opening paragraphs of this review.

But this leads us to a second publication that is readily available on line for individuals' and organizations' consumption: *Communication for Rural Development Sourcebook*, which was produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in association with the University of the Philippines at Los Baños (2014). (It is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3492e.pdf>. According to FAO the *Sourcebook* was meant "to equip development and communication professionals with a useful set of guidelines, reference materials and learning resources to apply communication in rural development initiatives." Participatory communication is a theme throughout. The document is organized into seven modules. These are: communication and development planning, participatory communication appraisal, designing the communication strategy and plan of action, implementing the communication plan, participatory message and materials development, assessing results and fostering sustainability, and, finally, applying "ComDev" to rural development challenges. The authors invite users of the *Sourcebook* to arrange the ingredients to suit the objectives of their own training plans. However, in a final section the authors also provide a practical guide for planning and conducting communication workshops in the field "tailored to specific training needs and contexts." The section discusses steps in ComDev training and provides many helpful tools such as a training needs assessment questionnaire and training evaluation forms. The *Sourcebook* concludes with an array of fruitful annexes focusing especially on the principles and processes of media production, including visual, radio and video. The initial annex provides an overview of different media and their characteristics, including folk media, community media, mass media, information technologies, and social media. Despite its age, the *Sourcebook* provides an abundance of ideas and principles that can be applied to issues in this second decade of the 21 century.

We conclude with a positive note to address the ambivalence reported in the opening of this review. Despite the significant challenges of extending digital technology and development communication to the underserved, there are many who provide successful models and hope for the future. For example, Varshaben Luva is one of a growing number of women in India breaking through traditional gender roles by starting her own business. As a woman from a rural village in western India, she joined the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) that has trained some five thousand rural women workers in information and communication technology (ICT), especially core computer skills, to help them find jobs, become self-reliant, and overcome traditional gender-associated constraints.

After her SEWA training, Luva combined her new ICT skills with her background in agriculture to start her own text messaging business for farmers. Luva would go daily to SEWA to do online research of markets and of commodities prices and then send daily text messages about current market prices to farmers. They pay her 50 rupees (approximately US\$1) a month. This case demonstrates that ICT education can make a significant impact on rural women and girls like Luva, who can use their new ICT skills not only to make a living for themselves, but also to have a larger impact in their communities. The books reviewed here can fuel such forces.