COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (C4D) IN THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM: NEED AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Communication has become a major issue in addressing various aspects of national development, including agriculture, health, gender issues, and entrepreneurship. Emergence of a new generation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has prompted widespread international attention on what is often called "communication for development" (C4D). Today the focus is on strategically using ICT tools to address the Sustainable Development Goals drafted by the United Nations and targeted on the year 2030.

C4D courses appeared in the academic programmes of many universities about sixty years ago. However, recently the question has arisen as to the future of C4D courses and programmes in universities. A discussion about C4D took place in the middle of 2017 via the Communication Initiative on-line network. There were over 60 contributions to that discussion from a wide range of countries and perspectives, including many from academic institutions. This paper reports and summarises the discussion.

There have been major advances in Asia and the Pacific region in getting universities to offer courses related to C4D and by creating online resources including distance learning and training modules that link ICT essentials to development. It is evident that the C4D approach is somewhat broader in scope than the emphasis on ICTs for development.

The final section of this paper provides additional ideas for introducing or strengthening C4D in the university curriculum including developing C4D resources for university programmes, incorporation of learning strategies, and involvement of community learning centres and telecentres as real-life laboratories for students.

Introduction

The emergence of a new generation of information and communication technologies (ICT) has prompted widespread international attention to a larger role for communication in development initiatives. Computers, mobile phones (especially smart phones), and the internet have become accessible by many even in developing nations. A major thrust toward recognising the great potential of ICTs

came from the eight major industrial nations (the G8) who, in the year 2000, asserted that information and communication technologies can be one of the most potent forces in shaping the 21st century. The G8 noted that the revolutionary impact of ICTs affects the way people live, learn and work, and the way government interacts with civil society. In 2003 and 2005, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) persuaded many nations and international organisations to undertake ICT projects to help meet the 2015 targets for the Millennium Development Goals. Now the focus is on strategically using these tools to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) drafted by the United Nations in 2015 and targeted for the year 2030. In this paper we explore a strategy for action that involves community learning centres, universities, and the application of communication for development.

Education and Community Centres

One of the keys to development in many nations is the creation of various kinds of community centres that provide access to lifelong education for poor and marginalised people. UNESCO, for example, has been active for many years in the establishment of community learning centres which it considers to be "vibrant centres of learning." The surge in the past decade has resulted, in part, from UNESCO's programme called APPEAL. However such local centres have a long history. The case of Nepal is a good example. The idea of creating these centres in Nepal goes back to the 1980s when about 154 village reading centres were established across the country to provide community-based post-literacy and continuing education training programmes. The reading centre concept was later refined, revitalised and further broadened from a 'reading' centre to a 'community learning' centre. The Community Learning Centre (CLC) programme in Nepal targets out-of-school children, youth and adults from marginalised rural and urban communities. Through various government processes and international funding, Nepal established more than 800 CLCs and had the ambitious goal of establishing one in every village. As in other countries, nearly all CLCs in Nepal were established and are being managed by the local people. The Community Learning Centre Project launched by UNESCO/Bangkok has been operational since 1998. Since then nations throughout Asia have created community learning centres. They exist in 24 countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region and 10 countires in the Arabic-speaking world. There may be as many as 170,000 CLCs in the Asia-Pacific Region, some established by governments, some by non-governmental organisations, and most operated by local communities. On a much smaller scale, in Africa, since 2007, Maarifa Community Knowledge Centres have been established in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. There is now an effort by UNESCO to promote the connectivity of the Asian learning centres, that is, have CLCs connected to the digital world, thereby reducing the world's digital

divide. In the African situation, there is an explicit effort to use multi-media tools to enhance learning for increasing socio-economic empowerment. The existance and expansion of the CLC movement is important to our discussion because, as we shall see, they could be partners in the education of university students in courses related to the communication and development such as education, computer science, social sciences, and other disciplines.

Communication and Development

Communication as a tool in development has a long history. Agricultural extension services have used publications and radio for many decades. However, the emergence of computers, the internet, and social media have changed the scenario dramatically. Here are some examples. Today there are about 3.5 billion internet users (3,500,000,000), or almost half (46%) of the world's population. The figure for Asia is about 40%. There are almost seven billion mobile phones in use. Obviously not all are for development. However we do see professional papers with titles such as "Mobilising Myanmar: A Smartphone Revolution Connects The Poor with Economic Opportunity" and "Crowdsources Citizen Feedback" — both drawn from The Digital and Development Network. (See: http://www.comminit.com/ict-4-development/content/crowdsourcing-citizen-feedback-district-development-ghana-using-interactive-voice-respon). There are probably around 95,000 village radio sets in use. And there are now approximately 160 countries with strategies to promote use of ICTs for development.Those are impressive data, but we need to take a look at the personal impact of the ICT movement.

Varshaben Luva is one of a growing number of women in India breaking through traditional gender roles by starting her own business. Although a farmer, she attended the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India that has trained some five thousand women workers from rural areas in core computer skills to help them find jobs, become self-reliant, and overcome traditional gender-associated constraints. Luva's story begins on a dusty road in India. Luva dreaded the 100-mile drives on that dusty road to the marketplace to sell her crop. The long trips were not only exhausting but often resulted in a financial loss when she could not sell her crop in the market. Other farmers experienced the same difficulty and frustrations – and losses. After attending SEWA's computer training session, Luva was able to combine her new information technology skills with her background in agriculture to start her own text messaging business for farmers. Luva now goes to SEWA on a daily basis to do online research of markets and prices of commodities. Then she sends daily text messages about current market prices to farmers who pay her 50 rupees (approximately US$1) a month for her service. There was not an obvious need for her ICT market information business, but apparently her training in the community learning centre inspired the innovation. It is a scenario and outcome

that could be duplicated around Asia and elsewhere with the involvement, skills, guidance and inspiration of university students.

Universities as CLC Partners

A recent project in northeast Thailand illustrates the potential of involving university students with communication skills in the real life laboratory of community development. It took place in the framework of the academic strategy called "engaged learning" (also referred to as service-learning). Engaged learning emphasises students taking their credit-based university learning into the practical world outside the university to help local people meet some of their development needs. The students then reflect (learn) from the intersection of community and university. Here is an example: a new museum in the Ku Santarat area of northeast Thailand took advantage of regular visits of Mahasarakham University's Faculty of Informatics staff to express a need for help in making the museum's collection available "virtually" to visitors, and for creating within the museum a community learning centre. In addition the community wanted the museum to attract tourists' attention and have them visit some of the culturally significant tourist attractions in the area. Discussions with the community led to the idea of having a data base and museum website as a part of the museum's development and its future resources.

Students and faculty at Mahasarakham University (MSU) were mentally prepared to engage in such a project because the university has a set of policies for all faculties and units that requires they engage communities through a programme called One Program, One Community. Confronted with the museum engagement activity, the students believed that they would learn more and do more by becoming centrally involved in a project outside the classroom but that also drew on the classroom experience.

Engagement in the Thai museum project involved a variety of community partners including museum officers, local community officials and villagers, and local teachers and schools. Approximately 100 students and 10 faculty members from the Faculty of Informatics participated in teams to collect, organise and manage data related to the history, antiquities, and other features of the surrounding cultural sites. The overall process included collecting ideas and data from the partners, deciding what needed to be included in the on-going communication (the website) with visitors to the museum, and how to present it. The pilot project concentrated on developing the data base and the webpage for the project and teaching local people how to manage them.

Although there are no statistical data showing the result of the engagement, there are generalisations about engaged learning in a university's academic programme that invite your attention. One is that engaged learning demands more active participation by all parties than is often evident in traditional courses where students are fed knowledge by an instructor. In engaged learning, students

are active and they gain a sense of civic responsibility in their engagement with communities.

The Thai project also demonstrated that university students can assist people in the community in a variety of ways to help people make constructive use of ICTs and digital connectivity. These range from showing them how to access development-related web pages to using various lifelong learning resources, sending emails, and collecting and storing local history.

Another generalisation is that the process can excite faculty, students and members of the community through the building of partnerships and teams. In Thailand, for example, this was the first engaged learning experience for third year computer science students at MSU, and subsequently they planned another community project named "C4C-Computer for Community" that would focus on teaching computer technology to villagers.

There is further evidence that university students can be effective agents of ICT in development. In 2013, approximately 100 Hong Kong Polytechnic University students participated in four ICT-related overseas service-learning trips to Cambodia, Rwanda, Indonesia and Vietnam. Themed "Technology without boundary", PolyU students taught local primary school children and orphans in Cambodia and Rwanda how to use software for digital storytelling, animation programming and making robotic cars. The PolyU students also set up computer labs and an intranet system in a non-governmental organisation (NGO), and provided training for its staff to make use of social media for publicity purposes. Some students developed solar panels to provide electric power to facilitate children's learning at nighttime. In addition, a team of students conducted a survey in slum villages of Cambodia, and the data collected were expected to be used by an NGO for identifying the needs of the villagers.

Additional evidence of engaging university students in community development is the successful running of the Each One Enable One programme of the Department of Development Communication and Extension at Lady Irwin College (University of Delhi, India) during the last 25 years. Each year more than 200 undergraduate students and about 10 faculty members work on a one-to-one basis with persons from less privileged backgrounds, imparting functional literacy skills and life skills. Post graduate students of the same department have been closely associated with local NGOs working in the area of mental health, substance abuse recovery, health and nutrition, sanitation, life skills, and gender empowerment. Students have been creating and providing need-based communication media and strategies to conduct awareness campaigns, mobilise communities and other stakeholders, provide training and capacity building of frontline staff, along with monitoring and evaluation support. This is a mutually beneficial process for the university, students, and NGOs. However, the process is very time and energy intensive and requires deft management to achieve the objectives within the framework of a curriculum and a university calendar. Needless to say, such experiential learning assignments prove to be mutually beneficial for the students and the partnering organisations.

Steps in Asia to Involve Universities with Communication and Development

There have been major advances during the past five years in Asia and the Pacific region in getting universities to offer courses related to communication for development (C4D). Their emphasis has been on using ICTs for development. The UN's Asia and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT/ESCAP) provided a major start. Initially it set up various training resources to help a nation's leaders apply ICTs to development. It created various online resources including distance learning and training modules that link ICT essentials to development. However, the organisation perceived that to achieve the development goals of the coming decades, the future leaders and workforce of the Asia-Pacific region needed to have ICT knowledge and skills associated with a variety of development challenges. This led to APCICT's "Turning Today's Youth into Tomorrow's Leaders" programme which seeks to create a cadre of future leaders equipped with the capacity to use ICTs for achieving development goals. Its approach has been to produce materials that universities can use to incorporate ICT in undergraduate and graduate programmes at universities in the Asia-Pacific region. Its Primer Series of publications aimed at university students has been rolled out in 14 countries in the Asia-Pacific region (See: http://www.unapcict.org/pr). However, the C4D approach is broader in scope than the emphasis on ICT for development. C4D includes a greater emphasis on social science aspects of a communication intervention including, for example, theory and principles, intervention and behavioural research, audience analysis, message design, and strategic planning. ICTD projects are inevitably part of a larger communication intervention, and the nature of that intervention influences and determines the characteristics and direction of ICTD projects. (We discuss this in greater detail in APCICT's Primer Number 2: Project Management and ICTD, Annex 2: A Communication Framework for ICTD Projects at file:///C:/Users/Royal/AppData/Local/Temp/Primer%202_Project%20Management%20and%20ICTD-2.pdf.

An early University C4D initiative in Asia was the introduction of the Department of Development Communication and Extension at Lady Irwin College, which was established in 1964 as Rural Community Extension under the aegis of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Government of India. The curriculum offered by the Department trains women to understand contemporary development issues and perspectives of the family and community. Teaching, research and extension are an integral part of the pedagogy. The course orients students to various dimensions of development and sustainable social change. It provides strong theoretical foundations and experiential learning to meet the existing market demands for trained professionals in participatory development processes, communication research and programme management.

The curriculum has a strong multidisciplinary foundation in applied and social sciences. The course offers degree programmes at undergraduate (Bachelors of Science), post graduate (Masters of Science) and a PhD in Development Communication and Extension (see: www.ladyirwin.edu.in). Using a participatory approach, the course trains students to develop expertise in theory, extension, research and advocacy for sustainable social change with gender sensitivity. Other important areas of study are behaviour change communication, training and capacity building, media management, audience segmentation, new media technologies, and monitoring and evaluation of national programmes. Students are oriented to take up independent empirical research and write research projects. Enhancing the capacities of the students in participatory methods and innovative research techniques is at the core of the curriculum. Internships and field experiences are an essential part of the teaching-learning process and help students to acquire appropriate skill sets. The course prepares students to take up positions in development organisations, media houses, corporate social responsibility initiatives, market research agencies, and teaching and administrative positions in educational institutions. Students are encouraged to work as independent consultants and social entrepreneurs in the development sector.

Since 1999-2000, the Department of Development Communication and Extension has been organising an annual lecture and symposium on contemporary development and communication issues. Eminent speakers of national and international repute have been invited for the lectures which are attended by students, faculty, development practitioners, activists, and government representatives. The lecture series also receives participation from other universities.

In the context of the Indian job market, this is a good time to give impetus to the C4D courses as the new Companies Act 2013 has created a situation conducive to promoting development of grassroots communities through mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. The Act has created several opportunities for young C4D professionals to move out of the usually less lucrative jobs in the NGO sector to better paying corporate C4D jobs.

Realising the need for strengthening the C4D component in India, in 2010-11 UNICEF/India launched a mapping exercise to identify institutions offering courses in C4D or institutions having the capacity to offer or have an interest in launching courses in C4D. This exercise identified 10 institutions situated across the length and breadth of India. UNICEF brought them all together to share experiences and agree to hold hands with each other to further their capacity to offer C4D in their curricula. The author of this paper was part of this process as a contributor. In 2013 this exercise culminated in the publishing of Communication for Social and Behaviour Change (CSBC) learning modules for academic and training institutions in India by UNICEF. These are nine modules that provide a framework to educate students and adult learners to work as professionals in the domain of communication for social and behaviour change. The modules can be used as a whole or specific module can be offered either as select units or individually or in combination based on the

specific needs of a group. Institutions can use the modules to strengthen courses offered by them currently, offer short term certificate courses, one-year diplomas, and two-year degree programmes in C4D. It is envisaged that by suitable adaptations the modules may be useful in designing C4D courses globally. These modules are available on the UNICEF IEC eWarehouse, a repository of communication materials (www.unicefiec.org). In the following three years, some institutions did launch courses in C4D but the courses have not been very popular with students as important issues like availability of jobs, pay packages, accreditation, recognition, training and capacity building of academic institutions (faculty, infrastructure and training materials) leave much to be desired. Achieving sustainable C4D courses would certainly require consistent hand holding of universities by way of financial commitments and technical support from national and international stakeholders, government and private sector.

More recently, in early 2017 UNICEF/India set up *Tarang*, a Social and Behaviour Change Communication Capacity Building Hub, with an online e-training centre offering paid training programmes in partnership with a non-government organisation based in New Delhi. The outcome and popularity of these SBCC online training programmes will be studied with interest by all stakeholders, especially the C4D academic fraternity. The issues that need to be addressed remain as with the SBCC initiative — along with issues of seamless internet connectivity and access to suitable technology interface, official recognition of the course, certification and accreditation. These are extremely vital issues that need to be addressed in the Indian context. In 2017 UNICEF/India also initiated Dhara, a SBCC seminar series which focuses on various themes and shares data, evidence and experiences from projects supported by UNICEF/India.

Moving Forward with C4D in Universities

ICTD in university curricula has moved ahead more rapidly than courses in C4D. To some extent, courses in health communication, agricultural extension, and other academic disciplines may have drained opportunities for C4D instruction in universities. A recent online discussion explored the state of C4D in universities. The discussions took place during March to May 2017 on the Communication Initiative Network platform (https://www.comminit.com/content/lack-c4d-modules-university-courses). The discussants included practitioners and academics who work in the area of communication, media development, and in social and behaviour change. It was observed that 28 members from 16 countries (representing all continents) actively participated in the discussion with more than 60 contributions. A majority of the discussants (70%) were from the developed countries. Almost half of the discussants (46%) were academicians and the remaining were independent consultants (32%) or working with nongovernment organisations (18%). One discussant was associated with the government.

The discussion was initiated when a member from Zimbabwe posted her views regarding the lack of C4D modules in university courses. Nearly all the discussants expressed a need to reach out to academia as they are responsible for developing the human resources for implementing C4D. It was pointed out that not many universities offer degree courses in C4D. However, several universities offer graduate courses in journalism, public relations and marketing, and many of their graduates are employed as C4D experts by UN and national and international non-governmental organisations. It was expressed that these graduates are often found to lack theoretical knowledge and application of C4D strategies. Discussants also perceived a gap between the academics and the field reality. This gap resulted in communication experts focusing on public relations, advertising, and marketing of development projects, programmes and services to influence donors and decision makers instead of working towards changing behaviours and promoting development agenda. Such communication experts were also found to focus on promoting information and knowledge in grassroots communities rather than changing behaviours and practices. All the discussants agreed that well-trained and qualified C4D professionals were urgently needed to mainstream C4D in the development agenda from the stage of proposal making and budgeting of projects, instead of being an afterthought once programmes have been rolled out. At the same time a few discussants wanted that the advocates of C4D should make the field very competitive and prepared to meet the challenges offered by other disciplines by better funding and marketing of C4D.

Discussants suggested that interactions with academics should focus on developing C4D training modules, organising conferences, forging research partnerships, mentorships and field exposures to familiarise themselves with ground realities. The idea of developing and introducing C4D training modules was welcomed by most of the discussants from the developing countries. Discussants from the developed countries shared that their universities were offering courses in C4D and allied domains, which could be adapted suitably to offer in the online mode as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). However, C4D practitioners amongst the discussants did not agree to the MOOC format because in their view C4D training needed face-to-face interaction and hands-on experience. Discussants from Africa, Asia and South-East Asia were also concerned about the availability of internet connectivity, the prevalence of employers' unfavourable attitudes towards online courses, issue of accreditation and certification, recognition of C4D as a professional course, as well as financial viability of MOOC courses for the students and universities. Another apprehension voiced was that C4D courses often end up as health communication courses or some other discipline. This is not in the larger interest of the C4D domain. The group concluded that academically-based C4D training needs strengthening globally. Lack of substantial awareness about existing C4D courses amongst the discussants suggested that a database of C4D courses and universities should be prepared by region and shared widely.

The idea of a C4D course adopted by a university and offered within a residency block found favour with nearly all the discussants from the developing countries. As

in these countries, education is an expensive investment that needs to be made on firm credentials of the institution offering a C4D course. This implies that the degree should be recognised by national education boards and international bodies for employment. Further, the institution conducting the course should be able to justify to the students and their parents that investing their time, energy and money in a C4D course is a safe decision and a smart move toward a well-established professional career. This is especially relevant in the context of developing countries where there is severe resource constraint and competing needs and priorities in families. A few discussants pointed out the need to motivate UN organisations like UNICEF to take the lead and introduce C4D training courses. It was evident that discussants were not aware of the C4D/CSBC training modules launched by UNICEF/India in 2013 or the more recent paid online course in SBCC. Experience indicates that any course is likely to face challenges if it is not backed by a university, nor recognised by the government, is not endorsed by an accreditation body, and is offered in an online mode where a majority of the population is not used to studying online courses.

From the discussions on the CI network, it emerged that C4D needed not only courses and training, but also research and advocacy to earn its rightful place as a profession with a clear job market and professional trajectory. This would improve the uptake of C4D courses by students and make these courses competitive in comparison to courses in mass communication, journalism, advertising, public relations, development studies, sociology and anthropology. The academics amongst the discussants offered to form a group focused on advancing C4D in academic institutions by analysing relevant issues and taking collective action to resolve those issues and challenges. By the end of May 2017 a group of 54 C4D academicians and practitioners volunteered to carry forward the discussion. As a result, a new group entitled Advancing C4D in Academic Institutions was formed on the Communication Initiative Network.

Conclusion

As most of the nations of the world subscribe to the Sustainable Development Goals and their 2030 targets, it becomes increasingly important that the potential of using communication knowledge, skills, ethics, and technology intelligently and strategically be made more prominent in the academic world. We need to push further to link university studies in communication to the real life laboratories of such local institutions as community learning centres. We have seen the negative consequences of unbridled use of the new digital technologies — from school children's bullying to international terrorism. We C4D practitioners can support a more constructive scenario. In partnership with people in education, psychology and the social sciences, universities can support the inclusion of communication for development in their curricula to reach positive social outcomes such as SDG (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality

Education for All, and (5) Gender Equality. This applies also to a target in SDG 9: "Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020." Whether C4D appears in curricula as part of a traditional course in the social sciences, in computer science or in agriculture, or as a stand-alone course, C4D needs to be part of many universities' efforts to support the SDGs.

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