# COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: STRATEGIC ADAPTATIONS AND HISTORICAL ITERATIONS

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## Abstract

The old paradigms of development communication are giving way to new approaches because development and communication are necessarily evolving and involving dynamic processes. In this article, we recount the strategic adaptations that characterise the transitions from one development communication epoch to another, starting from the Marshall Plan through the dominant paradigm, dependency, and participatory approaches to the most recent explications. Two of the most recent developments are postulations by McAnany (2012) about social entrepreneurship, and the new prognosis by Jacobson (2016) on the capabilities approach. These continuing adaptations and developments underline the persistent attention from academia and the field of practice. The ongoing attention notwithstanding, formulations of extant theories have not kept pace with these new developments in the field, although the early signs are promising for the eventual emergence of full-blown theories to explain the intriguing interface between development and communication. The final verdict is that development and social change communication is vital for saving the world through redressing poverty, which is a pervasive global problem that is more than simple economic deprivation.

## Introduction

Communication for development is the understanding that the state of socio-economic growth and social change is a function of extant communication processes that include interpersonal and mass media interactions. It is often more commonly referred to as development communication, a term that came into greater use in the 1970s, following its coinage by Quebral (1972/73). She defined development communication as the art and science of human communication used in planning for and bringing about strategic transformations of a society to alleviate poverty and achieve better and more equitable socio-economic growth that involves the larger unfolding of the potentials of individual peoples. This definition hinges on the assumption that any human community can change from a state of economic insufficiency to one of relative affluence and progressiveness, and that communication has a role to play in the change.

In a more recent analysis, Quebral (2012, p.3) observed that "forty years and several other versions of the first definition later, development communication is now described as the science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic, overall growth that fosters equity and the unfolding of individual potential". This more recent definition suggests that development communication is not only necessarily continually evolving, but it is also applicable in all human societies, regardless of their levels of economic and technological development.

Although it is usually associated with social change in the so-called developing regions of the world, development communication applies to all human societies regardless of their levels of social, economic, and technological development. Its ultimate goal is to purposefully address extant problems with planned communication interventions. Explaining its applicability in every human society, Moemeka (2000, p. x) observed, "there is no nation in the world that has no development or social change problems… problems whose solutions are strongly dependent upon intelligent exchange of ideas, cooperation and building of understanding". In the complexities of our new world today, those solutions require more strategic communication designs and applications to achieve predetermined goals and objectives, hence the increasing association between strategic communication and development communication.

Properly conceived development communication is the practice of purposively and systematically applying communication principles, processes and strategies to promote positive and desirable social change. It is an eclectic field that has found acceptance by specialists in such areas of research and practice as behaviour change, development journalism, information-education-communication (IEC), media advocacy, rural sociology, social marketing, and social mobilisation, among others. Whereas governments and para-governmental organisations at all levels are the traditional promoters of development communication, business organisations strategically employ its principles and methods in their corporate social responsibility programmes. Next to governments, non-profit organisations including international development entities such as the World Bank and United Nations agencies are some of its arch promoters. For example, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) jointly produced a useful two-volume practical toolkit that shows the principles and domains, as well as some of the international organisations that have been the most dedicated promoters of the practice of development communication (Mayo & Servaes, 1994).

The UNFPA/UNESCO toolkit embodies a review of the various approaches to development communication and provides a ready source of information on the subject. It defines development communication as a social process that involves the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching a consensus for action in the interests of all concerned (Mayo and Servaes, 1994). Of prime importance is the creation of development programmes that respond to people's real needs and thus elicit their participation. Other examples of development communication involvements

by international organisations include the Communication for Behavioral Impact (COMBI) by the World Health Organisation, the Information-Education-Communication (IEC) approach of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Communication for Social Change (CSC) by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The World Bank and FAO collaborated in hosting the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCED, 2007), which yielded the set of wide-ranging principles referred to as "The Rome Consensus". Interest in development communication is not waning, rather there are new interdisciplinary extensions that lead many to characterise the field as active, dynamic, and matured (Lie & Servaes 2015) and the underlying research activities within it as expanding and sustainable (Servaes 2016). Khan (2013) summarised the tempo as having risen and fallen, but now reviving.

## Goal of this Paper

Our goal in this paper is to show how development communication has evolved through a series of strategic adaptations starting from the initial stage of the Marshall Plan at the end of the Second World War to the recent reimaginations that include its explanations as social entrepreneurship (McAnany 2012) and human capabilities (Jacobson 2016). Exemplifying with Muhammad Yunus's Grameen Bank and Bill Drayton's Ashoka, McAnany explained the new paradigm of social entrepreneurship as the answer to the malaise of "development dependency" which is the unfortunate phenomenon of funding communities and their bureaucracies impeding the success of development. Borrowing from Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, Jacobson (2016) extrapolates the key concepts of functioning, capabilities, agency, and freedom in an envisaged new framework for studies of development communication. These borrowings by McAnany (2012) and Jacobson (2016) add to the evolving understanding of development communication and take us one-step closer to the formulation of specific theories of the discipline and practice. When they are eventually formulated, such theories shall be adequate to explain the historical adaptations that started with the Marshall Plan and the dominant paradigm and which are continuing in new iterations that underline the evolving and involving nature of communication and development. But first, let us acknowledge the origin and the strategic adaptations of the term and concept. Although well traversed, this history and trajectory bear repeating albeit summarily, with due emphasis on the nature of the strategic adaptations, starting with the Marshall Plan.

## The Marshall Plan and UNESCO

The evolution of the concept of development communication, in some sense, coincided with the end of the Second World War and the increasing realisation of the potential roles of mass communication in bringing about public enlightenment, mass

mobilisation, and the winning of hearts and minds to prevent future wars. This is not to say that communication and development were unknown to humanity before this time. The Marshall Plan was devised by the US Government to catalyse European recovery from the ravages of the war through curbing hunger and insecurity, two great enemies of development at the end of the Second World War. Today, hunger and insecurity continue to pose serious challenges to world peace and sustained economic development. Because of the resounding success of the Marshall Plan in speeding up European recovery after the war, it has often been proposed that the world now needs a new Marshall Plan for the developing regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America where hunger and insecurity are the worst enemies of development. Communication was acknowledged to have a special place in bringing about development through its influence on people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. The prevention of wars and the embrace of new economic, political, and social development programmes were acknowledged to begin in people's minds, influenced both by interpersonal and mass communication.

The Western world was unequivocal in its convictions that it had the best model for economic and political development in its practices of capitalism and democratic governance, and it felt that the rest of the world, especially the developing regions, had to modernise by westernising. Thus was born the original and dominant paradigm for development communication that argued for development through industrialisation, mechanised agriculture, and the use of communication technology to achieve a post-peasant stage of economic growth. In addition to the US Marshall Plan, UNESCO was an active promoter of mutual understanding and social development. UNESCO's Secretariat identified obstacles in the way of achieving its goals, and these included global communication facilities and practices, which laid an early foundation for the organisation's continuing interest in development communication (McAnany, 1980). One of UNESCO's signature communication programmes is the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), which still actively promotes practical media development programmes in member states, especially those in the developing regions. The work of the US Government through the Marshall Plan and UNESCO's involvement in communication development were complemented by early American academic researchers who showed an abiding interest in practical applications of communication in addressing the pressing development problems of different world regions. The work of these American pioneers constitutes the first development communication adaptation, building on the foundations of the Marshall Plan and UNESCO.

## First Adaptation: Modernisation and Urbanisation

The intellectual progenitor of development communication was Daniel Lerner (1958) who led in the earliest attempts at formally staking the claims on the uses of communication in development. With a clear interest in the role of information in economic and social modernisation, he pointed to the powerful confluence of factors

that would provide the fertile ground for the mass media to play an active role as a distinctive index of modernisation in a participant society. Lerner's case studies of modernisation in the six Middle Eastern countries of Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan showed that the media are effective in relation to the minimum threshold of a critical mass of people who have certain characteristics among which are literacy, psychological preparedness and economic standing. In his words, "the mass media…flourish only where the mass has sufficient skill in literacy, sufficient motivation to share 'borrowed experience,' sufficient cash to consume the mediated product" (Lerner, 1958, p. 362).

Where the media are anemic as was the case in many developing countries in the 1950s, participation in modernisation diminished. A concomitant feature of modernisation was urbanisation, which even today is one of the collateral forces associated with development. Many of Lerner's ideas on modernisation and development are still valid today, even though the general tenor has diminished as subsequent adaptations gained in popularity and acceptance. Although modernisation is not synonymous with urbanisation, the good things of life, which we associate with development, are often more easily associated with our urban infrastructure. However, there are many anti-social and negative characteristics of some conurbations that show them to be lacking in some aspects of development. True development is more than a physical manifestation of material acquisitions.

Lerner's respect for the relationship between communication and business is often overlooked, as is his recognition of the value of people's participation in the modernisation enterprise. He was convinced that an expanding business sector leverages modernisation and development. He argued that in the absence of thriving businesses, "there is little room for the lawyer and accountant, for the specialist in industrial management or labour relations, for the insurance broker or the investment manager, for the account executive or the public relations counsel" (Lerner, 1958, p.362). It is instructive to understand the communication crux of the modernisation process, and to recognise the complementary roles of education and leadership in inducing a new process of socialisation among the rising generation. From the Marshall Plan and UNESCO programming to Lerner's modernisation and urbanisation in the Middle East, the next adaptation was the diffusion of new ideas, which is a necessary corollary to development. True development requires new knowledge that would lead to changes in attitudes and behaviours, in short, an acceptance of new ways.

## Second Adaptation: Diffusion of New Ideas

Right on the heels of Daniel Lerner was Everett Rogers (1962) who popularised the diffusion of innovations and related it to the adoption of new ideas and practices, which are often the foundations of social change and development. This was an elaboration on the role of communication in speeding up adoption and obviating rejection of new ideas, with significant implications for social change and development. Defining diffusion as the process by which an innovation is communicated through

certain channels to get it adopted, Rogers was quick to point out that this is an age-old problem dating back to Gabriel Tarde's (1903) concerns that given 100 different innovations, only about 10 would spread abroad, while about 90 would be forgotten.

The march of human civilisation is prefaced on wide acceptance of certain "good" ideas and practices by the generality of the people. Diffusion of innovations provided additional tools for explaining change and continuity in society, including modernisation and traditionalism, making it one of the most popular approaches to understanding development and social change. As Rogers (2005) noted in the fourth edition of *Diffusion of Innovations*, no other field of behaviour science research has showed "more effort by more scholars in more disciplines in more nations" (p. xv). Rogers' diffusion model showed there was a definite pattern in the adoption of new ideas and practices, with obvious implications for developing societies, especially in the areas of agriculture and health. In spite of the popularity of diffusion research, it was open to criticisms, especially from scholars in developing countries who were critical of the dominant paradigm. The next strategic adaptation in development communication after Lerner (1958) and Rogers (1962) is credited to Wilbur Schramm, the acclaimed father of mass communication education in the United States. His ideas on communication came largely from his personal experiences as a researcher and writer in the US Office of Facts and Figures (Chaffee & Rogers 1977).

## Third Adaptation: Schramm's National Development

Wilbur Schramm's work in development communication is so remarkable that Everett Rogers (1976, p. 213) argued that "the most influential book about communication and development is probably Wilbur Schramm's *Mass Media and National Development*". When the book was first published in 1964, it was the best statement of development and the role of communication in the development process. In the decade of the 1960s, with many developing countries attaining political independence and adopting some of the educational and mass communication practices of their erstwhile colonial masters, there was a pervasive belief in the power of the media as tools for bringing about national development. Many felt that due to the "magic multiplier effect" of the mass media, developing countries did not have to go through the long arduous paths that Western countries had to traverse, but could leap frog the early stages of development. According to Nair and White (1993, p. 13) developing countries "hoped to achieve in a few decades what the developed, wealthy, industrialised nations of the West have achieved over the centuries". Schramm's views are elemental in understanding the relation of communication to change (and development) in society and what communication can precisely do to assist economic and social development.

According to Schramm, communication establishes a climate for development to take place and its effectiveness requires an understanding of the culture needing change with explicit and implicit strategies that guide execution. Schramm's ideas on the uses of communication in bringing about planned changes in different

world regions have contributed in the evolving new intelligence on development communication and the ongoing strategic adaptations of the concept, which are revisions of the dominant paradigm.

As Rogers (1976, p. 213) explained it "Through the late 1960s, a dominant paradigm ruled intellectual definitions and discussions of development and guided national development programmes". Implicit in the dominant paradigm were beliefs in economic growth through industrialisation, capital-intensive technology, national government planning, and quantifiable measurements. By the 1970s, it had become fashionable to criticise the dominant paradigm and offer alternative approaches to understanding development and consequently the role of communication in promoting change in society.

The dominant paradigm, as an offspring of Western development theories, was found to be an inadequate all-encompassing framework in explaining the situation of developing regions, with its emphasis on internal factors as the main causes of underdevelopment. The combination of many factors that included burgeoning intellectual critiques and the realisation that meaningful development was not realised in many of the developing countries that practiced the dominant paradigm led to the proposals for alternative paradigms. Schramm's national development marked the end point of the dominant paradigm and the next adaptation showed greater respect for the beneficiaries of development programmes by emphasising their involvement and participation. The third adaptation (i.e. Schramm's) is close to the second (i.e. Lerner's and Roger's) but remarkably different enough to justify its identification and classification as a separate movement, although they comprise the dominant paradigm.

## Fourth Adaptation: Dependency Paradigm and Participatory Approach

The new alternatives to the dominant paradigm were the dependency paradigm and participatory approach. Dependency is the Marxist-oriented notion that the developing regions of the world were victims of the unfair distribution of resources caused by Western capitalism. The World Economic Order favored developed countries and kept developing countries economically, politically, and culturally dependent on Western countries, especially their former colonial masters. Development programmes were designed to perpetuate existing inequity with no genuine efforts to improve the living conditions of ordinary citizens. Media ownership and media content reflected the interests of powerful groups in the society. With such structural imbalances that favored the powerful elites in the society, the solution to underdevelopment is not communication or information but rather structural transformation to remedy the inequities and recalibrate the distribution of power and resources. The arguments for a New World Information and Communication Order are in the mold of the dependency paradigm, which demanded for more participation of the less privileged in both development and communication affairs.

The participatory approach emphasised popular participation in self-development planning and execution, employment of local resources, abandonment of top-down approaches, and integration of traditional with modern systems, among others. Like dependency, it was a reaction to the dominant paradigm and its emphasis on central planning by elites. Social change in Lerner's Middle East or Roger's rural communities and Schramm's developing countries came from the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy to the lower rungs of the society of ordinary citizens or farmers whose involvement in drawing up the plans and programmes was minimal and only nominal. The participatory paradigm argues that people's genuine participation is essential for meaningful change, which should not be dictated and enforced, but negotiated and internalised. As McAnany (2012, p. 87) explained it, participatory communication "refocused the effort of c4d in people as the engines of change, and it trusted people to be up to the challenge".

The participatory communication paradigm is indeed an omnibus platform within which can be grouped many approaches that are reactive to the dominant paradigm. Participation is not an end in itself but only a tactic for enlisting the active engagement and buy-in of the beneficiaries (Yoon, 1996). Thus, a modicum of participation existed even in the dominant paradigm. True and genuine communication is usually participatory and so no phase of development communication practice can be said to be completely bereft of participation nor can we say that the participation phase has ended. However, we can argue that there is a new phase of development communication that can be termed the fifth strategic adaptation.

## Fifth Adaptation: New Views on Social Entrepreneurship, and Human Capabilities

It is easy to argue that there is a new phase in our understanding of development communication because of multiple interesting recent developments that include widespread association with social change, expanded views on poverty, the recognition of new media's roles, an explanation of social entrepreneurship, and some forays into theory building. These are only a few of the interesting new developments in the field that underline the new realisation that development communication is on a new growth trajectory. Assigning a role for communication in development has come a long way from the ideas of modernisation to the strategic adaptations that have resulted in today's mixed bag of propositions and developing paradigms. The discipline continues to attract steady attention from researchers many of who have identified new interesting trends and foci that build on the historical assessments of the field's fecundity (Fair 1989, Fair & Shah 1997, and Ogan et al. 2009). Some of the new attention is directed at showing that the subject is contributing to the growth of the wider field (Bau 2016 and Servaes 2016). Others demonstrate its practical applications in public relations and ethics (Paquette, Sommerfeldt, & Kent, 2015) and also in addressing unequal development among global communities (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

The variability in points of view and the diversity of perspectives lead some to see the field as "somewhat fragmented at a theoretical level, with tensions represented in debates between some of these perspectives" (Jacobson 2016, p. 13). In his book on the history of development communication and social change, which is appropriately titled *Saving the World*; McAnany (2012) proposes a new paradigm for the new millennium, which he termed "social entrepreneurship". Illustrating with two innovative examples from the work of Muhammad Yunus (Grameen Bank) and Bill Drayton (Ashoka), McAnany explained the term "social entrepreneurship" to mean creating social value through finding local solutions to "social problems that are not otherwise being solved…." (p. 108). The goal is to create value that is social and to help people whose pressing and critical problems are not being addressed by other parties. This, in his view, is an apt description of development communication or c4d.

Although neither Yunus nor Drayton invoked development communication in their work, they recognise how significant macro changes can be made in the lives of marginalised groups through participatory engagement and empowerment that is not based entirely on foreign interventions and initiatives. As McAnany (2012) saw it, the essence of this paradigm "consisted of a focus on social change originating from local people who had innovative ideas about ways to accomplish the change and a care for planning and funding … that helped make the projects sustainable" (p. 122) by avoiding development dependency. Sustainability is an important contextual factor in the new paradigm, which adopts the participatory approach of the post-dominant paradigm historical moment. McAnany recognises and accepts that the dominant paradigm has not "passed" even though development communication is witnessing a new age of strategic adaptation and historical iteration. Social entrepreneurship promises new vistas that have potentials for growth and new applications to make us understand development communication better and ultimately contribute to practical theories of the subject.

Nothing could have been further from the minds of the pioneer scholars of development communication than a foray into social entrepreneurship; however, this excursion shows the elasticity of the concept and the possibilities for revivalism in the discourse. Jacobson's (2016) proposition on human capabilities is yet another recent iteration of development communication discourse. This is based on Amartya Sen's philosophical-cum-practical paradigm on human development, which is proposed to be employable as an overarching conceptual framework or theory for studies of development communication and social change. In this context, development communication is defined as communication that enhances human capabilities, which means the ability of concerned people to make choices about issues and concerns that they may have reason to value. The participatory and empowering stance is not mistakable, as is the case with McAnany's social entrepreneurship.

One of the four key concepts of the human capabilities approach is "functioning", which is the expression of what a flourishing life might entail. A truly flourishing life is not necessarily associated with financial wealth, and thus true development is more than economic wealth. The second concept is "capabilities", which represents real

opportunities that people have for them to enjoy a "functioning" (and not the actual *ipso facto* enjoyment of the "functioning" itself). The people concerned must select the functioning and capabilities. In the true sense of participation and empowerment, the people must be able to make choices about the things that they may have reason to value. The third concept is "agency", which refers to someone acting to bring about resultant change based on his/her own values and objectives. The fourth concept is "freedom", which is the real essence and measure of development. The degree of freedom in making decisions is development, in the sense that the freedom to make choices on one's volition to meet one's needs is both a primary end of development, as well as its principal means.

Genuine development is neither wealth nor health nor even environmental sustainability, but rather it is "freedom" or our capability to choose from available "functioning". Jacobson (2016) hereby presents a broad view of how we can adapt Sen's ideas of development in terms of what a flourishing life might entail. This is a position of radical and existential freedom in which neither governments nor aid/development agencies should decide for ordinary folks and aid/development beneficiaries. Rather, as McAnany would argue, citizens and common folks should decide for themselves in the spirit of social entrepreneurship and participatory empowerment. Jacobson (2016) is convinced that Amartya Sen's capabilities approach is a suitable paradigm for development and social change communication because it eschews the pitfalls of the modernisation paradigm and provides us with an innovative definition of development as freedom (Sen, 1999), while lending itself nicely to interdisciplinary applications. Not blinded to the attraction of the capabilities approach, Jacobson (2016) recognises some criticisms of Sen's postulations some of which include definitional problems, overlooking of collective needs, and inadequate attention to the class character of the state. These criticisms notwithstanding, the capabilities approach is promising because it recognises that the media and communication have key functions in enhancing human freedom and development.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that development is a complex phenomenon and the role of communication in leveraging positive change in society is not easy to decipher. Many attempts to explain development and the role of communication in it create the misleading impression that it is a simple process that only needs information and media manipulation to succeed. This reflects the tragedy of seeing development communication largely in media and persuasion contexts, which misses the important point that much of the practice is in stimulating understanding (Agunga, 1997). From the Marshall Plan through modernisation and participation paradigms, the underlying motif is one of creating better understanding, changing minds or affirming positive beliefs. The recent iterations are also in the mold of previous values with some common themes running through the various historical stages. The vestiges of modernisation and the dominant paradigm will hardly "pass" because no new

paradigm can be defended if it argues for anti-modernisation. Development is not to be associated with Western civilisation exclusively, as it is a universal experience. Therefore, development communication cannot be restricted to only certain parts of the world. Consequently, the search for explanatory approaches to help us discern the relationship between communication and social change will continue incessantly.

Although there is today better understanding of the sources of economic growth and some of the other aspects of national development, explanations of societal change are still elusive. Although the Marshall Plan succeeded in rebuilding war-torn Europe in the 1940s, today the continent is facing new development challenges in massive immigration problems, religious terrorism, and tensions within the European Union, all needing strategic interventions that are based on the principles of development and social change communication. The challenges of modernising the Middle East and improving the living conditions of developing regions have taken on new meanings in the new millennium. The problems defy easy solutions and the academic subject does not lend itself to facile theorising, hence there are no simple theories to explain the intriguing relationship between communication and development. The strategic adaptations from one paradigm to another and the historical iterations that presage change and continuity point to the promising potential for the eventual formulation of acceptable theories that are home based and not adapted from other disciplines. Development communication will continue to evolve, with new attempts to explain the various uses and challenges of communication in development, especially in this age of globalisation and new media forms. Whatever the disciplinary emphases, the central motifs will be people empowerment, new knowledge creation and management, poverty alleviation and eradication, and sustainable social change, all based on the widely-accepted notion that poverty is more than simple economic wellbeing. Development and social change communication is necessary for saving the world. This requires innovative and strategic uses of communication to redress poverty in all its manifestations and ramifications and to leverage on the capabilities of people to make decisions about the things they value for their well-being.

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