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APPLYING PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

This article speaks about the mode of communication which involves actual interaction with final stake holder and the importance of proper mode communication in order to understand the needs of data to be generated which is essential to meet the objectives of the project.

The primary and secondary data, its methods of collection and the challenges involved while collecting this data is highlighted.

Simple references and in life actual experiences helps in communication, one to one and between both, the stake holder and volunteer.

"participatory communication is associate degree approach supported dialogue, that permits the sharing of inf ormation, perceptions and opinions among the assorted stakeholders and thereby facilitates their management,especially for those who are most vulnerable and marginalized"

can be stated as summery of this article"

The limitations are also discussed, which affect the final information collected and the reasons for these limitations and part solutions to overcome the limitations in both, data collection and interaction with vulnerable group.

KEYWORDS :*Participatory communication, involvement of masses, Genuine participation, dialogue, empowerment, project management, benefits, constraints.*

Participatory Communication in Action

Participation and communication are terms with broad and multifaceted connotations, trying to define them specifically is a difficult task. Even harder is providing a widely acceptable definition of participatory communication. For the scope, participatory communication is an approach based on "participatory communication is associate degree approach supported dialogue, that permits the sharing of inf ormation, perceptions and opinions among the assorted stakeholders and thereby facilitates their management, especially for those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.

Participatory communication is not just the exchange of information and experiences: it is also the exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that need to be improved.

To be genuinely participatory and truly effective,1 communication should occur among all parties affected, ensuring all have similar opportunities to influence the outcome of the initiative.

Optimally participatory communication would be part of the whole project process, from beginning to end. Since this approach promotes the active involvement of stakeholders in investigating options and shaping decisions regarding development objectives, participatory communication also facilitates empowerment. In this way, the effects go beyond the project boundaries, spilling into the wider social and political dimensions.

The literature on development programs is increasingly flooded by examples of projects apparently embracing “participation." At a closer look, however, very few cases meet the standards of genuine participation. This publication, while embracing a broad range of applications, promotes the highest form of participatory communication applications, empowerment communication (defined in Chapter 1).

Proper applications of participatory communication methods and tools are not enough to ensure a project's success. Broader contextual requirements are also needed, namely a flexible project framework (especially in terms of timelines); a politically conducive environment, allowing open and transparent communication; and an enabling attitude by key stakeholders, including project management. Close adherence to these factors is essential for a high level of participation, while lack of these preconditions usually results in lower participation.

It should be highlighted that within the current structure of the development aid system it is rather difficult to have a high degree of participation. The agenda of projects and programs is often set by a few individuals (for example, policy makers or technocrats) with very little input from other stakeholders, especially at the local level. Moreover, the rigid management procedures and the tight deadlines for planning and funding required for approving and implementing projects allows little flexibility needed for participatory processes.

Finally, it should be noted how participation and participatory communication tend to be associated with grassroots and community-driven development. While this is often the case, it should be acknowledged that participatory communication could be used at any level of decision making (local, national, international) regardless of the diversity of groups involved, even if the number of people involved can significantly affect its effectiveness. There are instances where participatory communication has been used to enhance social accountability in water reforms, to engage parliamentarians in governance reforms and to mediate conflicts between local communities and national authorities.

VALUE-ADDED AND BENEFITS

To reinforce the benefits of adopting participatory communication, it is important to understand that participation and participatory communication are main answers to why so many development initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s did not achieve their objectives to produce significant improvements for the many poor of the planet. The causes of many such failures were ascribed to the limited understanding of local context and the insufficient involvement of local stakeholders. In addition, misunderstandings and differences in perceptions about key problems often led to limited political buy-in and faulty project design.

By actively engaging stakeholders from the start and by seeking a broader consensus around development initiatives, participatory communication has begun to be considered a crucial tool to avoid past mistakes. Many conflicts and obstacles can be prevented if addressed in a timely fashion. Moreover, genuine participation increases the sense of project ownership by local stakeholders, thus enhancing sustainability. On one hand, communication practitioners might have a more complex process to take into account the many viewpoints to be reconciled, but on the other, they are likely to

gain some extra benefits. For example, communicating project objectives and outputs might become redundant because stakeholders will already be aware, many of them will already consider the initiatives their own, will become actively engaged in the project.

Participatory communication's value, however, is not only considered because of the better results it can yield. People's participation is also considered a right of its own by an increasing number of NGOs, international organizations and UN agencies.. In this respect participatory communication fulfils a broader social function, providing a voice to the poorest and the most marginalized of the people around the world. By engaging all relevant stakeholders, participatory communication becomes a tool that helps alleviate poverty, mitigates social exclusion, and ensures priorities and objectives are agreed to and refined by a wider base of the constituencies. This process enhances the overall results and sustainability of any development initiative.

RISKS AND CONSTRAINTS

When developing participatory approaches, there are some limitations and potential pitfalls to consider in regard to the quality and ownership of the interventions.

As to quality of interventions, Bill Cooke and Uma Khotari have drawn our attention to the “tyranny of the method" (Cooke and Khotari 2001). They address the risk of insisting on participatory strategy no matter what the context or the environment. With a growing consensus around the benefits of participatory strategies, a word of caution is called for as to the relevance, timeliness and content of proposed participatory strategies. Critiques of populist participatory approaches include the difficulty, if not impossibility, in managing a decision-making process with large numbers people involved speak to technical limitations and to theoretical, political and conceptual limitations in unfolding a participatory method. Inappropriate timing of participation (e.g., half-way through a project) can also lead to further delay and conflicts, especially when reverting to top-down approaches like trying to persuade people “to participate" in what has already been decided. In this respect, obstacles are sometimes unfairly ascribed to participation itself, rather than to its wrong application.

One condition for successful participatory approaches is the articulation of local ownership of the problem and related solution. Collective, community-based solutions are often the answer, yet in achieving these, there is the risk of “tyranny" of the group. Based on some myth of community in participatory approaches, “communities" often are seen by many practitioners as the turning point of bottom-up solutions. They are often taken for granted as homogeneous socio-economic and cultural entities- harmonious units where people share common lifestyles, interests and visions of life. In trying to emulate participation, it is important, however, not to conceal the power relations in a community, the differences in opinions, lifestyles, beliefs and the socio¬economic distribution. A community can be full of tension, inequality and conflict, and practitioners need to be aware of the environment and treat the community as a sum of different groups rather than a homogeneous entity.

Finally a built-in problem exists in participatory approaches attempts to scale up the strategy. Given the differences among projects, their objectives and nature, and the host communities, replication is difficult. This is a risk to calculate with when strategies are defined and developed.

Different from one-way communication intervention, participatory communica¬tion requires a predominantly dialogic process, whose outcomes and implications are not always easy to pre-determine. This makes some managers of development initiatives uneasy. On the other hand, the higher the level of control from the top, the weaker the sense of ownership and commitment by the local stakeholders. Stakeholders' ownership and commitment are necessary ingredients to ensure better and more sustainable results.

The Four Phases of the Communication Program Cycle

The communication program cycle can run parallel to the project cycle when they both start at the same time. As presented in Chapter 1, the basic phases of a communication program can be classified as:

- Participatory Communication Assessment (PCA) is where communication methods and tools are used to investigate and assess the situation;
- (Participatory) Communication Strategy Design is based on the findings of the research and defines the best way to apply communication to achieve the intended change;
- Implementation of Communication Activities to determine where activities planned in the previous phase are carried out;
- Monitoring and Evaluation runs through the whole communication program, monitoring progress and evaluating the final impact of the intervention.

To make the program cycle genuinely participatory, two-way communication should be adopted from the beginning and be applied consistently in each phase of the process. Because implementation success depends largely on the way the strategy has been designed, the first two phases, probing key issues and making decisions affecting the whole program, are crucial. Finally, monitoring and evaluation assesses progress and helps to make the necessary adjustments during the implementation and to measure the overall impact at the end. This classification is equally valid for outreach (one-way) types of communication programs, as well as for participatory (two-way) ones.

Full participation by all stakeholders in any step of the process is not possible and, in some cases probably not entirely desirable. For some situations and technical issues, it would not make sense to broaden the participatory decision-making exercise. If priorities are decided in a participatory manner and there is a broad consensus, for example, to build a bridge in a certain spot, there is no need to involve all stakeholders in the technical decisions concerning the type of concrete, bolts and other technical specifications for construction. Unless there are people familiar with different technical engineering specifications, general participation would only delay the process and would not benefit the end result. In general, however, an overall participatory process (at least in key steps) is relevant to ensure transparent leadership and management of a bridge or other infrastructure project, including securing equal access to the bridge according to agreed policies and pricing.

While allowing for stakeholders' participation, a development planner or project manager must balance inclusiveness with time, resources, interests and knowledge of individuals and groups related to the intended change. Key stakeholders affected by the change should have the opportunity to participate in the entire decision-making process defining the needed change. After their input is taken into account, however, they do not need to be directly involved in decisions, especially technical ones, that might go beyond their specific interest or knowledge. The next example should clarify this point.

Box 3.1. An Example of Participatory Communication Assessment

In a water project, officers of an international organization identified as a key development priority the need to improve the water system of a poor region in a Central American country. Based on their knowledge and expertise, the officials defined what was needed and which aspects should be improved, with little or no input from local stakeholders. Expectations of the stakeholders were not considered, and as problems emerged, project management came under increased pressure from the donor and national political authorities to gain the support of what are too often referred to as

"beneficiaries." Thus, a more participatory stand was adopted in the following stages, and local stakeholders were involved in decisions concerning the technical design of the new water system.

The end results of this mixed approach (that is, top-down in the beginning and participatory from halfway mark) were less than satisfactory. Managers and a subsequent review mission ascribed much of the failure to participation, when in fact should have been ascribed to a faulty use of participatory communication. To be effective and actually participatory, the project should have sought participants' inputs at the beginning when assessing the situation and making decisions on what to do were made. Subsequent actions in the process could have been restricted to technical experts. This water project not only misused the concept of participation but also jeopardized the overall success of the project itself.

When stakeholders are not included from the start, participation is significantly impaired. In this example, local stakeholders should have been included in defining the needed outcome of the improved water system. They would have gained interest and been knowledgeable about which services were needed to improve lives. Rather they found themselves in a discussion of the technical design of a water system in which they had limited knowledge or interest. By switching these two basic factors—no stakeholder input in setting priorities and stakeholder inclusion in technical decisions—the project management set itself up for failure.

The Johari Window is a tool originally developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Inghman (hence the name) to explain interpersonal communication processes. It has been adapted to illustrate the dialogical process that exchanges knowledge and explores issues, leading to the best possible change. The Johari window is a useful tool to illustrate the process of joint decision making necessary in any participatory communication initiative. If "the unknown" is addressed successfully, the successful outcome is the definition of the objectives for the intended change. These objectives constitute the core of the subsequent communication strategy presented in the next pages.

Table 3.1 The Johari Window

Window 1:	Window 3:
OPEN KNOWLEDGE	THEIR HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE
What we know and they know	What they know and we do not know
Window 2:	Window 4:
OUR HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE	THE BLIND SPOT
What we know and they do not know	What neither we nor they know

Window #1 represents the first step of the initiative, starting with dialogue based on the common knowledge shared by all parties involved. "We" broadly refers to outside experts and project staff, while "They" refers to internal and local stakeholders. Window #2 represents knowledge of They, the local players, which is not known by the outside experts; window #3 is the opposite, knowledge of We, the outside experts, is shared with local stakeholders, covering areas not known to them. The final window represents the end of the exercise and concerns issue/s unknown to both groups. At this point knowledge, experiences, and skills of key stakeholders must come together to find the most appropriate options and solutions leading to the desired change. If key stakeholders jointly define the nature and extent of the intended change, the chances for success and sustainability of the initiative increase significantly.

Keywords: Communication program cycle, Johari window
Phase One: Participatory Communication Assessment (PCA)

In this phase, issues of relevance are researched and analyzed through two-way communication methods and techniques. For these tasks to be successful, it is necessary to establish an open or common space where key stakeholders can interact freely with each other. Establishing an open space facilitates the local stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process, thereby enhancing the chances of success and sustainability of the development initiative.

The name Participatory Communication Assessment (PCA) is derived from the Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA) methodology created in the late 1990s. The PCRA was developed in Southern Africa by a joint FAO (Food and Agriculture Organizations of the United Nations)/SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) project based in Harare, Zimbabwe, as a way to enhance project design and operations (Anyaegbunam et al., 2004). As PCA, the name is partially modified and the concept is similar yet broader for two reasons: 1) to account for its wide range of applications reaching beyond the original rural focus and 2) to indicate the more analytical nature of this approach from the initial concept of appraisal to a more in-depth assessment of the situation, which usually includes options to address change and to seek solutions. PCA can be visualized as a funnel (figure 3.1), starting wide and narrowing down to define the key issues necessary to have a successful and sustainable change.

Some of the basic concepts and applications of PCA are also closely related other widely known participatory research methods, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Some of the principles of PCA are also applied in the communication-based assessment (CBA), an investigation method used by the Development Communication Division of the World Bank (Mefalopulos, 2008).

Defining needed change: (communication) OBJECTIVES

Investigating specific issues, causes and effects, best options and the communication environment (media regulations, information systems, etc.)

Exploring broader socio-economic issues, priorities, problems, needs and opportunities

Setting the foundation:building trust, listening, understanding groups' perceptions and cultural norms

Figure 3.1. The Funnel Approach: Zooming In on Key Issues

The following are basic steps in the PCA: 1) understand the socio-cultural context while identifying and defining key issues (including definition of key stakeholders); 2) create a common/public space, establish dialogue, and build trust among key stakeholders; 3) assess needs, problems, risks, opportunities, and solutions; 4) prioritize key issues for change and reconcile different perceptions; 5) validate findings and define solutions/objectives.

To clarify and simplify the adoption of participatory communication approaches, the following guidelines illustrate the steps to follow, as a general reference for practitioners. Variables such as experience in this approach, scope of the intervention and specific socio-cultural context may change the definition or sequence of the steps.

The scope of any development initiative is to improve the lives of some stakeholders. In the past, decisions on what change and how were left in the hands of a restricted group of decision makers and technical experts. More recently, such decisions increasingly involve key stakeholders. Nevertheless, often external actors continue to define a development project or program.

A classic example of external, top-down decision making

A group of agronomists manipulated crops that constituted the basic staple food for drought prone regions in parts of Africa. They produced a new plant with a shorter stem that required less water.

The newly modified plant addressed the problem of water scarcity but the scientists did not contemplate another important issue. The long stems were used as building materials for roofs of huts, and therefore, the modified crop was abandoned after the initial adoption. This example is one among many where project innovations have failed to take into account local knowledge and needs, resulting in failure or underachievement.

The following steps indicate how to implement participatory communication-based research:

STEP1: ISSUE IDENTIFICATION AND DEFINITION

Initiatives originate in a number of ways: request of local stakeholders, study by a public or private organization, government-defined priority or need identified by outside technical experts. Whatever the origin, a participatory communication assessment adopted initially to explore all relevant issues is most effective.

The use of the participatory communication assessment at the beginning is exploratory: it is not restricted to a specific area or sector but is open to all areas and issues deemed relevant by one of various stakeholder groups. Conversely a PC A adopted in an on-going project with objectives already set is topical: it is restricted to investigate and probe topics related to set objectives. in this case, topical PCA should be considered a partial participatory approach, since the main priorities/objectives are already defined, and probably not in a participatory way.

To be genuinely exploratory, a PCA should assess any issue deemed important by stakeholders, including issues of global import such as climate change. it will be essentially exploratory since the PCA can investigate and explore various key issues, risks, and perceptions, and come up with key priorities and recommendations within a broad spectrum of applications.

On the other hand, there is the example of a project with the main goal to reduce the environmental impact of the destruction of the Amazon forest. The project manager may request a communication intervention in order to find ways to stop the practice of starting fires (even though often farmers are not the major cause of such problems), which lead to significant forest destruction. In order to design an effective communication strategy a PCA will need to investigate the causes of the fires and probe farmers' perceptions and rationale for starting those fires. Even if topical, to be at least partially participatory, the findings of the PCA will need to be discussed and negotiated with project management. if it is not, the whole exercise will be reduced to a top-down, one-way persuasion initiative, which is highly questionable not only from a participatory perspective but also as far as results are concerned.

Clearly, the range of a topical participatory communication assessment is limited by the boundaries set by the project nature and objectives. Therefore, if the objectives are set properly and are considered relevant by key stakeholders, PCA can still play a major role in the overall success of the initiative. if this is not the case, the major contribution of PCA should be to identify critical areas, obstacles and risks, feeding these findings back to project management.

When defining the area of intervention it is also crucial to identify and engage the major stakeholders and their basic positions and perceptions about the proposed change as soon as possible. All the key issues and the various stakeholders' perspectives will be investigated and probed further during the next steps.

STEP 2: ESTABLISH A COMMON SPACE

This step is often neglected, yet it is one of the most crucial. Past experiences teaches that many project failures result from two major factors: faulty project design and lack of buy-in by those who are

supposed to be beneficiaries. Both of these problems are due to a basic flaw: insufficient or very limited involvement of key stakeholders in the decision-making process of the development initiative. Establishing a space where all stakeholders feel comfortable enough to express their views, share their concerns, and provide their inputs on the desired change is key for the success and long-term sustainability of any initiative. This step, when adopted, comes after the initial definition of issue/s of interest and is the ideal one to start any initiative.

Key stakeholders must interact, achieve a mutual understanding, and then seek a consensus about priorities.2 All of this can be achieved only if all parties trust and talk to each other. Building trust is, therefore, a very important prerequisite to ensure genuine participatory communication. creating a common space can engender this trust. The space can be established in many ways, such as regular meetings in a physical space open to everybody, more formal mechanisms where stakeholder representatives convene and engage in a dialogue facilitated by a neutral source, or where appropriate, use of interactive technologies, such as the internet, to allow people no matter how distant to provide their inputs and interact directly with the other players.

There are a number of communication methods, techniques and icebreakers, which are particularly effective in establishing trust and require a high degree of empathy and understanding of the situation. These tools include a transect walk in rural and peri¬urban settings where local stakeholders walk around the community illustrating the various social and productive areas to outsiders; historical timeline to trace the history and patterns of certain populations; trend lines to identify if and when certain phenomena (such as AiDs, soil erosion, and so forth) have occurred, making it easier to identify key causes and possible solutions; and seasonal/daily calendar in which relevant groups describe key activities during the different time of the years, or even daily activities, according to the scope of the investigation.

0All of these are dialogic tools, using two-way communication. Outside experts should act as facilitators to make certain that dialogue, while covering key areas, flows freely in directions considered important by stakeholders. When these activities have established trust and issues of interest are jointly explored, it is possible to proceed to the next step.

STEP 3: ASSESSING NEEDS, PROBLEMS, RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND SOLUTIONS From this point the investigation focuses on areas related to the agreed change. Two¬way communication explores areas of interest, regardless of the sector, which can include environment, governance, health, infrastructure, agriculture or any other initiative-related area. participatory communication assesses relevant problems, risks and needs and it identifies best options, opportunities and solutions. participatory communication is the key for the discovery process, described previously in the Johari window, acknowledging what each party knows and does not know, facilitating the sharing of existing knowledge, creating new knowledge and defining solutions to achieve the intended change.

A number of methods and tools can be used to investigate issues of relevance. A baseline study is a valuable tool to implement at the beginning of the communication initiative, before the situation is changed. The baseline has two functions: 1) measuring the situation at the beginning of the communication intervention, in order to evaluate its overall impact in an accurate manner by comparing the findings with a second study carried out at the end of the initiative; and 2) validating and quantifying the extent of the initial findings defined through qualitative methods. For instance, if a few ad-hoc interviews reveal that there are some reservations about the proposed change to give more political and financial power to local authorities, a baseline study can further probe the reasons for these positions and quantify how widespread are these views among other stakeholders.

One of the most common techniques is the problem tree. It starts from a problem or undesired situation (graphically represented by the trunk of the tree) draws an in¬depth picture of the overall situation, investigating the causes (the roots of the tree) and the effects (the branches of the tree). Often another technique is used in conjunction, the solution tree. It follows the same logic, however, instead of going deeper into problem-analysis, it uses the logical framework to focus on available options and best solutions.

One-to-one interviews and focus groups are among the most frequently used methods of investigating key issues. Although not necessarily genuinely participatory techniques, however, if conducted properly they can be part of a participatory process. A focus group is usually composed of eight to ten individuals with a common relationship to the issue probed. For instance, women of reproductive age can form a focus group probing perceptions of birth control methods or farmers of different ages and genders could form a group exploring the introduction of innovative techniques in agriculture.

In rural settings, community resource mapping is a useful tool that allows communities, even the illiterate ones, to describe their major source of income. Livelihood mapping is a similar tool, but its focus is more on people's occupation rather than on the overall resources of community. Social maps can provide a wider understanding of the social composition of a community, which are seldom homogeneous entities. These techniques can be used sequentially to validate results and to reach a better understanding of the socio-economic structure of a community or groups of stakeholders.

Communication-related issues. When dealing with communication-related issues, a number of techniques are used: communication resource mapping indicates in which way communities and stakeholders communicate among themselves and their preferred channels of information; Venn diagrams are useful to assess the influence of various actors and institutions and the way information flows among them; and a media environment audit investigates existing media infrastructure and current legislation on media.

When dealing with communication issues, it is important not only to identify formal and institutional channels but also the informal ones, which are often more important than the others. This identification is even more relevant in monologic approaches. For instance, while officers of the Ministry of Agriculture can play a valuable role in introducing an innovation of a certain harvesting technique, a successful farmer in the area could be even more influential in persuading3 farmers to adopt the innovation. A project in Eastern Africa, despite the use of key institutional figures and city doctors, experienced many problems in having villagers adopt a practice that could prevent many illnesses. Success came only when local community healers were taken on board and became key channels of persuasion for people to adopt the new practice.

STEP 4: PRIORITIZE KEY ISSUES FOR CHANGE AND RECONCILE DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS After investigating key issues, assessing problems, causes and risks, and identifying options and opportunities, it is important to probe and triangulate the findings. This determines if the issues are perceived and considered equally important by all key stakeholders. Even when there is a broad consensus on a problem, there may be many different views on how to address it. As a result analysis of the causes of the problem is needed to prioritize the various reasons and their solutions

For instance, to effectively devise a communication strategy it is not enough to know that the key problem is the destruction of the forest in a region, nor is it enough to know if the farmers start the fires when clearing their fields. To devise a strategy to reduce or eliminate this problem, it is necessary to know if the forest is burned intentionally or mostly due to careless acts. The farmers' perceptions

about the forest are also important. Do they see the forest as a resource for future generations or as an impediment for the expansion of their fields? This and other issues need to be assessed, contrasted and ranked among the various stakeholders' groups.

once a restricted set of priorities, problems or needs is defined, the list can be reconciled with different perceptions among the various groups, using a number of tools. The window of perceptions is a technique devised to compare and contrast different perspectives even in complex projects. it requires drawing a diagram of the key issue and how the different stakeholders' groups perceive its causes and effects. The various diagrams are then compared and when significant divergences are identified, two-way communication is used to reconcile those differences.

In instances where a straightforward comparison among different items is required (e.g., probing top health risks as perceived by a community) there are other simpler tools to be used. Pair wise preference ranking is a technique to probe stakeholders' views and rank a set of issues in any sector such as health, agriculture or infrastructure. its goal is to allow stakeholders to express their opinions about which issues are more important. It is particularly useful when trying to understand and weigh causes of problems and potential conflicts.

As the participatory communication assessment unfolds and different perceptions and positions emerge, dialogue should be used to facilitate understanding of differences and common ground and to reconcile the various views.

STEP 5: VALIDATE FINDINGS AND DEFINE SOLUTIONS/OBJECTIVES

once all the issues of interest have been investigated, priorities defined and best course of action agreed upon, the final part of the Participatory Communication Assessment can take place. It requires careful synthetic and analytical skills, since the amount of data collected for interpretation is often extensive. Findings must also be compared and contrasted across the whole spectrum of relevant stakeholders, because the communication specialist's main task should be that of interpreting stakeholders' inputs and identifying patterns leading to a change agreed by most. Combining a careful diagnosis with the logical process of problem solving derives this wider consensus, making the definition of objectives more relevant to stakeholders.

The role of the communication specialist at this point is to interpret the information collected and facilitate the definition of the path with the better options. Some creative thinking is often needed to ensure a broad consensus among stakeholders and define the best solution. Any PCA should end up with the identification and definition of the objective/s of the development project or program. This is the most critical part of any program, but even more so one based on participatory principles. There cannot be genuine participation if stakeholders do not take part in the decision-making process to define the scope of change and the objectives through which to achieve it.

The genuine use of participatory communication facilitates a collaborative working mode among stakeholders, allowing the sharing of different experiences and knowledge. This enhances the problem-analysis and problem-solving processes, leading to the definition of the objectives of the initiative. Proper identification and analysis of the causes behind an undesired situation are the most important factors in a successful definition of the objectives needed to achieve the desired change.

Keywords: Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA); Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA); Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Communication Assessment (PCA), exploratory assessment, topical assessment.

Phase Two: (Participatory) Communication Strategy Design

Any successful design of a communication strategy, or any strategy, begins with the definition of the objectives. This might seem an obvious statement, yet instances where strategies are designed on broad, shaky and even poorly understood objectives are more frequent than expected. When this happens, crisis and failures become the norm.

For example, in a poverty reduction program one of the objectives was to promote sustainable livelihoods of communities in rural areas. The objectives were so vague and broad that they allowed for a large number of possible interpretations and course of actions. As a result, the communication strategy was weak and it was difficult for the communication specialist to determine what was conceived and understood by “sustainable livelihoods." Notably, even the conception of poverty reduction was a source of trouble and confusion. The way poverty was defined by the donor and the implementing agency was not accepted by local communities—many of whom refused to be labelled as poor. The local communities boycotted many of the activities that were intended and defined for the “poor."

Similar to the first phase, a series of basic steps can help understand how to design a communication strategy based on a participatory communication assessment, helping to avoid problems of vague intent. Full participation of stakeholders in all steps is not an imperative as long as key decisions take stakeholders' inputs into account and/or are validated with stakeholders at a later stage. For instance, a communication specialist can design a radio or television message to raise awareness of avian flu provided that the avian flu issue has been first introduced and positioned with key stakeholders. To ensure a proper strategy design, the specialist also needs to be familiar with audiences' knowledge, culture, perceptions and priorities.

Design of a participatory communication strategy divides into two broad modalities: monologic and dialogic. Monologic, a one-way communication approach, promotes, for example, a public reform, raising awareness of innovation that can benefit stakeholders or designing a health campaign to promote a desired behaviour. The level of change addressed by this approach concerns one or a mix of the following: awareness, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours, and practices.

Not everybody might agree to include one-way approaches within the context of participatory communication, however, participation is not an absolute concept— either there or not. Participation does not always mean everybody is engaged in every step of the way. It can also be considered as a way to ensure the opportunity for stakeholders to participate in key steps of the decision-making process. Bella Mody (1991) refers to participatory message design, based on audiences' inputs, as a most effective way to design and implement campaigns: this implementation through mass media can be considered mainly one-way.

The second modality, dialogic, concerns strategies requiring a change in the level of collaboration, mediation, conflict resolution, mobilization or partnership, and coalition building. Participatory communication can enhance social accountability and transparency in the growing sector of good governance, which promotes the establishment of common spaces where various constituencies meet to air and negotiate different positions.

In Chapter 1, the distinctions between the dialogic and monologic modalities were introduced in the heuristic framework for communication for development at the conceptual level. In Chapter 2, they were further fleshed out through ten guiding questions and served as guidance for the elaboration of participatory communication strategies. The following elaborates on both modalities of communication.

In a monologic modality the basic steps of strategy design are to define 1) SMART objective/s

(SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound);
2)primary and secondary audience; 3) level/type of change (i.e., awareness, knowledge, attitude, or behaviour); 4) communication approaches and activities; 5) channels and media; 6) messages; 7) expected outputs and/or outcomes.
In a dialogic modality the steps do not differ significantly. The major difference is that change is not rigidly predefined, but the result of the interaction among the various stakeholders. The basic steps are to define 1) SMART objectives; 2) stakeholders;
3)level/type of change (e.g., collaboration, mobilization, mediation, partnership building, etc.); 4) communication approaches and activities; 5) partners, channels and, eventually, venues; 6) target issues; 7) expected outputs and/or outcomes.

Hence, the main differences reside in a couple of steps. In step two, audiences in the monologic mode are substituted by the more active conception of stakeholders in the dialogic mode. In the third step, the level of expected change differs: in the monologic mode it usually refers to a change in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, practices or behaviors, while in the dialogic mode it can refer to the level of trust, collaboration or partnership established, or even to the outcome of a joint investigation and analysis. In the following section, the steps of strategy design for each of the two modalities are illustrated through practical examples.

An example of the monologic modality of communication.

Clearly an example in this modality can only have limited degree of participation. In this case the example refers to a rural development project in Latin America and the issue of climate change. The participatory communication assessment identified a number of issues to address; one seemed particularly important: soil degradation caused by a number of factors, including the poor use of land by farmers. The main effects of soil degradation reduced the productivity of the land, increased the risk of landslide in the rainy season, and had a negative environmental impact due to the gradual reduction of the forest.

One of the project priorities was to raise the awareness of local farmers about the negative effects of soil degradation while enhancing their knowledge and capacities on how to use land in a more sustainable way. Even if the communication objectives (addressing change in the awareness and knowledge level) point to a strategy based on a one-way, monologic modality, the overall approach can still be considered within the participatory communication boundaries, although to a limited degree, since the strategy was derived through a participatory communication assessment and stakeholders inputs were taken into account throughout the process.

STEP 1: TAKE IDENTIFIED OBJECTIVES AND TRANSFORM TO SMART OBJECTIVES The SMART requirements can be considered as guidelines to define objectives in a feasible and measurable manner. In this instance the two objectives can be made SMART in the following way: objective #1 raise awareness to 80 percent of local farmers on the negative consequences of soil erosion by the project end; and objective #2) ensure that 70 percent of local farmers know and can apply basic agricultural techniques, allowing a sustainable use of land in agriculture by a set date. These quantitative outcomes should be based on the existing data, which can be provided by a baseline study.

It should be noted how in the proposed objectives the purpose is to raise awareness and increase knowledge, and not to have farmers adopt the new practices, even if that is the eventual project aim. It is therefore important that the indicators and the subsequent impact evaluation in the

first phase will focus on these two factors (i.e., change in awareness and knowledge) rather than in a change in practices or behaviors.

STEP 2: INCLUDE NEEDED INFORMATION ABOUT AUDIENCES

To illustrate the basic steps in designing a monologic communication strategy, focus on the first objective, raising awareness. It is clear the primary audiences are the farmers, however, a number of secondary audiences can be identified who influence farmers and raise their awareness about soil degradation. Among them are teachers, who influence students, who in turn can in turn influence the parents/farmers, and the extension agents, who with proper training and tools can become important channels to raise farmer awareness.

STEP 3: DEFINE THE INTENDED LEVEL OF CHANGE TO ACHIEVE

In this case the objective indicates the intended change is awareness and knowledge level. The rationale for explicitly defining the level or type of change is to keep the design of the intervention and the related activities focused on target objectives; hence on the needed change.

STEP 4: FOUR DEFINE COMMUNICATION APPROACHES AND/OR ACTIVITIES TO EFFECTIVELY ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE

In this case an effective objective would be to raise the farmers' awareness of the implications of soil erosion. if social marketing is considered to be an effective approach in the context, it will provide the broader framework within which the communication activities are selected. Radio ads and talk shows, public meetings, posters and regular meetings with extensionists can be some of the activities to raise farmers' awareness. Each decision, however, depends on the resources available and the knowledge of the local context acquired during the pcA.

STEP 5: SELECT THE MOST APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE MEDIA AND CHANNELS TO ACHIEVE THE INTENDED OBJECTIVE

Step 5 is closely intertwined with the previous step. In this case, radio, print materials in the form of posters, meetings, extensionists and teachers4 have been identified as proper channels. Some degree of overlapping between one step and another should not be considered as duplication, since it can provide useful triangulation and validation of previous decisions and insights.

STEP 6: DESIGN THE MESSAGE TO RAISE AWARENESS LEVELS

Step 6concerns the design of messages to raise the awareness level of farmers. To be effective the message design should be derived from the findings of the participatory communication assessment. in this instance, the pcA had revealed that most farmers did not associate the catastrophic effects of mudslides with cultivation techniques that caused or reinforced soil erosion. once this fact was probed and confirmed, a series of messages linking the elements was designed and successfully increased farmers' awareness through a multimedia campaign, including radio, posters, and interpersonal methods.

STEP 7: CONSIDER THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Step 7 can be factored in at a later stage. Considering this step as part of the communication strategy, however, keeps the strategy focused on the expected change, while also considering how to assess and measure it. In this case, the expected outcome is straightforward—the level of change in

farmers' awareness—but in many other cases it is not. Moreover, the difference between outputs and outcomes should always be kept in mind. Output refers to the immediate result, usually quantitative, of an activity, while outcome refers to how the activities impact the desired change. For instance the output of a training workshop can be the number of people trained, while the outcome concerns whether the skills acquired have been applied and with what result.

An example of the Dialogic modality of communication

An example of water sector reform, related to the broader framework of good governance, can be used to illustrate the steps to design an effective communication strategy in the dialogic mode. The broad objective was to improve water services, which were considered inefficient and with little or no accountability mechanisms to protect consumers' inputs.

STEP 1: DEFINE THE KEY PRIORITY

Step 1 as derived by the PCA defines a key priority for improving water services as the establishment of mechanisms to ensure citizens input and feedback in the system. Among the identified SMART objectives, the one used in this case is the establishment of a partnership among the main actors in order to ensure accountability and transparency in the system.

The main actors involved are 1) the local water utilities, private companies responsible for providing water services to consumers; 2) regional water boards, which respond to the Ministry of Natural Resources and are responsible to maintain the good condition and satisfactory service of the water infrastructure; and the 3) water consumers group, which represent the interests of the consumers. The experience and related literature confirm that in a dialogic mode, it is harder to have fully SMART objectives, as change requiring collaboration, mediation or partnership building are harder to quantify and accurately evaluate than changes in level of awareness, knowledge or behaviors.

STEP 2: DEFINE THE RELEVANT ACTORS

Similarly to the previous strategy, in step 2 the stated objective already defines the actors of relevance, or stakeholders, who are named in this context. The definition of these groups, (local water utilities, regional water boards and water consumer groups) including an understanding of the composition and functions of each group, is all that is required in this step.

STEP 3. FIGURE OUT THE SCOPE OF THE STRATEGY

Step three is the level of change or the scope of the strategy, and in this case, it refers to establishing a partnership to improve the situation. Achieving this task could be harder than expected since good intentions by the stakeholders directly engaged in the meetings might not be enough. institutional buy-in is also needed to guarantee support and sustainability to the partnership, particularly through difficult times. On the supply side (water utilities and water boards) the institutional buy-in must be validated by the top management, while on the demand side (consumers) the fact that consumers pay for water services should ensure their interest and commitment. Thus it is in consumers' interest to ensure water services are delivered effectively and efficiently.

STEP 4: SELECT THE COMMUNICATION APPROACHES AND/OR ACTIVITIES TO ACHIEVE THE SET OBJECTIVE

in this case, the activities identified first are the drafting of a memorandum of understanding about roles, duties and responsibilities for each of the three parties, a calendar of regular meetings and

clear two-way reporting lines. Representatives of the water utilities have to report on issues that emerge in the partnership meetings to their management and then back to the other partners. The representatives of the water boards need to report to their Ministry and then report back to the partners on any decisions taken. Finally, the consumer representatives have to inform consumers of decisions and actions taken in response to their suggestions and complaints, while at the same time making sure to have open channels to collect consumer feedback in a timely manner.

STEP 5: DEFINE PARTNERS AND CHANNELS

Once the activities are established, an effective modus operandi for the partnership has been identified, step 5 defines partners and channels. Due to the nature of the original objective (i.e., establishing a partnership) the partners here are the representatives of the three stakeholders' groups already defined in step two: local water utilities, regional water board and water consumers groups. In a similar way, the channels are defined in step four and are mainly meetings, followed by reporting to their respective audiences.

STEP 6 REFINE AND ADDRESS KEY ISSUES

These need to be discussed to share and understand each others' points of view and seek solutions that are within the framework established in the beginning, reconciling different interests and responsibilities. Due to the diversity of the issues and openness of the process is not often easy to predefine the content of what will be discussed in great detail, but it is usually possible to frame the broader issues, also based on the feedback provided by each partner.

STEP 7 CONSIDER THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Finally, step 7 requires the definition of what is expected once the strategy is implemented successfully. clearly the outcome of such an initiative, which is more genuinely participatory,5 is also more difficult to define accurately than in the previous example, which aimed to increase awareness. in this instance the expected change relates to the establishment of a working partnership among the three key players with the outcome emerging from the partnership. The evaluation then should assess both how well the three parties are able to collaborate and what results are produced by such collaboration.

Each of the two strategy templates presented here, monologic and dialogic, follow a similar pattern. When adopting a dialogic modality, however, the initiative is clearly more participatory and requires a higher degree of flexibility to adapt to multi-party outcomes, which are not always easy to predict. To be successfully and genuinely applied, dialogue and two-way communication not only require adoption from the beginning but also require a strong commitment and a high degree of ethical standards by the facilitators.

Paulo Freire once stated, “Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for the people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love.... Because love is an act of courage, and not of fear, love is commitment to others" (Freire 1997: 70). Such a statement may appear too idealistic to some readers. It does help, however, to explain better what many consider one of the major underlying factors that drive participatory approaches—the passion and commitment that goes beyond the purely professional competencies.

Keywords: Communication strategy design, SMART objectives, monologic communication, dialogic

communication.

Phase Three: Implementation of Communication Activities

Once the communication strategy has been defined, it is important to draw an action plan to implement and facilitate the management and monitoring of all relevant activities. There are many possible ways to devise and organize an action plan. Table 3.2, which refers to the example in section 3.4, presents a sample action plan.

Starting from the objective, the plan includes people (audiences or stakeholders) who are engaged in the needed change, activities planned, resources needed (human and financial), party responsible for each activity, and timeframe. Finally a column about the indicators to assess outputs and outcomes can also be added to facilitate the monitoring of the activities.

If the strategy is designed properly, most of the activities in the action plan are defined in a straightforward and logical way. Based on the findings of the PCA, some decisions require a mix of professional skills and creative insights, as every situation is different and takes place in a unique cultural and social setting. For example, avian flu prevention projects have as objectives to alert people and to engage them in discussing and implementing preventive actions to minimize threats, especially in rural areas.

Table 3.2. Communication Action Plan

Objective: Raise the awareness of the negative consequences of soil erosion to 80% of local farmers

Audience/ stakeholders	Activities	Resources	Party responsible	Timeframe	Indicators
Who are the actors addressed by the initiative	Which are the needed activities?	What are the financial/human resources needed?	Who is the party (person or institution) responsible?	What is the schedule for their completion?	Which are the indicators to assess and evaluate their impact?
Local farmers	Production of radio programs, posters and training workshops	Funding for design and production of radio programs and posters, and for training courses	Extension unit in the Ministry of Agriculture	End of 2009	Surveys indicating level of awareness of farmers on the given topic

In Latin America, community radio is a popular medium in many regions of the continent and would be advisable as a main channel. In many parts of Africa given its tradition and broad diffusion, popular theatre could provide a better approach to engage local communities.

The strategy and the related action plan must always take into account the context, the resources available and any other factor that might affect the implementation of the activities. The indicators column signals that monitoring and evaluation should be a consideration throughout the whole intervention, even if the final assessment is done after its completion.

Keywords: communication action plan

Phase Four: Monitoring and Evaluation

In many instances, this evaluation phase is planned and performed only toward the end of a project, while in reality, its planning should start at the beginning of an initiative. Furthermore, in a genuine participatory communication modality, the usual approach of assigning the responsibility of the design and implementation of the evaluation to external experts cannot be considered a proper course of action. If participation means that stakeholders are partners in the decision-making process, it follows logically that they must also be partners in the process of evaluating the impact of that change.

Too often the evaluation of communication activities is focused on outputs (for example, materials produced, number of viewers reached or number of staff trained) or on technical aspects (such as rate and use of innovations, adoption of new behaviors). Usually neglected are consideration of stakeholder satisfaction and feedback about the proposed change. To be participatory, decisions on what and how to assess change must be agreed jointly by all key stakeholders. For instance, when measuring the impact of an innovation, quantitative methods, rooted in a scientific methodology and often required by international organizations, can be used in conjunction with more qualitative methods. Not always considered as “scientific," qualitative measures assess the level of satisfaction and opinions of the ultimate users at the local level. Dialogue can help reconcile the different positions and needs, making sure that all stakeholders' inputs are considered.

For example, participatory communication articulates social change processes where monitoring the actual process is crucial to understand the outcomes. Figueroa identified seven key process indicators of social change: leadership, degree of equity of participation, information equity, collective self-efficacy, sense of ownership, social cohesion and social norms (Figueroa and others, 2002). Figueroa's methodology was as an attempt to quantify the changes occurring, thus seeking to numerically “weigh" the change. This is a difficult task, as the indicators are seeking to capture social change processes. Similarly, qualitative methodologies have been developed, for instance, the increasingly popular “Most Significant Change" methodology. It is based on the principle of systematically assessing and analytically synthesizing stories of change narrated by the participating people.

In the current structure of development, however, based on projects and programs planned and managed by outside entities, genuine participatory evaluation is difficult to adopt, given tight deadlines and rigid reporting lines. Nonetheless, this approach increasingly being used in small-scale, community-driven development initiatives. When success in these types of projects can be documented in a systematic way, it will become easier to promote and scale-up genuine participatory communication evaluation approaches in bigger initiatives.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that while impact evaluation is conducted at the end of the communication initiative, it needs to be planned from the very beginning of the initial phase. If indicators are not defined, validated and assessed from the start, no measurement will be able to assess the impact of the initiative after its activities are implemented. The same holds true for monitoring indicators that are needed to ensure that the planning and implementation of the activities stay on track.

Keywords: Monitoring indicators, evaluation indicators.

NOTES

1It should be noted that the terms "genuine dialogue" and "genuine participation" indicate the highest possible form of dialogue, that is an open and balanced communication flow among all parties, and the

form of participation where all parties have an equal opportunity to participate and affect the decision-making process.

2The authors are aware to walk a thin line here, since genuine participatory communication approaches are not fully compatible with the rigid structures of current conception of development initiatives that requires tight and timely outputs, usually defined well in advance.

3Once more, persuasion does not need to be considered exclusively as a one-way, top-down effort, but it can also be a way to seek for better options in a dialogue among two or more parties (Mefalopulos, 2008).

4Note that while extensionists and teachers are stakeholders, they can also become channels in some of the activities of the overall communication strategy.

5Again, genuinely participatory refers to a higher level of participation, as defined previously in this publication, with the higher level of difficulty in accurately measuring its outcome.

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