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## A COMPENDIUM OF REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

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The compendium integrates the findings of seven regional initiatives coordinated by FAO in preparation for the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD). These initiatives (involving regional meetings, e-forums and research papers) sought to bring together people, ideas and practices from the seven regions to provide a reality check – voices from the field - on actual experience on how Communication for Development (ComDev) is being applied at this point in time.

### CHALLENGES

The WCCD symbolizes the many and varied challenges (both opportunities and barriers) to full-scale adoption of Communication for Development (ComDev) in the world of global development. Each region participating in the FAO meetings, e-forae and research papers identified challenges inherent in their individual regions. Most of the challenges cross regional boundaries while a few are pertinent to the individual issues confronting a particular area.

Lack of knowledge and understanding of the different Communication for Development functions (and their planning process) on part of decision-makers

*Experience has shown that decision makers are comfortable with the idea of communication particularly where it applies to public relations, information and awareness raising. However there is little knowledge of the breadth of communication functions ranging from public relations to participatory communication. Nor is there understanding of the need for research-based communication planning to make a communication initiative viable. This lack of knowledge can result in confusion between communication for development and media, and presents a major barrier to the mainstreaming of Communication for Development*

*initiatives.*

*East and Southern Africa* reports that in 1990 the SADCC countries gave written recognition to the fact that a condition for development is the “free-flow of ideas, technical know-how and capital.” However, no mechanisms were subsequently put in place for establishing such participation in a sustainable manner. As a result, the failure to integrate all members of society in the decision-making process coupled with the lack of regional standards to guide member states on issues of democratic standards, electoral regimes, participatory development and corporate governance, paved the way for widespread failure in food security and natural resource management practices. All were carried out without proper analysis and participation of the people.

In *the Sahel region*, three out of the five countries participating in the Regional Workshop “Communication for Natural Resources Management and Local Development” held in Ouagadougou 6-8 June 2006, had policy documents on the importance of participatory development and communication. However, even those with policy in place had not integrated communication into sectoral policies nor supported much in the way of participatory communication. Those communication projects that were centrally promoted tended to rely on the media rather than other more participatory methodologies. There was little evidence of research-based communication initiatives.

## The need for capacity development and training institutions focused on communication

*There is a tremendous dearth of well trained communication practitioners in all regions. There is also a certain amount of confusion as to the depth and meaning of Communication for Development within regions and across regions making it difficult to find a common language/terminology to indicate the meaning of the process.*

The *Central America & Mexico* workshop “Communication for Development and Sustainable Livelihoods” held in Costa Rica in June 2006 attempted to introduce the Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) framework as a common foundation to compare and contrast the regional experiences. There was no unanimous agreement on the proposed framework. Two definitions of Communication for Development were considered.

The thematic studies carried out in the *Near East* region from April-May 2006 demonstrate that the region suffers from an absence of capacity

building opportunities for Communication for Development practitioners (and decision-makers). Participants to the technical consultation held in June 2006 in Cairo, Egypt felt the need for one institution to take the lead in providing training and capacity building for practitioners in the region. They pointed to only four institutions engaged in the practice and noted the subsequent lack of broad-based support for Communication for Development in the region.

The Southern African Development Centre, SADC Centre, set up with FAO assistance in 1993, offers a unique opportunity for ComDev capacity building in the *Southern and Eastern Africa* region. The Centre (which recently moved from Zimbabwe to Malawi) developed in-house training opportunities for regional teams from rural development programs to work and apply communication techniques in the field. In addition, FAO and the Centre worked with regional universities to open courses at the graduate and undergraduate level in Communication for Development.

### **Policy and organizational reform**

*It is clear that the presence of a supportive policy (for ComDev) within government at the national, middle and local levels would provide the impetus (enabling environment) to help accelerate the use of communication initiatives in project and program implementation. In many regions such a policy is often implicit in those countries that support participatory development (or community-based management) but in others, where participatory development is not the norm, it is almost impossible to find examples of any communication initiative beyond public relations and/or information exchange.*

In the *Central America & Mexico*, the initial findings of a policy review contracted to RUTA ([www.ruta.org](http://www.ruta.org)) has revealed that communication is rarely mentioned in national policy documents, and that references to participation tend to be associated with rural policy development. When asked about communication, policy makers associate the term with public relations and journalism, while ICTs tend to be associated with the technological dimensions of the term.

In *West Africa* three countries (Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali) already boast National Communication for Development Policies, which were in turn developed through a participatory approach. This work has been supported by FAO and relevant publications are available on the policy development process. Despite this, countries report that efforts have still not been made to disseminate the policy with few communication initiatives in place.

In contrast, Communication for Development is neither well understood nor appreciated in *Southern and Eastern Africa*. Although most countries in the region are signatory to the Lome IV Convention that recognizes that communication is pivotal to people's participation, there are few countries with policies to enable the process. When countries do recognize the importance of communication in the development process (Kenya), they lack the trained personnel to carry a program forward.

Most ComDev initiatives in *Southern Africa* have come from donors or international organizations (FAO, IDRC, UNFPA etc.). The need for HIV/AIDS communication has raised the profile of ComDev that has given rise to a plethora of communication initiatives carried out by NGOs.

In *South-East Asia*, the trend is for donor-driven projects to introduce Communication for Development as components in Natural Resource Management (NRM) and food security projects. While this creates opportunities for national government to witness the role of communication, there have yet to be written policies even within specific sectors. There is a need to systematize the findings from these initiatives to create policy agendas within the countries familiar with the practice through the individual initiatives. One exception is the Philippines where the call for communication inputs is clearly stated in the Agenda 21 policy statement.

The *Southeast Asia* experience with Farmer Field Schools (FFS) is already world-renowned. A major contribution of the FFS approach is that in Cambodia, the government has officially recognized the participatory approach as the core of its agricultural extension program. The FFS approach lends itself well as an example where the different communication functions are used in a coherent and complementary strategy. It also exemplifies a case where the government implicitly acknowledges the place for communication within the policy agenda (the policy call for participatory development).

In *Mexico*, the legacy of the communication component of the PRODERITH program appears to be an organizational tendency to focus on quantifiable media products as opposed to valuing the learning processes or contents of the materials. This "instrumentalist" approach constitutes a challenge when it comes to impact assessment and sustainability measures in that there is a need to demonstrate enhanced knowledge and skill as part of the process. Interestingly enough, the reports from Mexico confirm that the project left its mark: people still remember the videos; they recalled the video sessions as good opportunities to meet face to face.

In *Central America*, non-governmental organizations have created communication programs in support of advocacy and social mobilization. A combination of media and grassroots training activities that address agricultural issues, such as the farmer-to-farmer approach (campesino-a-campesino) are common. From a policy perspective, there is a contrast between these bottom-up efforts of social mobilization and a tendency at the governmental level to focus on the public relations side of communication.

In the *Near East*, participants to a technical consultation on “Communication for development in the Near East: experiences, needs and opportunities” made it clear that lack of political support and policy direction hampered the advancement of Communication for Development in the region. They felt that in all cases, the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts of any region clearly determined Communication for Development strategies and had to be taken into account and that the present centralized top-down systems of government in this region created a barrier to any form of participatory communication.

### **The need for partnerships**

*There are several examples where partnerships between government bodies, NGOs and academe have brought together the different communication functions within a given program to good effect. This type of synergy is possible in countries where governments welcome the presence of NGOs and see them as complimentary to the government role of service provider and regulator.*

In *the Philippines*, involvement in NRM conservation and development efforts has usually been a partnership between a funding agency, government unit, and an NGO or academe. Partnerships between and among several public and private institutions picture prominently in many of the projects reviewed. In *Thailand*, NGOs and the media are also actively involved in the implementation of national sustainability development projects.

While partnerships between government and NGOs are found in the *Near East* (Pakistan comes to mind), the relationship is not widely sought in many of the countries in the region. The absence of this relationship renders it more difficult to facilitate participatory communication approaches across the region.

In *Uganda*, a Participatory Poverty Assessment report (2000) indicated that 44% of communities cited ignorance and lack of information as the fourth most important cause of poverty. As a result of this report and

other assessments, the government established a National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) to assist government in providing agricultural extension service delivery in the country. NAADS activities are showing how communication methods and media are playing a key role in attaining its goal.

### **ICTs and knowledge management**

*The growth of internet technology has given an enormous impetus to wider interest in the power of communication. It has also opened the door to more horizontal communication that cannot be controlled by government. A good example of this is the recent blogging between Israeli and Lebanese citizens during the July war. At the same time, the excitement about the internet has led many decision-makers to confuse the internet (which is a tool) with Communication for Development which is a process that makes use of a wide array of methods and media tools. Internet is just one tool among many brought into use within the communication process.*

The *Near East* has witnessed a spurt of growth and interest in satellite technology. This has given rise to strong interest in modern ICTs. Ironically this has presented both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity lies in the potential of modern ICTs to connect vast networks of individuals and organizations across great distances (at low cost), the downside, however is that the fascination with ICTs has taken away from a broader understanding of Communication for Development, combined with the challenge of rural areas that lag behind in terms of connectivity. ICTS are seen as both the product and the program whereas they are only one group of tools in an arsenal of possibilities for communication in the region.

The *Central America and Mexico* gathering held in Costa Rica in June 2006 concluded with agreements for regional collaboration or platform. A website has already created a networking tool (<http://www.comunicacionparaeldesarrollo.org/>). The goal is to demonstrate how Communication for Development approaches contribute to improved livelihood outcomes in harmony with the environment.

In *Southern and Eastern Africa*, governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of information. As a result there are some policies encouraging the use of ICTs. However more needs to be done since many governments are not aware of the breadth of neither potential ICT applications nor what the internet itself can offer. In addition, gender imbalances in terms of access to information need to be addressed.

In the *Philippines and Thailand*, cases have been found where participatory methods are combined with the use of traditional media and more modern ICTs. Here, ICTs are being used to bring stakeholders into the process of planning and learning. This is a potential that can be harnessed more in sharing how the process of ComDev is done especially among field workers who have access to the net.

## STORIES ON COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES

*It is always important to tell the stories of communication initiatives that have been able to breathe life into a wide spectrum of different projects over the years. These stories bear testament to the impact of communication in the development process and help to remind us that without communication there can be no development.*

The development model that has prevailed in *Latin America* has stimulated top-down, unilateral, message-oriented communication approaches. What is needed instead is an alternative development model that is centred on pluralism and dialogue, where communication is seen as a basic right and as a tool for citizen engagement. In this perspective, there is no development without communication.

*Indigenous Peoples' organizations in Latin America* perceive communication as a strategic means of ascertaining their cultural identity, which in turn calls for supportive public policies that allow for aboriginal organizations to establish, own and operate their own communication networks in such a manner that traditional and modern methods and media may be combined towards self-determination.

Several *Central American* experiences (Nicaragua's Food Security Program; Honduras' Agrifood Communication; Costa Rica's Open Furrow radio program) provide examples of multi-media strategies that support rural communities with agricultural and food related information. In several cases, programming specifically includes a gender component. In most of these cases, however, there is no evaluation dimension in place to document achievements and/or identify weaknesses.

In *Cambodia*, where the government has embraced participatory extension on the basis of the success of the Farmer Field Schools, additional participatory communication experiences like IDRC's Isang Bagsak will demonstrate the multiple dimensions of such approaches beyond agriculture, such as participatory evaluation.



In *the Sahel*, Communication for Development approaches are often integrated with participatory approaches and this in turn leads to the inclusion of traditional methods and means of communication into project strategies. The bridge between modern and traditional communication gives recognition to the fact that projects can build on existing communication expertise at the grassroots level and complement it.

In *Lao, Cambodia and Nicaragua*, the FAO Special Program on Food Security incorporated Communication for Development and participatory approaches in its implementation. The benefits of these interventions include the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches and participatory planning. These projects have the potential to be used as “policy experiments” if and when the government is involved in a reflection process to appreciate the potential contribution of the approaches and the policy requirements for their continued use and evolution.

The notion of using theatre for development is relatively strong in *Eastern and Southern Africa*. In Malawi, “Drama in Education” is a process whereby theatre is used to research, analyze and solve critical issues in a community, empowering local people to enhance or make change towards positive behavior, knowledge and attitudes regarding social issues affecting their lives. Outsiders go into the community and stay for a few days, during which time they must know the people and their culture and then produce plays around familiar themes that are coupled with development messages.

In *Thailand*, the Agricultural Services and Technology Transfer Centres (ATTC) encouraged farmers to work as village volunteers. To be a volunteer, the farmer must have the capacity to access new knowledge and information quickly. Village volunteers acted as trusted teachers and provided a link between the government and the villagers. The ATTC staff provided technical advice and material support to the farmers from their Centres in the community areas.

The Virtual Extension and Research Communication Network (VERCON) started in *Egypt* in 1998 ([www.vercon.sci.eg](http://www.vercon.sci.eg)), a joint initiative supported by FAO with Egyptian research and extension institutions, is based on the knowledge that research, extension and farming communities needed to cooperate, communicate and plan together to ensure effective programming. It also capitalizes on the interest surrounding the new technologies to try to harness these technologies to bring disparate groups together into a knowledge network. Although a proven effective tool to link extension and research personnel into an information sharing network, so far VERCON has not been able to map out a methodology to include the small farmer within the circle.



In *Lebanon*, a communication initiative was instigated by the American University of Lebanon together with the Association for Rural Development in Arsaal (ARDA) to find a way to provide a platform to bring together disparate groups in the Arsaal area of the country, developing a method to bring multi-stakeholders together to discuss local needs in a face to face setting. A User Network was set up, with a platform for group discussion, functioning as a self-reinforcing interactive participatory communication platform that proved to be effective and innovative.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REGIONS

### Central America and Mexico

The common elements to work on in the Central America & Mexico region include: enhancing alliances, strengthening training, making the work visible, systematic documentation of experiences, creating a platform as sharing space, identifying indicators, influencing policies, integrating Communication for Development in planning, creating spaces in the media, horizontal exchange of experiences, information networks and methodological innovation.

*Analysis: While these are important accomplishments, the regional workshop did not lead to a common conceptual framework to enable a systematic comparison of experiences. Instead, a great deal of effort was placed on developing the mechanisms for a regional exchange platform. In addition to this initiative, there is scope for capacity development and exchange beyond the regional level, not only with other regions, but also with existing information resources with conceptual and methodological innovation that has yet to be shared, namely in the areas of evaluation and policy.*

### Latin America

“Sin comunicación no hay desarrollo” (Without communication there is no development) is the motto at the top of the Latin American report, and this captures the main lesson learned. The bulk of the development model that has prevailed in the region has created the conditions for a vertical, top-down way of thinking and implementing communication. The privatization thrust behind much of the development funding has left little room for the public domain of communication. The Latin American report calls for three strategic directions: citizen engagement to monitor the Communication for Development approaches; international observatories

on methods and media for ComDev; and the development of a mechanism for monitoring and exchange of participatory communication within the region beyond the WCCD.

*Analysis: The motto captures the strategic role of communication for Sustainable Development. Indeed, to date the prevailing communication methods and media have more often been a mirror of the dominant development paradigm rather than an engine for change. A major challenge then is for communication practitioners to become more strategic in identifying when and where there is scope for realistic interventions. Can we advocate for governments to embrace communication functions that are not threatening (policy communication and educational communication) and leave space for others to implement participatory communication until there are spaces to influence regulatory and policy level that shift the overall development paradigm, rather than expect our pleas for participatory communication to be heard from those who support the prevalent development model? In other words, do we have realistic, practical strategies in place to deliver our message? We suspect it is time to move from the broad call for change, to more practical, sobering means to create spaces for change at the policy level.*

## Indigenous Peoples

Communication for Development is already embraced by indigenous organizations in Latin America as a means to ascertain cultural identities and pursue sustainable development in their own cultural terms. The challenge remains one of unequal access to media resources, and inadequate regulatory regimes that fail to recognize the rights and particular needs of aboriginal populations.

*Analysis: As with the Latin American report, we observe a clear direction but limited specific steps to outline how we can get there. In other words, we have the goals, but we lack the specific objectives to help us get there. These steps will at the very least need to address policy, capacity development and new partnerships.*

## Southeast Asia

In the Southeast Asia context, the analytical framework used for comparing country experiences focused on four areas: policy, institutions, concept and practice in Communication for Development. In this region the introduction of Communication for Development has taken place mainly through donor-driven projects. A common first step is a focus on

the production of materials, which seems like a practical element to link with conventional extension programs (the case of Laos, Thailand and Cambodia). The risk of this project-based approach is that the broader contribution of Communication for Development is often disregarded, and the impact at the policy level is weak or non-existent.

South East Asia reports that while the countries reviewed in the region show a strong willingness and interest in Communication for Development, there is no indication that communication is being planned into programs and projects from the start.

Lastly, in Southeast Asia, experience has shown that policies are important as they provide the enabling mechanisms by which an innovation can easily be shared and worked out in a given social system. Its legal implications somehow “compel” people to oblige. At the regional level, policy on the inclusion of ComDev as an integral part of any development effort in food security and NRM has been achieved fully in the Philippines, partly in Thailand and is still being worked out in Cambodia and Laos.

*Analysis: The regional report did not yield consistent analytical frameworks that would allow for a cross-regional comparison of experiences. Even within regions, the attempt to apply the Sustainable Livelihoods framework- as was the case of Central America- did not succeed. The need for a common framework –or set of frameworks- that are accessible to practitioners and their partners remains a challenge.*

## East and Southern Africa

In the East and Southern Africa region, the review focused on a research paper produced by the head of the SADC Communication for Development Centre and augmented by a very lively e-mail forum on the subject. The paper gave a basic overview of ComDev activities in the region (both past and present) with a particular focus on examples from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Uganda. The author made the strong point that policy makers and decision-makers must learn to understand the breadth and importance of communication for development. In addition, the paper pinpoints the need for middle level management to build communication skills that would include an understanding of the research-based planning process and suggests further communication training for field level staff.

*Analysis: Even though governments, NGOs and others are now recognizing the need for Communication for Development, very little is being done to build capacity to make it possible. East and Southern*

*Africa clearly argues that the most important need in the area is capacity building in communication for development (at the macro, meso and micro levels). It is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that this region sees capacity building as the route to future policy development around ComDev in NRM and Food Security.*

## The Sahel

The Sahel group of countries -with three out of five actually having policies in place in support of ComDev in each country- was seen to have the political backing for increased attention to the role of communication within their development programs. This was the result of strong earlier support from FAO. Even so, they reported a lack of dissemination of the policies resulting in communication being underutilized in NRM. The participants to the workshop in Sahel pointed to the need for the elaboration of policies within all participating countries but urged each country to learn to disseminate the policy and integrate communication into all development programs and projects. They also called for strategic partnerships within all stakeholders in national institutions and urged the reinforcement of capacity building and acknowledgement of local knowledge.

*Analysis: The experience of countries in this region highlights both the importance of putting policy in place in support of ComDev (enabling environment) but also points to the undeniable fact that the presence of policy is not enough. In addition, there is the need for knowledgeable decision-makers who understand the policy enough to ensure its implementation coupled with sufficient practitioners to make implementation viable.*

## Near East

In the Near East common themes that emerged included centralized governments inhibiting the advancement of ComDev along with an absence of ComDev policies to enable the establishment of ComDev programs. The nature of centralized government tended also to downplay the importance of the role of civil society, hence eliminating possibilities for strong partnerships between government and civil society players. Participants strongly supported the need to develop a common strategic vision for promoting ComDev and the sharing of knowledge and experience.

*Analysis: The Near East workshop enabled participants to confront several of the key challenges to mainstreaming ComDev in their region.*

*It also gave clarity to the need to take the political and economic environment into account in addressing the mainstreaming agenda. Is it best to acknowledge a centralized government framework and curtail communication initiatives accordingly or does one see communication as a vehicle for widening the government agenda?*

## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hoped that the recommendations flowing from the individual studies can become tools to assist in the mainstreaming of communication in all development initiatives.

### Communication and politics

*In essence, the presence or absence of free and easy communication both vertical and horizontal is a political act. Countries that foster dialogue, debate and inclusion whilst encouraging a free and open media are more likely to engage in participatory communication practices than those with more centrally controlled nation states. The whole notion of transparency is in itself a communication function that depends on the willingness of those in power to share knowledge and information with those who are not. It is difficult to know which is the cart and which is the horse – can bottom up participatory communication help foster a freer society or must a society already be free for open expression in order to foster participatory communication?*

Regional initiatives have raised the point that the level of acceptance of communication (ie whether it is public relations; information sharing or participatory communication) is often indicative of the type of development practiced both in the region and by individual institutions in the region. Regions that discourage the presence of NGOs usually indicate that there are countries where not a great deal of participatory development is being practiced. Similarly, the presence or absence of a free and open media is an indicator of the degree of willingness on the part of government to tolerate/facilitate and encourage participatory approaches to development.

### The need for policy

*The regional meetings have shown that those countries with policies to support Communication for Development are most likely to open the door to an increase in practice. The presence of an enabling environment*

*offers a hook for practitioners to demand the inclusion of communication at all levels of planning. While this may be self-evident, the need to fight for policy has not often been clearly articulated.*

Specific “prototype” policy clauses that enable Communication for Development are needed at different levels: macro, meso and micro.

In many countries, Communication for Development is introduced through donor-driven projects. There is a wide variation in the approaches utilized, but often lacking a systematic review of achievements and a definition of the conditions needed for their continuation. In particular there is a gap when it comes to best practices in participatory communication.

If we are to harness projects as “policy experiments” then there is scope for more systematic reflection mechanisms to challenge technicians, communicators, administrators and policy makers to identify the relevant methodologies and the required policies to ensure the future evolution of the approaches adapted to the local context.

## The importance of fostering partnerships

*While the development of national policies to support communication for development is key, we recognize the differing degrees of effort and length of time each country might take to get to the table on this issue. Meanwhile, the need to foster partnerships between government agencies and other actors and other actors with each other is paramount.*

## Capacity development for decision-makers

*All regions report a lack of knowledge on the part of decision-makers about the breadth and depth of communication for development. This has often resulted in a partial nod to communication particularly if it involves media or a form of public relations to enhance the government agenda. It is clear that methods must be found to broaden the knowledge of decision-makers towards the full communication agenda. There may be scope to use well-recognized approaches like the Farmer Field Schools as a strictly “non-communication” -yet familiar- vehicle to illustrate how the different communication functions are contributors to the success.*

All regions note the need for sensitization of policy-makers, planners and decision-makers in government to the need for, and dimension of,

communication for development. As noted, even those countries in the Sahel with established national policies on communication for development still need assistance not only in diffusing the message of the policy but also in understanding the scope of participatory communication for development. There tends to be too much dependence on the mass media as main perpetrator for communication.

## Capacity development for practitioners

*The corollary to the need for capacity building amongst decision-makers is the more pressing need to develop a cadre of trained practitioners across all regions. Across all regions there is a lack of accredited training opportunities in Communication for Development. This calls for a global and regional concerted program to develop –at the very least- regional training programs.*

Several of the regional workshop reports call for networking among peers to support the exchange of experiences, further systematic documentation and comparison of approaches and experiences, and extraction of best practices. However, none of the reports provide examples of either analytical frameworks or evaluation approaches that have been applied to make such efforts practical. There is a need to develop basic common frameworks to enable the above tasks to develop in a coherent manner that will allow for cross national and cross regional exchange of approaches and experiences. A concerted action-research effort is needed for this to happen, one that integrates practitioners and researchers.

## Sharing of stories and experiences

The exchange of stories and experiences across regions and within regions has shown to provide impetus and encouragement to decision-makers, practitioners and donors who can get motivated to support ComDev initiatives. The call for regional platforms deserves to be balanced with the need to make use of what is already available at the global level within the field, and in each region with complementary activities in related fields. Of particular interest for the future will be the sharing of successful mechanisms to create spaces for dialogue and change with policy makers. Reaching these circles of decision making with convincing examples of the power of Communication for Development is the challenge for the future. While the message “Without Communication there is no Development” rings true, without expertise at reaching policy circles there is no message.



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