



SEEING BEYOND CELEBRITY

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Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them how to fish and... You know this story. In communication for development terms, the analogy might go like this: give people a say in your project, a voice in your study, a photo of themselves in your campaign, and they validate your work or lend credibility to a campaign. Teach them how to use their voice, address the world and tell their own story, and they might change how development is done. This article looks into this premise and considers how communications and development professionals could implement it with help from an underused resource.

BEYOND AID NGOS, NEW PHILANTHROPISTS AND HOLLYWOOD'S PROGRESSIVES

Michael Edwards and Alan Fowler said at the start of this decade that, “NGOs have moved from being ‘ladles in a global soup kitchen’ to a force for transformation in global politics and economics” (Edwards, E. and Fowler, A., 2002). At the same time, Fowler described how the amount of aid being provided by OECD countries has been decreasing since the 1990s and stated that this requires NGOs to consider how they will survive if it were to stop completely. The model he proposes for “beyond aid NGOs” suggests that if they are self-sufficient, they will be able to retain their values base and credibility. It includes them being more effective and responsive to increasing global changes. It also suggests that their work should ensure adherence to human rights. This could be done by: pressuring compliance from those whose duty it is to protect and deliver those rights; redistributing risk to those more capable of bearing it; being social entrepreneurs and civic innovators in finding new ways for states and markets to better serve society’s marginalised; and fulfilling these roles by being mediators, negotiators and watchdogs that enhance the capability of the marginalised (Fowler, A., 2002).

Meanwhile, as many NGOs are re-structuring, re-strategising, and reviewing their campaigns, business writer Charles Handy regards new philanthropists as another force for transformation. Handy’s research

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indicates that in many countries the wealthy are increasing in number, giving much more than they have done before, and taking an active role in the projects they fund by seeking out areas of need overlooked by existing projects, using their own funds to address them and their own entrepreneurial skill to ensure sustainability. They are also collaborating through new networking initiatives (Handy, C. and Handy, E., 2006). While the responsiveness and independence of these philanthropists echo aspects of Fowler's model, their success and visibility could further undermine public faith in NGOs before the "beyond aid" breed evolves.

A third notable element in the development landscape is the emergence of Hollywood's new progressives. Ben Dickenson describes how the social and political upheavals in USA in the 1960s produced a questioning of society and its institutions, which was reflected across all art forms and gave rise to new artists and artistic products that found new audiences and markets. According to Dickenson, this attracted wealthy financiers, which, favoured by subsequent tax and trade legislation in the 1980s and 1990s, gave birth to the current massive media conglomerates of today (2006). The last ten years have seen growth and convergence of anti-globalisation, anti-war and environmental movements – not yet deemed to be as transformative as their forty-year old forerunners, but still, populated by people generating media products that reflect their own views and at the same time have highlighted a new market that has caught the interest of investors. The new artists include veterans of earlier eras in their projects, and the combination is both encouraging and emblematic of the movements. Some of the new philanthropists have joined forces with the new progressives, perhaps most successfully in the case of eBay co-founder Jeff Skoll's film company *Participant Productions*, whose films include "An Inconvenient Truth" and "Darfur Now".

The body of work on NGO relations with the private sector says little about those business people who are looking for more than good PR. Yet, Robert Chambers contends that we really ought to be studying the rich and powerful. In arguing for development to be reconceived of as "responsible well-being", he points out how obvious it is that what happens depends on what type of people we are: "Especially, what happens depends on those who are powerful and wealthy. One might have supposed then that trying to understand and change their perceptions, motivations and behaviours would have been at the centre of development and development studies [...] Yet there have been few studies of individual officials as leaders. Studies of greed and generosity are few. There are quite a number of institutes devoted to development studies but there is, to my knowledge, no institute devoted to the study of greed or power." (Chambers, 2005)

In Chambers' view, "For responsible well-being, it is then especially

individuals who are powerful and wealthy who have to change. This entails confronting and transforming abuses of power and wealth. For this, one need is for a pedagogy of the non-oppressed [...] to enable us to think and act differently.” (ibid.)

Chambers describes this pedagogy as involving analysis of and innovation in personal change and enabling the wealthy to understand more of the effects of their actions, inactions and the benefits of having less. Development NGOs often attempt a form of pedagogy of the non-oppressed by enlisting famous entertainers to front campaigns or appear in broadcasts aimed at educating and inspiring change in Western audiences.

The research discussed here¹ looks at this traditional use of famous supporters, and compares it to four development-oriented initiatives created by or collaborating with famous entertainers on the basis of the artistes’ communications expertise.

The stars involved in those four initiatives could certainly be termed rich and powerful, and thus their work is a valid subject. Some of them appear to invest their own money as well as their expertise, and in that sense, they are a form of new philanthropists. They have close links with Hollywood’s new progressives, and one was a social and political activist when development studies were in their infancy. Most importantly, in their hybridity, social entrepreneurship and focus on enabling those they are seeking to help, to speak for themselves, these initiatives demonstrate many aspects of the “beyond aid NGO” model, and in that sense, could give us a peek into some possible communication for development futures.

The organisations whose work I will discuss are *Louverture films*, *SixDegrees.org*, *FilmAid International*, and the *Rwanda Cinema Centre*. The traditional forms of using famous supporters that I will examine are: telethons, with the UK’s biennial “Red Nose Day” as an example; concerts, with “Live Aid” and “Live8” as examples; and the work of goodwill ambassadors, with several examples.

To provide a framework for analysis, I adopted Silvio Waisbord’s five key ideas in development communication (2005) and used them as categories to examine how these new initiatives compared to traditional forms of making use of famous supporters. The five key ideas are: the fostering of community empowerment; an integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches; the use of a tool-kit of communication strategies; the use of personal communication with multimedia activities; and the use of approaches that take into consideration factors affecting the individual as well as their environment.

As part of my research work, I compared communications initiatives aimed at a mainly Western audience with others aimed at audiences in more marginalised countries –taking full account of the fact that the purposes of the initiatives are quite different. The scarcity of primary and secondary source material available on this subject means that the focus here is on points of interest, rather than comprehensive analysis.

NEW INITIATIVES AND TRADITIONAL FORMS

The fostering of community empowerment

“Red Nose Day” (RND)

Although **RND** raises funds for NGOs working around the world, including in the UK but with the highest proportion of grants going to Africa-based projects, the telethon is aimed at members of the UK public acting as fundraisers. RND’s parent organisation, Comic Relief, sends out fundraising kits and provides information about the nature of Comic Relief’s work. Fundraisers must engage with donors in order to raise funds; as many fundraising activities are held within schools and workplaces, fundraisers might have to negotiate power relations to acquire donations from bosses, teachers and peers. RND’s extensive publicity in the run up to and during the telethon includes press and broadcast features about fundraisers, thus acknowledging their efforts and promoting a sense of group identity and encouragement among the fundraisers. However, there is no apparent mechanism for fundraisers to have input on how funds are spent: they are encouraged and given some support, but not empowered, because their participation is strictly prescribed and they have no opportunities to provide feedback to Comic Relief.

Concerts: “Live Aid” and “Live8”

Concerts are aimed at people in front of a television or concert stage, who are asked to carry out specific actions: donate money or visit a website. If directed to more information, they may find an opportunity to connect with other participants or organisations and consolidate action. However, messages conveyed during concerts are often limited and prescriptive.

Like RND, the community that concerts such as “Live Aid” and “Live8” seek to empower in order to create change is a Western audience, but

empowerment focuses on providing tools, rather than enabling the audience to gain control over how those tools are used.

Goodwill ambassadors

Goodwill ambassadors have the most diverse community of all as an audience, as it is anyone that the ambassador addresses within their role. This can include the most destitute, heads of state, and everyone in between. Visits from ambassadors may result in positive changes for or created by those who had the opportunity to participate, but this may vary according to the visited person's self-perception and how causes and effects are communicated. The sense of being recognised as a person and listened to is important to everyone, but this is a precursor to empowerment, not empowerment itself. Angelique Kidjo talks of going to villages, discussing with people what they can do to help themselves, and putting them in contact with organisations that could help them (BBC Tyne, 2006). Barbara Hendricks says that humanitarian action is open to all of us; we can check on our elderly neighbours and look out for each other (interview, 2007). Essentially, she is saying "you can do what I do in the way that best suits your circumstances". Role models can be empowering or not, depending on how we use them. As role models, these people show a confluence of success and compassion.

Louverture

Louverture's community is both African filmmakers and African diaspora. *Louverture* is a film company founded by Danny Glover and former UN consultant and program officer, turned writer and producer, Joslyn Barnes. It is raising finance for, writing and directing films that tell little-known stories of Africans and people of African origin. The company "partners with progressive filmmakers and producers around the world and particularly from the global South, and proactively supports the employment and training of cast and crew from communities of color in the United States" (retrieved from www.louverturefilms.com). Preserving and strengthening identity is common to each of the non-traditional initiatives, but *Louverture* is not only working to strengthen people's ability to tell stories from their own countries and tackling the financial and structural obstacles that stand in the way of marginalised groups sharing their stories with each other. Its main activity -producing feature films about marginalised people and stories- serves to prime a broader audience for the filmmakers it seeks to encourage and support.

Sixdegrees.org

SixDegrees.org is a social networking website founded by Kevin Bacon

and run in association with the US-based NGO, Network for Good. Users create a profile on the site and describe their interests, including the charities that they support. The site features the profiles and nominated charities of celebrities and invites all users to “Be a celebrity for your own cause”. However, the point of the site is not to use philanthropy as a route to fame, but rather to encourage the importance of caring about issues and to show young people that they can take an active role in tackling issues that they find worrying and wrong. *SixDegrees.org*’s community is US teenagers. A particularly interesting aspect of this site is that it portrays profiles of people wanting to fundraise for a charity of which they are a beneficiary, alongside profiles of people who want to raise funds for organisations with which they have no personal connection –donors and recipients are presented side by side. However, no research is so far available on what implications, if any, that this has for their respective senses of empowerment.

FilmAid International

In 1999, in response to the conflict in Kosovo, actress Julia Ormond and producer Caroline Baron took film screenings to refugee camps to provide some relief to children and families. Their rapid intervention was supported and encouraged by relief and development organisations, and their organisation, *FilmAid International*, has since gone on to work in Afghanistan, Kenya and Tanzania. It now uses the choice of films screened to provide practical information on issues such as health, conflict resolution and domestic violence; enable a broader view of the outside world, which is particularly important for children brought up in the camps; and encourage people to plan positive futures for themselves. It sources appropriate material, where possible in local languages, and distributes them to the camps where it oversees the creation and running of makeshift cinemas by refugees. The organisation also facilitates discussions after screenings of educational material, produces videos with refugees to address specific local issues arising in camps, and teaches basic camera and editing techniques to young adults to enable them to create their own films with which to communicate with their fellow refugees. *FilmAid*’s community is the inhabitants of refugee camps. In allowing residents to select what they view, prioritising material depicting their native culture and/or in their own language, and teaching how to use the medium for their own purposes, this may be more about confidence building which is an important part of empowerment, though not empowerment in itself. However, providing training and employment opportunities not only ease camp life but potentially broaden the refugees’ opportunities for employment and societal integration when they leave, giving them some very practical power with which to improve their lives.

The Rwanda Cinema Center

RCC regards all Rwandans as its community. Run by a group of local filmmakers, it includes a touring film festival featuring films made by Rwandan directors and producers. It works on training young people to make their own films and build an audiovisual testimonies archive, and in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), it develops a project specialising in comedy filmmaking, supported by cast and crew from the US sitcom “Everybody Loves Raymond”. As with *FilmAid*, prioritising material depicting the local culture and in the local languages, and teaching people how to use the medium for their own purposes may be more about confidence building, but here the passing on of technical skills is ultimately aimed at boosting the country’s economy and thus increasing the options for and self-determination of the whole community.

An integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches

RND does not use its position to challenge the leading politicians and the representatives of companies that appear as guests or as handing over donations during the telethon, though its films sometimes refer broadly to corporate or governmental decisions that have played a part in the problem portrayed. As noted above, there is no real bottom-up approach at work, aside from the creativity encouraged in fundraising activities.

At concerts, approaches are also mostly top-down: the audience is implored to act in a prescribed way and is limited to demonstrating support by virtue of its presence and acting or not acting as instructed. Van Zoonen (2005) quotes a critic saying, “Live Aid is one good example of where the ‘politics’ of popular music stops”, because it did not tackle US and UK foreign policies. However, Bob Geldof was shown on TV at the time, challenging UK government policies and politicians, and Valley (2005) claims that the event was influential on the young Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Money raised and audience size might be seen as a way in which Live Aid enabled many people to display disagreement with government policies, and although the form of expression was narrow – e.g., telethons – it was highly accessible and widely seized upon. Live8 attempted to integrate top-down and bottom-up approaches by trying to inspire the audiences into action that would provoke high-level political change, but it has been criticised by Hodgkinson (2005) for being too pre-determined, and the actions it prescribed too narrow.

That goodwill ambassadors listen to people tell their own stories and then convey those messages to a wider audience would be more of a bottom-up approach if people could choose whether they wanted a visit from an ambassador, whom they would like, and what they would like them to do.

Ambassadors can have an uncommon range of access, communicating with people at the tops and bottoms of societies; their advocacy role could lead to some integration.

Louverture is all about integrating top-down and bottom-up approaches. Using its position as a US film company to get round the restrictions placed on foreign film companies wanting to get their films into the US market, it provides work for already established African directors and actors, and supplies new material to African film audiences. Moreover, it strengthens ties between the African American film community and Africa's national film industries, promoting alternative models of financing and alternative distribution strategies, and increasing the capacity of Africa's national filmmaking industry. Its top-down expertise and support to young filmmakers in Africa and use of location filming strategically to pass on financial support and employment opportunities, directly feed in to strengthening the bottom-up activities, while taking the bottom-up messages of marginalised voices from Africa's history and present and using them to inform both US and global audiences.

Websites consisting of user-generated content are a modern form of bottom-up communication. *SixDegrees'* lack of differentiation between supporter and beneficiary does not integrate the two forms of participant but nor does it enforce a hierarchy based on form of participant, and cross-referencing and communication between the two are possible.

FilmAid's camp advisory committees represent the camp demographics, are used to guide programmes, pre-screen all material and relay community feedback. However, details of the feedback mechanism are not clear. Integration is clear, though, in the use of a level of film analysis to tackle residents' problems and then the teaching of film making so that residents can use the medium to explore their interests and concerns in their own way. Using film to broadcast but also teaching its use as a medium of self-expression is also a feature of RCC's work. It appears to be particularly adept at taking top-down communication support and using it to create bottom-up communication products. Thus, it enlists traditional Western academic institutions in the service of teaching young Rwandans how to develop their own vision and sharpen their storytelling skills. Its board of advisors includes highly experienced US directors, writers, and a composer. Its testimonies project uses this financial and strategic leverage to collect over 100,000 audiovisual historical testimonies, translate them into other languages and use them to develop educational tools.

Use of a tool-kit of communication strategies

RND's toolkit is made up mostly of social marketing, entertainment

education and social mobilisation. They provide materials for schools and children; have travelling roadshows and a multi-sectioned website; work with documentaries, sitcoms, quiz shows and dramas; produce press articles and organise special events involving well-known personalities. They aim at the widest possible audience. The only sense in which the campaign could be termed as narrow is in that it is unashamedly populist, which may alienate those preferring more seriously analytical approaches.

Concerts use almost exclusively entertainment-education, where celebrities attract large audiences, which enable organisers to target certain demographics. Their endorsement lends credibility to the cause and the organisation championing it, and therefore facilitates the response that the organisation is seeking to elicit from the audience. By interspersing documentary film and celebrity statements in between musical performances, serious issues are kept short enough to prevent the audience from switching off, though that in turn poses the risk of over-simplification.

Ambassadors might use any of the above and more as they advocate, publicise, mediate, motivate, fundraise, facilitate, network and educate; the mix varies according to the ambassador and project.

Louverture combines advocacy methods on the back of community media, and community media is also a cornerstone of *FilmAid* and *RCC*; *FilmAid* adds the use of film to engender peer-to-peer development through the facilitated discussions, and straightforward entertainment as a form of relief therapy. *SixDegrees*' tool-kit is limited to web-based social networking and encouraging fundraising.

Use of personal communication with multimedia activities

RND's multimedia activities are extensive and increasing. Yet, while its publicity stunts get people talking, it has not instigated local groups, like Amnesty; it does not send speakers to address existing groups, like Oxfam and the Red Cross, and it has not built local networks through existing social structures, like Christian Aid.

The concert is the only use examined here that does not use personal communication. Backstage interviews, where presenters discuss the personal impressions of performers are in practice, another type of film footage. Ambassadors are chosen for their ability to communicate in person and through other means, with specific audiences.

SixDegrees' internet-based social networking is conceived as a new form

of inter-personal communication, but within a multi-media format; it is not yet clear how this compares to face-to-face inter-personal communication.

Using approaches that take into consideration factors affecting the individual and their environment

RND's profusion of communications means that it is very hard to avoid for most members of the UK public. The length of concerts gives people the chance to catch some part of them throughout the day. Snippets are often broadcast on news, and DVDs of the event may be issued, which extends their availability to their audience.

The ambassadors' wide travel and extensive toolkit makes them potentially the most flexible.

Having someone as well known as Danny Glover at the helm of *Louverture* films helps in finding the films an audience that might not otherwise have heard of them or considered going to see them. His long-standing experience of activism and Joslyn Barnes' familiarity with the development industry mean they have a considerable amount of insight to offer the people they are training and the organisations they are helping to network.

The *SixDegrees* website is available in the home, school, portable internet-accessing computer, or public library of all US teenagers. The advanced internet literacy and the access to this medium in that country make it particularly well suited to its audience. Similarly, *FilmAid* is ideally targeted, and the medium of film is more accessible to those with impaired sight or hearing, because it works in both sound and vision, while also overcoming problems of literacy and third party mediation. The RCC's substantial outreach programme and the priority it places on local culture, again, make it appear to be finely tailored.

CONCLUSIONS

The goodwill ambassador appears to be the traditional use of celebrity supporter that offers most within the categories, though diversity among individual ambassadors will cause variation in effectiveness. Large concerts and celebrity-laden telethons might attract difficult to reach members of the Western audience, but their strength is in attention grabbing and there has to be follow-up for any meaningful communication of issues or long-term involvement of the audience. In

both cases, the imperative to keep viewers tuned in long enough to elicit action from them appears to necessitate simple messages and a narrow scope for interaction. It would be good to see telethons experiment more with the format at non-peak viewing times, or as Comic Relief did with a programme specifically about debt, in shorter programmes in between telethons. Also, while many NGOs are trying strenuously to move away from a paternalistic approach in programme work, the very top-down, prescriptive approach used by concerts and telethons towards their Western audiences seems to be lagging behind.

Each of the non-traditional uses of high-profile supporters derives benefit from the particular skills of the celebrities involved, from Kevin Bacon's legendary network of colleagues, to Danny Glover's long-running activism. So far, the involvement of the "Everybody Loves Raymond" team has been overshadowed by the larger success of RCC's broad range of activities, but their participation in such an innovative community-based organisation is worth watching. It is worth considering the likelihood of any of these projects receiving funding, had they been conceived of in-house by an NGO.

The organisations discussed are unusual and I would not argue that all actors and musicians could do what these organisations are doing, or that they would all make good teachers or programme managers. However, many might have skills to offer in voice and drama techniques to help people stand up for themselves and get their messages across; they might be able to advise on working with different media to help people take their stories directly to a wider audience, or they could work with local teachers to develop the teachers' skills. Because there are already qualified teachers of these subjects, because jobs should not be withheld from people who are capable of fulfilling them locally, and because entertainers already have jobs, short-term contracts, consultancy or guest-lecturer type jobs might be suitable. The work experience could lead to better-informed supporters, and as many performers go on to get involved in producing and directing, it could even lead to more nuanced and diverse mainstream media in the future. Most importantly, the people that NGOs aim to help would benefit from a greater number of resources targeted very literally at improving their ability to get their voices heard.

The pursuit of fame and fortune through a career in sports or entertainment may seem like the only hope for some among the very poor or marginalised. The spread of celebrity culture means that more and more are tempted to risk their meagre resources in this way, while the slim chances of success are akin to investing in lottery tickets or the seeds of an inedible cash crop.

If the NGO community can see beyond celebrity culture and use the

communications expertise of some of their famous supporters, they could –to continue the analogy– replace the cash crop salespeople with the agricultural techniques of food security.

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1 The research included a literature review on telethons and on the relationship between development organisations and their famous supporters, as well as with three people who work as ambassadors for development organisations: Barbara Hendricks, a US-born classical singer who is UNHCR's longest-serving goodwill ambassador (honorary lifetime appointment to the position in 2002) and has worked as a special advisor to UNESCO; Siobhan Redmond, a British actor who has worked with CARE for over ten years, and Stefan Booth, a British actor who has worked with World Vision since 2003.

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