

# **The Rome Consensus**

## **Communication for Development**

### **A Major Pillar for Development and Change**

Communication is essential to human, social and economic development. At the heart of communication for development is participation and ownership by communities and individuals most affected by poverty and other development issues. There is a large and growing body of evidence demonstrating the value of communication for development.

#### **Some provisional examples are:**

- In India rural radio forums engaging farmers resulted in significant productivity gains [Neurath: Date – Mody]
- There have been significant reductions in female genital cutting in Senegal attributed to participation communication strategies [ ]
- In Uganda a national and local communication process related to the corruption of centrally allocated public funds for education at the local level in schools resulted in a very significant decrease in the level of funds that did not reach that local level – from 80% “lost” to only 20% lost [World Bank Institute: date]
- Communication programmes are linked to significant reductions in Acute Respiratory Infection in Cambodia [BBC World Service Trust: Date]
- Use of mobile phones and other communication techniques for farmers to obtain information on market prices in Tanzania resulted in farmers increasing the price per ton they receive for rice from US\$100 per ton to US\$600. A \$200,000 investment resulted in US\$1.8 million of gross income. [ ]

#### **Development Challenges**

In the year 2006, it is estimated that 1.3 billion people world-wide still live in absolute poverty. Even though many countries have experienced considerable economic development, far too many remain worse off in economic and social terms.

Nelson Mandela reminds us that “Poverty is not natural - it is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings”.

People’s rights to equality and to communicate are protected and advanced in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Related to poverty and rights there are other very considerable and related challenges. These are delineated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are often the benchmark for decision-making in civil society, national governments and the international development community.

Achieving improved progress on these issues requires addressing some very sensitive and difficult challenges: respect for cultural diversity, self determination of people, economic pressures, environment, gender relations and political dynamics amongst others.

These factors often complicate and threaten the success of overall development efforts in local, national and international arenas. It is the people related issues that are the focus for communication for development.

### **Communication for Development**

Communication for Development is a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication.

### **Strategic Requirements**

That development organisations place a much higher priority on the essential elements of communication for development process as shown by research and practice:

- The right and possibility for people to participate in the decision making processes that affect their lives
- Creating opportunities for the sharing of knowledge of skills.
- Ensuring that people have access to communication tools so that they can themselves communicate within their communities and with the people making the decisions that affect them – for example community radio and other community media
- The process of dialogue, debate and engagement that builds public policies that are relevant, helpful and which have committed constituencies willing to implement them – for example on responding to preserving the environment.
- Recognising and harnessing the communication trends that are taking place at local, national and international levels for improved development action – from new media regulations and ICT trends to popular and traditional music.
- Adopting an approach that is contextualised within cultures.
- Related to all of the above a priority on supporting the people most affected by the development issues in their communities and countries to have their say, to voice their perspectives and to contribute and act on their ideas for improving their situation – for example indigenous people and people living with HIV/AIDS

In order to be more effective in gaining improved progress on poverty and the other MDGs the communication for development processes just outlined are required in greater scale and at more depth.

### **Long Term Foundation**

These processes are not just about increasing the effectiveness of overall development efforts. They are also about creating sustainable social and economic processes. In particular:

- Strengthening Citizenship and Good Governance
- Deepening the communication links and processes within communities and societies

Those are essential pillars for any development issue.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the arguments above, in order to make much more significant progress on the very difficult development challenges that we all face we recommend that policy makers and funders do the following:

1. Overall national development policies should include specific communication for development components.
2. Development organisations should include communication for development as a central element at the inception of programmes.
3. Strengthen the communication for development capacity within countries and organisations at all levels. This includes: people in their communities; communication for development specialists and other staff including through the further development of training courses and academic programmes.
4. Expand the level of financial investment to ensure adequate, coordinated, financing of the core elements of communication for development as outlined under Strategic Requirements above. This includes budget line[s] for development communication.
5. Adoption and implement of policies and legislation that provide an enabling environment for communication for development – including free and pluralistic media, the right to information and to communicate.
6. Development communication programmes should be required to identify and include appropriate monitoring and evaluation indicators and methodologies throughout the process
7. Strengthen partnerships and networks at international, national and local levels to advance communication for development and improve development outcomes
8. Move towards a rights based approach to communication for development

### **Conclusion:**

As Nelson Mandela highlighted it is people that make the difference. Communication is about people. Communication for development is essential to make the difference happen.

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