

## Chapter 26

# Communication functions in an evolving context of rural development

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**While rural development today** is understood as a broad field that encompasses multiple livelihoods and sectors, during the 1970s and '80s it was closely associated with a 'transfer of technology' approach in support of agriculture and forestry (Röling, 1988). The underlying model was the diffusion of innovations that placed emphasis on the adoption of new technology as a way of enabling farmers to become more productive (Rogers, 1983). Many government organizations and development agencies were structured along these lines, with agricultural, livestock, forestry and fishery departments. Extension and information were usually made separate departments. In communication, most of these organizations functioned within a 'transmission world-view'. This was certainly the case with the agricultural extension organizations that for many years were designed under the World Bank 'training and visit' (T&V) system, which sought to spread agricultural innovation through contact farmers as a way of improving production and –ideally– rural incomes. While today's debates on extension are firmly rooted in how they may actually reduce poverty, poverty reduction was at the time presumed to be a consequence of the T&V approach (Farrington et al, 2002). Critics of this approach in the late 1970s and the '80s were concerned that rural poverty was a more complex matter. Rural development called for an approach that supported multiple livelihoods, not just productive ones. Moreover, the communication dimension referred not only to the transfer of new ideas; it also embraced the acknowledgment of what people already knew. In the example from Peru, outlined below, modern audiovisual media were used to capture and share these traditional insights in unprecedented ways.

### 418 | Case study: Peru

In Peru, a project supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) during the mid to late 1970s experimented with the use of video to help document traditional knowledge and share it among other groups in the highlands. The approach was termed *pedagogía audiovisual* (audiovisual pedagogy), suggesting an adult education approach to video. The model developed by Manuel Calvelo Ríos and colleagues centered on reviving traditional wisdom in the form of agricultural know-how that was well adapted to specific agroecologies and deserved to be documented, analyzed and shared. The model differed from the conventional 'message-channel-receiver' model and was rather one of 'interpreter-medium-interpreter'<sup>1</sup> where each person involved in the communication process was perceived as an active receiver and sender of messages (Calvelo Ríos, 2003). The approach centered on producing training materials on existing techniques, and producing educational modules on video, with accompanying workbooks for facilitators and farmer trainees. The videos would be used together with hands-on training events. The approach also focused on celebrating traditional knowledge, which was noteworthy at a time dominated by the modernist approach to agricultural development, where expert advice from scientists was perceived as being superior.

The process centered on the notion that training meant helping people take action and modify their reality (Fraser, 1987). It fitted the notion advanced in Brazil by Paulo Freire, who in the early 1970s wrote about education and communication as the basis for conscientization and criticized agricultural extension as a top-down process (Freire, 1973). The development of audiovisual pedagogy in Peru took place in opposition to conventional agricultural extension, which as we shall see later, was predominantly rooted in the 'transmission' world-view and therefore shared little with the participatory or 'symmetric' world-view. This meant that within organizations, the promotion of Communication for Development met with opposition by units or partner organizations or agencies that worked in the 'transmission' world-view<sup>2</sup>.

1 'Interpreter' is used as a translation for the Spanish term 'interlocutor'; another possible term would be 'intermediary', though the term 'locutor' refers to the action of talking.

2 The term 'communication' has been understood in many ways by practitioners and planners, with most if not all interpretations falling into two basic perspectives: the 'transmission' world-view that centers on a one-way process of information transfer, vs. the 'symmetric' world-view that emphasizes shared perceptions in the context of interaction (Windahl et al, 1992). These two interpretations have been at the heart of the evolution of communication for rural development and debate among its practitioners. Those comfortable with the transmission world-view have tended to work under modernist assumptions about development, focused on the notion that the diffusion of innovations would help solve basic problems of underdevelopment. This school of thought suggested that lack of knowledge was the key issue needing attention; and so found the transmission focus appropriate. In contrast, those who understood the challenge of rural development in the context of unequal distribution of resources found meaning in a dependency theory that pointed to social change and structural transformation as necessary steps toward improving rural livelihoods (Waisbord, 2001). The two perspectives embodied different world-views that incorporated contrasting perspectives (elaborated further in other chapters of this book).

## Another development

In the mid 1970s, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published a groundbreaking report entitled “What now? Another Development” that called for attention to the satisfaction of needs, beginning with the eradication of poverty. It advocated self-reliant and endogenous development that relied on societies’ own strengths, and called for development in harmony with the environment. The report underlined that development required structural transformation and that immediate action was both necessary and possible (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1975). The communication work done by the FAO in Peru was certainly in line with this thrust. Essentially it was based on principles of adult education, very much along a Freirian line of thinking, and was entirely compatible with Another Development. The momentum for a trend in favor of more participatory perspectives was being set in motion.

A few years later, a voice from the field was heard when the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published a book by Andreas Fuglesang, a seasoned practitioner. *About Understanding – Ideas and Observations on Cross-Cultural Communication* (1982) has become a classic for communication practitioners in many fields. It builds on the way oral culture processes information and shares it. It is rich with examples that show how we all perceive the world differently. It emphasizes communication as a process of sharing concepts. A quote from a Zambian woman says it all:

Why do you Mzungu [white people] not try to understand the minds of Africans more than their ability to work? You people do not understand, your words do not belong to our minds (Fuglesang, 1982).

During the 1980s the term *participatory communication* began to emerge. In Latin America this perspective was rooted in several decades of work –*Radio Sutatenza* experience in Colombia and the miners’ radios in Bolivia, to name just a couple. The term sought to emphasize collective meaning-making (as the Latin root of communication *communis facere* emphasizes). However, it did not actually represent a unified model and was therefore not easy to define, though all agreed that it represented a very different approach compared with the transmission model (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; White et al, 1994; Bessette, 1996).

During the late 1980s and early ‘90s, the thrust toward human and sustainable development caused a shift in thinking, and rural development thinking began to encompass a broader picture. This is especially true with regard to focus on poverty alleviation, which meant that attention also had to be given to other sectoral issues: food security, employment, rural industry, policy, migration, and land tenure issues, to name just a few.

During the 1990s the way communication for development was promoted shifted along with the development trends of the day. At the FAO we emphasized its contribution to ‘sustainable development’ building on “Our Common Future”, the report of the World Commission on Environment and

420 | Development (1987); and to 'human development' following the UNDP Human Development Report of 1991. The 1991 Roundtable on Development Communication in Rome concluded that a major effort was needed in order to reach decision-makers and drive home the contribution of communication for development in this field (FAO, 1991a). One concrete product was the 1991 video "Sharing Knowledge", which emphasized the role of communication in sustainable development. The video includes an opening statement by Gro Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway and Chairperson of the World Commission on Environment and Development, in which she said:

Sustainable development is a major challenge for the next century. People are central to that task. The only way we can work for a common cause, for common interest, to improve our condition, is really through communication. Basically, it has to do with democracy, with participation, with spreading of knowledge and insight and ability to take care of our future. (FAO, 1991b).

In other words, over a period of two decades a shift took place from an emphasis on the transmission of agricultural information, to an acknowledgement that rural development is a multi-sectoral, complex context. During the 1990s, FAO pioneered communication projects in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa, and produced a significant number of case studies documenting innovative approaches. Whether this meant rural radio in west Africa, where people at the grassroots were directly involved in producing programs, or a farmer-centered approach to communication campaign design in the Philippines, the emphasis was on participation.

By the start of the new century, the FAO had consolidated its experience with participatory communication and had produced case studies, evaluations and manuals, and specialized publications on gender and communication (Coldevin & FAO, 2000; Mefalopulos and Kamlongera, 2002; Balit, 1999). While this is not the place to review each of these in detail, the overall collection of publications is indicative of the coming-of-age of an applied discipline<sup>3</sup>.

### Case study: Philippines<sup>4</sup>

Rural communities exchange information with multiple sources including other farmers, traders, input suppliers, non-governmental organizations, outreach workers, and research institutions. These different actors constitute agricultural communication networks and interact regularly in multiple ways to form new relationships for innovation. At times, they lobby and influence policy-makers in search of improved access to markets, technology or incentive programs. The

3 For a complete list of publications refer to <[http://www.fao.org/sd/KN1\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/KN1_en.htm)> and to the CD prepared in 2000 <<http://www.fao.org/sd/CDdirect/CDre0052.htm>>.

4 Some of the material presented here is based on Ramírez, R. (1997) *Understanding Farmers' Communication Networks: Combining PRA with Agricultural Knowledge Systems Analysis*, London: IIED.

best extension systems in the world develop where farmers are organized and able to lobby for the technical assistance that they consider the top priority –not the other way around (Röling, 1988). It is the demand capacity of farmers that dictates the quality and effectiveness of the extension support. The opposite process, whereby extension systems conceivably strengthen farmers' production systems through technology, is more a myth about the transfer of technology model than an observable reality.

The notion of agricultural knowledge and information systems (AKIS) was developed in the late 1980s by researchers at Wageningen Agricultural University in the Netherlands. The AKIS model describes the two-way flow of information and knowledge among researchers, extension organizations and farmers. In other words, the model is a concept that runs against the linear information dissemination systems which were developed in most national agricultural research systems under the transfer of technology model. It is a perspective that emphasizes multiple actors and focuses on the description and analysis of linkages with a view to improving them. In this approach, communication is seen as a central component.

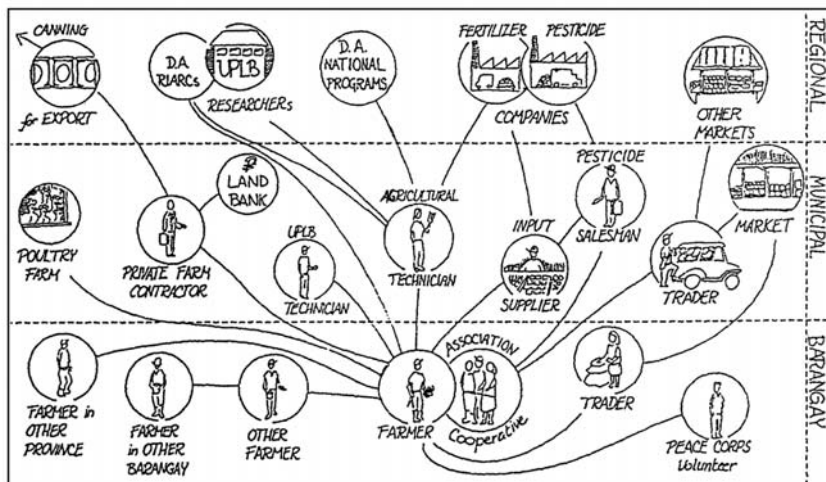
In the AKIS perspective, a two-way exchange of information is crucial for innovation. As a consequence, the role of extension has been reformulated from a one-way persuasive channel into a two-way channel for requests and answers that facilitates the learning process for farmers, extension staff and researchers. But the change from disseminating to facilitating requires staff with fundamentally different attitudes, skills and knowledge. From the point of view of the AKIS, and of participatory research, the facilitator can be described as a broker of information demands and supplies.

Following the growing trend in participatory analyses where information is visualized, and borrowing from the AKIS notion, an approach was developed to map the knowledge networks. This research was first developed through an FAO project in the Philippines and then further tested in Ethiopia and Peru. Since then, the mapping of networks of stakeholders has been used in communication planning in other parts of the world and in other sectors, such as rural water planning (Ramírez and Quarry, 2004a, 2004b).

This approach allows researchers, field workers and rural communities to identify the networks of information exchange jointly, bringing these actors together in a closer learning and planning process. It has three stages:




- 1 mapping of actors and linkages;
- 2 analysis of linkage performance; and
- 3 an action plan for modifying roles and improving linkages.

**Figure 1. Linkage map prepared with the farmers of Barangay Mamala, Region IV, the Philippines**



The linkage map (Figure 1) shows stakeholders by their location (barangay or village, municipal, and regional/national) and indicates their linkages. It captures what people ‘know’ in a tacit manner about their networks but have not had a chance to organize or analyze. Once key linkages have been identified, they can be analyzed using a simple matrix (Figure 2). The criteria for analysis can be developed in each context, yet the key criteria tend to focus on who controls the linkage (the power dimension).

**Figure 2**

Site: Barangay Mamala		Criteria for assessing performance					
Linkage	Awareness of other actor's service	Relevance of other actor's service	Timeliness of other actor's service	Accessibility of other actor's service	Communication medium through which link is mediated	Linkage control	Remarks
 Farmer — Farmer [linkage outcome: seed variety exchange]	Empathy; sharing same predicament	High	Regular contact	Fully accessible	Oral; demonstration	Equally shared by both actors	Effective link between two actors who share same reality; a linkage with unexplicit potential
 Farmer — AT: Agricultural Technician [Extension worker]	F aware that AT's function is not open to his influence; aware that AT lacks expertise in most topics	F has experimented but rejected the recommendation; the service is therefore considered to be of limited relevance	F receives information/advise without timely supply of technology or inputs. At times these become available one year later	Irregular	F describes AT's message delivery as traditional and top-down [black-board lecture] without printed materials	F has no control	Very little impact in terms of technology transfer. Sometimes useful impact in enhancing F's organization
 [linkage outcome: limited dissemination of technology; some support to F organization]	AT only partially aware of F's strengths and needs	AT does not perceive F's knowledge as worthy; AT has no training to diagnose/assess needs with the participation of F	AT plans visits as per instruction and schedules agreed with the M.A.O. AT has 6-7 barangays to visit and lacks funds for travel	AT's access to farmer is irregular	AT lectures but does not diagnose or learn from F	AT controls, although under directives handed down from M.A.O. [institutional control]	[as above]

In the case of the Philippines, the major linkages identified were analyzed using the following six criteria:

- 1 *actors' awareness* of other actors' functions in a linkage;
- 2 *relevance* of other actors' services;
- 3 *timeliness* of other actors' services: if the information input is programmed to coincide with the availability of other inputs, then the service is timely;
- 4 *accessibility* to other actors' services: if an extension worker is able to visit farmers regularly this can enhance the relevance and timeliness of the service;
- 5 *communication media* through which a link is mediated;
- 6 *control* over the initiation and management of a linkage: when farmers have demand capacity over the services in their area, the other criteria listed here can be better ensured.

The matrix provides the foundation for improved communication and an action plan can be derived on the basis of this data. Other work also from the Philippines used indicators to describe change in the information systems used by different stakeholders (Lawrence, 1995). These included: amount of information, diversity of sources, relevance, satisfied demand, credibility, complementarity of information sources, linkages between information sources, access by users, direction of information flow, democratic control, and use of indigenous knowledge. While there is no quantitative indicator of linkage performance, in essence an effective link contributes to the actors' learning process while also responding to the immediate needs of their job or economic activity.

A major advantage of this approach is the new perspectives that it can bring to field workers who have been trained in conventional, one-way approaches to communication. This approach highlights the amount of know-how farmers already have, noting that they tend to be each other's major sources of information; it shows the potential new roles for extension workers as brokers of information across multiple disciplines; it demonstrates the importance of horizontal exchange of information as opposed to vertical; and it sheds light on the importance of shared power as a foundation for effective, trustful linkages among stakeholders. The methodology on its own does not give any final answers, but it does provide entry points. It calls for a process whereby extension workers along with other municipal actors become facilitators in identifying and assessing problems and exploring solutions through networks.

## **Communication functions in an evolving context of rural development**

A review of communication functions is a useful way of locating the above case study in the context of this chapter about rural development. Communication for

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424 | rural development encompasses several complementary communication functions. The three major functions are: the communication of new policies, making things known (or educational communication), and facilitative communication. The original emphasis on transmission is highly compatible with the first two functions. By contrast, the case study emphasizes a participatory function that fits in well with the notion of social or facilitative communication. Table 1 explores the three functions in some detail.

**Table 1. Communication functions and their attributes (adapted from Röling, 1994)**

Communication function	Purposes	Initiator	Evidence of success
<i>Policy communication</i>	Making policies, programs, and the evolving procedures known	Government agency	Stakeholders demonstrate awareness by applying procedures or suggesting modifications to them
<i>Educational communication: making things known, sharing knowledge</i>	Making technical know-how accessible to increase knowledge about the production, transformation, organization and marketing dimensions of agriculture; including price information. Worldwide, there is a trend toward a closer engagement by farmers in technology development and adaptation in contrast to the conventional role of passive receiver of extension messages.	Service providers and farmers (with training on accessing content and transforming it)	Service providers are able to seek and find information sources and repackaging materials for farmer learning. Farmers adopt practices or reject them knowledgeably; utilizing communication methods and media to enhance farmer-to-farmer linkages
<i>Social or facilitative communication: platforms for participation and debate</i>	Providing platforms for stakeholders to exchange perspectives, explore new ideas and programs, appreciate differences of opinions, negotiate common goals, develop partnerships, propose changes to programs and become confident participants able to articulate needs and opinions	Farmers' groups, district authorities, service providers, and local groups/organizations with support from a facilitator and a neutral convener	Stakeholders participate, become empowered, take action, and take over ownership of the program



The Philippines case study constitutes a means of bringing different parties together to visualize and understand their linkages. While this process could be started by many of the initiators listed, it often requires a neutral convener. International projects in the past have played this role and it is increasingly important to have organizations that can play this convening role and bring different parties to the table to negotiate common interests.

This notion of communication as a platform for negotiation is coherent with the notion of another development in that it is an example of participatory communication. It is an action-oriented tool that can be applied to project planning involving multiple stakeholders. It embodies the 'symmetric' world-view (Waisbord, 2001). In my experience, this approach has influenced practitioners in many fields of rural development, including water and sanitation, health, fisheries, and forestry. It has been instrumental in negotiation workshops arranged to review agricultural services in the context of privatization and decentralization (Lightfoot et al, 2001).

Communication for rural development requires attention to every function of communication (Table 1 only highlights three); it is not a matter of one versus another. Communication strategies, be they in agriculture or water and sanitation, need to embrace a combination of these functions (Ramírez and Quarry, 2004a; 2004b). Rural development approaches today give much attention to stakeholder interaction, in what is often referred to as 'actor-oriented approaches' (Biggs and Matsuert, 2004). Communication is well suited to supporting these emerging world-views. This has been so for several decades, but now we also have evidence and methods to share.

Rural development has evolved in the last few decades. Today, it is a field of applied research and action that is quite complex. There is an acknowledgement that many stakeholders need to be involved and that their perspectives are bound to be different. This suggests a need for processes of negotiation, not only about strategies, but more importantly about common understanding. The following definition of communication for development encapsulates these complementary dimensions:

Communication for development is the use of communication processes, techniques and media to help people towards a full awareness of their situation and their options for change, to resolve conflicts, to work towards consensus, to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and that of society, and to improve the effectiveness of institutions (Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 1998).