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# **Development Communication: A Clarification of Constructs**

**By Muiru Ngugi**

## **Abstract**

The concepts development communication, non-development communication, development journalism and development support communication are often misunderstood. The confusion, according to this paper, becomes even more magnified in Africa due to lack of sufficient literature on the conceptualisation, definition and operational parameters of the concepts in question. The paper presents a historical account of the origins of the concepts and differentiates each from the other. The essence of the paper, however, is that the mass media if well applied, can facilitate the development process. In a bid to illustrate how this can happen, the paper outlines some approaches that can be adopted and how best to manage these strategies. Paramount in the process is the need to synchronise the issue to be dealt with, the audience for whom the communication message is intended, the nature of the media to be used, and the socio-political and economic context within which the media campaign is to be effected. The paper concludes that all four concepts are crucial for development in their own right. It, however, warns that their effective utilisation calls for high degrees of specificity in their formulation, planning and management.

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# **La Communication du Développement: Un Eclaircissement de ces Termes**

**Par Muiru Ngugi**

## **Résumé**

On confond souvent les concepts de la communication du développement, celui de la communication de non développement, celui du journalisme de développement, ainsi que celui de la communication du soutien au développement. Selon cette communication, la confusion entre ces termes est encore plus grande en Afrique, en raison du manque de littérature sur les paramètres opérationnels de conceptualisation et de définition. Dans cette communication, on présente l'origine et l'histoire de chaque concept, tout en cherchant à faire la distinction entre eux. Cependant, le but de l'exposé demeure l'illustration que la bonne utilisation des médias constitue un outil très efficace, dans la promotion du développement. Pour illustrer comment réaliser cet objectif, cette communication donne des approches et comment les appliquer, comme stratégies dans la promotion du développement. On souligne ainsi l'importance de la systématisation du processus, la définition du public visé, le type de média disponible, ainsi que le contexte socio-politique et économique dans lequel il faut opérer. La conclusion de cet exposé est que ces concepts sont cruciaux pour le développement, quoique chacun influence différemment ce processus. On remarque toutefois que l'efficacité dans l'application de ces concepts dépend, en grande partie, de la spécificité dans la formulation, la planification et la gestion.

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## **Introduction**

This paper attempts to explain differences between development communication, non-development communication, development journalism, and development support communication. Although these terms are generally understood to imply that the mass media, if applied carefully can aid the process of development, there is little literature in Africa on the conceptualisation, definition and operational parameters of these communication concepts. Indeed these four concepts present definitional problems for most people. The tendency is to define them differently and separately, depending on the dimension that is familiar to the writer. For concepts that crop up every so often in development debates, lack of clear definitions, is a great setback.

In an attempt to trace the origins of these terms and define them accordingly, this paper maintains that development communication, which initially held a lot of promise, has paled in significance over the years, while development support communication has gained more acceptance. Non-development communication on the other hand, has continued to grow from strength to strength. This has, however, been affected by development communication, thus giving rise to the concept of 'development journalism', which is itself threatened by the recent political changes in Africa. Throughout the paper, there is a deliberate attempt to link communication to development, which linkage is also defined and developed.

## **Communication and Development: The Origins of a Symbiotic Relationship**

The history of communication for development can begin at any point in history, for human beings have, throughout their existence, always communicated, and their cumulative communication activities must have contributed to the process of development. This is true whether or not the historical changes occurred before the term "development" was coined.

For purposes of this paper, however, a time limit of the last

four decades is considered sufficient. For some, conventional history began after the Second World War (Hornik, 1988:ix), with an extraordinary political change, namely the movement to independence of more than half the world's nations, most of them in the Southern Hemisphere and most of them poor by all the criteria held dear by all nations of the North - small per capital incomes, poor and overstretched health systems, non-existent industrial plants (the assumed engine of modernisation) and populace devoid of "modern" skills. Hornik goes on to state that these countries' underdevelopment was also distinguishable because their social organisations, intellectual dynamism, and psychological openness were all obstacles to their attainment of the stage of development occupied by modern Western nations.

The single most prevalent explanation of the underdevelopment of these countries was that certain deficits existed among the peoples of these countries. Specifically, these countries were said to lack what Schramm (1964:21) termed the "basic dynamic" of economic development - the propensity to save and invest enough in their industrial plant to fuel a take-off to rapid growth. Since these deficits - illiteracy, lack of skills, and modern attitudes - lay with individuals, they demanded development solutions that stressed more formal education, more training for adults and more information diffusion. The theory went that:

Education might, provide intellectual skills; it might teach new health and agricultural practices and encourage political mobilisation. However, implementing education in poor countries proved difficult. Conventional Western educational strategies for doing these tasks through face to face instruction foundered on the thin supply of teachers and trained field agents and inadequate budgets to support their work" (Hornik, 1988:ix-x).

It is the encounter with these problems that led to the utilisation of the mass media which presented a huge potential for reaching huge audiences to whom desired knowledge and skills could be imparted, and hence through whom desired change could be achieved. Communication activity planners needed to transmit their ideas to extension agents who would in turn take them to farmers (Idid, 1990:35; Quebral, 1992:5).

Inherent in these linkages between development and communication is an assumed potency and ubiquitousness of the mass media, an assumption that has preoccupied communication researchers for nearly five decades now.

## **Differences**

Having described the historical and contextual origin of the ideology of development communication, an attempt is made here to explain what is meant by development communication as opposed to non-development communication, development support communication, and development journalism, all of which differ markedly in their definitions and applications. In offering definitions of these terms, it is appropriate to first define what is meant by the words 'communication', and 'development' and 'journalism' which are the generic concepts from which these terms are derived.

Communication has been defined as "the transfer of ideas of knowledge in ways that enable the recipient to understand, react to, and act upon the information received," (Oliveira, 1993:103). Mercado (1992:15) has similarly defined communication as "a process of sharing messages between a source and a receiver either directly or through a channel." Effective communication is predicated on four elements: a source who initiates the process; a message which contains information that the source is transmitting; a channel or medium which enables the transmission of the message; and a receiver who acknowledges receipt of the message.

Development on its part, has serious definitional problems. It has been defined as a conceptual framework for a number of individual, institutional, national and international changes (Mowlana and Wilson, 1990). Another definition holds that development is conceived as "six lanes of large motor cars streaming powerfully into and out of gleaming cities; neon lights flashing and juke boxes sounding, and skyscrapers rising, storey upon storey into the sky" (Haque, 1991:221). Other scholars have even questioned whether the term development

should continue to be used instead of others such as “progress”, “transformation”, “beneficial change”, “liberation” or even “revolution” (Crocker, 1993:62).

For our purpose, Mercado's definition of development as “a process of providing disadvantaged people the opportunities to realise and improve their knowledge, attitude, and skill to utilise, sustain, and improve their productivity of available resources within their environment in order to improve the quality of their life and the society where they belong,” (Mercado, 1992:14) shall be adopted. Implied in this definition, is the fact that development is a type of “social change” intended to bring about both social and material advancement, including the area of human rights (Rogers, 1978: 68).

Journalism refers to the practice of gathering, packaging and disseminating news to a homogeneous audience. This term covers the work of all practitioners in mass communication in general, and the work of newspapermen, television and radio producers, continuity announcers, newscasters, cameramen and sound technicians. Having defined the generic concepts from which development support communication, development communication and non-development communication are derived, the following are definitions of these terms.

### **Development Communication**

Development communication came to Africa as part of the policy guidance favoured for experimentation in the developing world by the West in the 1960s, barely ten years after its advent as part of the development lexicon in the early 1950s. In the manner in which it was used by its founders, Lerner, Pye and Schramm, development communication referred to technology-based communication networks which, regardless of message and content, tended to create, a suitable climate for development. It was supposed to “generate the psychic ambience within which economic and productive activity occurred” (Jayaweera and Amunugama, 1987:xix).

In this context, the role of development communication was

conceived as being a facilitative one; the means to an end called "development." But the ideology later came to be seen as "the systematic utilisation of appropriate communication channels and techniques to increase people's participation in development and to inform, motivate and train rural populations, mainly at the grassroots levels." More recently, development communication has been redefined as the planned and systematic use of communication, through interpersonal and mass channels (Oliveira, 1993:103).

An elaboration has been made on this definition by Mercado (1992:16) who states that development communication is a subsystem of the larger system of communication, which deals with the planned use of communication resources to gain multi-sectoral support in attaining national development goals. It is distinguished by the fact that it is purposive and has clear, well-defined objectives such as to change people's attitudes, skills, or behaviour.

Its sources of information are usually people involved in national development efforts such as farmers, researchers, health and population professionals, development planners, and policy makers. The nature of its message is such that it is aimed at aiding the attainment of specific objectives, for instance, increasing food production, family planning, adult literacy, and other aspects of development.

The message is normally presented following an interpretative style, and it is passed on to the audience through not only mass media channels, but oramedia, folkmedia, theatre, below-the-line-communication, extension workers, teachers, and even door to door campaigns. Messages are directed to specific target audiences, in whom development communication practitioners want to achieve knowledge, understanding, changes in attitude, as well as knowledge and practice of new skills and practice. Critics blame it for its emphasis on top-down, government-to-people communication (Oliveira, 1993: 103), and argue that it has lost credibility over the years (Jayaweera and Amunugana, 1987: xix). Hence Okigbo (1985:23) queried if "development communication is dead".

## **Non-Development Communication**

Non-development communication, can only be defined in relation to development communication, and in terms of what it does and does not do. Perhaps no other scholar has explained the two concepts better than Mercado. According to him, non-development communication can be differentiated from development communication by its nature, its sources of information, its message, the channel it uses, its audience and its intended effects (Mercado, 1992:17-19). With regard to its nature, non-development communication is non-purposive. It neither has any clearly defined objectives to accomplish in the audience nor is it planned. Rather, it is publicity-oriented.

It has varied sources of information who are not directly involved in national development, including functionaries like policemen, soldiers, etc. Its message is heavy on entertainment and sensational news such as crimes, war, and crises. This message is presented objectively as fact, and is based on what the audience wants.

Non-development communication limits itself to the use of the mass media as the key channels of communication. A heterogeneous general public forms its audience, in whom non-development communication hopes to instil awareness. However, non-development communication has been influenced by development communication giving rise to such concepts as "development journalism", media "crusades" and "campaigns," all of which borrow their techniques from development communication.

## **Development Journalism**

This term designates the journalistic activity of gathering news with a view to satisfying the needs of a country's population. The news thus relates to development, and is invariably positive in its disclosure. There are scholars like Aggarwala (1981) who tend to confuse the issue by saying that development news, the

by-product of development journalism, is "not, and should not be, any different from regular news or investigative reporting." With this kind of education, one wonders why the term exists in the first place, and why it should crop up if its sole purpose is to be a synonym of everyday journalism.

The fact of the matter, however, is that development journalism does in fact exist separately from what is generally referred to as journalism. Sussman (1978) for instance sees it, albeit in a restricting sense, as the coverage of scientific and economic news and relating them to the development needs of the country. Rampal (1984) offers a much more expansive and inclusive definition by asserting that development journalism includes activities like the use of the media in formal and non-formal educational purposes. Nearer home in Africa, development journalism tends to be seen as the aggregate responsibilities added onto the usual business of journalism when it comes to be practised in a developmental setting.

In the words of Africa's foremost voice on this issue, "In Africa, the mass media fulfil an educational role which they are not necessarily called upon to assume in the advanced countries. News about development is important in stimulating further development" (Ansah, 1990:34). A new dimension is brought into this whole issue of what development journalism means when Ansah emphasises the value of development news as being in its demonstrative effect:

Development news is new schools, hospitals, bridges, roads, etc., especially if these achievements were made possible through collective, self-reliant local effort. More importantly, such reports should illustrate how the projects were accomplished, so that they can provide inspiration to other people (Ansah, 1990:34).

Some people argue that in the light of the young age of African nations which makes them prone to instability, positive news should be stressed and negative news, meaning news that might undermine national unity, should be downplayed or not reported at all. This argument has always rested on shaky ground, mainly because it assumes gullibility on the part of Africans, but it did at least retain a certain appeal during the one-party

systems in Africa.

However, with the adoption of political and economic liberalisation on the continent in the recent past, which has resulted in greater media pluralism and freedom, such prescriptions are no longer practical, their merit or otherwise notwithstanding. What these changes have brought with them in the media would appear to be more adversarial journalism as African journalists copy Western journalistic conventions. In the wake of this new style of journalism, development journalism has been the first casualty of these changes.

### **Development Support Communication**

Although some scholars tend to use the phrase development support communication interchangeably with development communication (Oliveira, 1993), the two terms are actually quite different. Development support communication is a 'sub-set' of development communication, to borrow imagery from mathematics. It is communication that is specifically designed and implemented to support a particular development programme. According to Jayaweera and Amunuguma (1987: xix), it applies generally to micro or local entities; is concerned with effects and is goal oriented; is time bound, and takes the form of campaigns; is invariably interactive and participatory; and provides easy opportunities for researching as variables can be isolated, controlled, and measured.

It is also focused on "co-equal, little-media-centred government-with-people-communication" (Oliveira, 1993: 103). One other factor that distinguishes the two is that development support communication has recently been gaining in stature and credibility, mainly because of its emphasis on knowledge sharing between sender and receiver of development information. It is now widely in use by the UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, and is fast being adopted by governments.

Explaining the difference between development communication and development support communication Jayaweera has stated:

DC represents a much larger universe than DSC. It can subsist without the latter. Likewise DSC, though a smaller universe, can work effectively within its limited sphere, even in the absence of DC throughout the rest of society (1987: xviii)

On the whole, it is important to point out that development support communication is essentially part of development communication, even though the two concepts may appear to be competing for attention. The strength of one strengthens the other, and the weakness of one constrains the other. The next section deals with the management of communication for development, and it will be oblivious of the definitional differences between development communication and development support communication. This is because the formulation, design and management of communication for development follows the same principles.

### **Formulating and Managing Communication for Development**

A thorough analysis of ideas put forward by development communication specialists shows that when formulating a communication strategy for socio-economic development projects, it is necessary to consider four basic things. These include the nature of the issue on which the campaign is to be based; the audience for whom the campaign is meant, the nature of the media to be used; and the wider, social-political economic context within which the media campaign has to be launched. Mercado (1992:22), for instance, has developed a model for development communication formulation and management that borrows heavily from business management and social research methodologies.

According to this model, a modern project should initially engage in research with a view to gathering, organising, processing and interpreting authentic data about the problem, including the initial knowledge about the problem, attitude, skill and practice of and available resources to the target beneficiaries and the implementing staff before a programme or project is imple-

mented. Only then should the project proceed to the next stage which involves planning the best course of action to take in implementing the project by formulating attainable objectives, and identifying the most appropriate target audiences, channels and messages based on the research results.

The next stage involves assigning, organising and orienting or training staff who will be responsible for implementing the project, which he calls "directing", which essentially entails the project manager providing guidance to the project staff in implementing the project, and usually includes coordination or orchestration of the various activities.

This should then be accompanied by a monitoring process to determine whether the project inputs, activities and outputs are delivered on time and according to specifications as indicated in the plan. The final stage is the evaluation stage which is crucial in terms of determining whether the project's expected effects and or impacts are attained.

This model closely resembles 15 characteristics identified as necessary for successful communication strategies applicable to development projects developed by Ray (Oliveira 1993:105). These characteristics, however, make a few additions that could greatly assist Mercado's model. These include the significant but often disregarded observation that political goodwill is necessary for the successful implementation of communication projects. Such goodwill should consequently be sought by those involved in the management of communication for development, while government on its part, should be quick to avail it.

A strong case is also made for messages and media presentation to be localised to adjust to local conditions as well as the needs and desires of the target audience. It is also recognised that effective communication cannot be achieved without cost, and that decisions have to be made regarding the most appropriate distribution of resources among communication support and other components of the project. At the same time, there should be close co-ordination within the communication component and between communication and other project components and collaborating institutions.

It is this model and characteristics that appear to have led to successful examples of development communication carried out by donor agencies such as the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in various countries of the developed world. Indeed some of the most enlightening literature on development communication has come from specialists working for such organisations. Mercado's seminal paper on development communication management for instance, is based on his experiences as a planner/programmer and monitoring and evaluation specialist of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and FAO in Asia and the Pacific Islands (Mercado, 1992).

Both strategies were, for instance, used in FAO's Strategic Extension Campaigns (SEC) and USAID's Communication for Technology Transfer in Agriculture (CTTA) (Oliveira, 1993:106). Although the SEC campaign was found to have been superior in terms of its systematic collection of detailed information on different levels of knowledge, attitude and practice of the target group, both projects followed the research, planning, development, implementation and evaluation model that more or less replicated Mercado's ideas as well as those cited by Oliveira.

Quebral (1992) gives two examples to illustrate the development communication models that are fashionable currently. These are the use of what she calls "small media" such as radio and video for animation, and of "social marketing," which "sells ideas like goods." These models are "a break with the traditional use of media as delivery systems of information," where these media "hold up a mirror in which people can view their own reality as a critical first step in participatory development" - which is an exact description of the function of non-development communication.

## **Conclusion**

The four concepts of development communication, development support communication, development journalism, and non-development communication are often confusing because of the

similarity of their origin, application, and even linguistically. By providing the historical context as well as detailed definitions of the terms, it is hoped that this paper has shed some light on their meanings.

Above all, the paper has attempted to show that the concepts and their understanding in all their full perspectives, are crucial for development: non-development communication and development journalism assist the process by creating awareness in a heterogeneous audience, while development communication and development support communication are applied to change certain undesirable attitudes that impede development in given target audiences.

Since their effective utilisation demands high measures of specificity, development communication and development support communication require to be carefully formulated, planned, and managed. This process has been explained in brief and a few examples given of projects in which communication for development was carefully implemented according to models developed by development communication specialists.

Reading the current trends and extrapolating from such trends, it seems justifiable to state that development support communication will gain more acceptance because of the tendency towards decentralisation in national planning, privatisation, and the entry of rural based nongovernmental organisations, all of which tend to favour localised, and project-specific communication campaigns.

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