Making Waves

Stories of Participatory Communication for Social Change

A Report to the Rockefeller Foundation

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Forward by Denise Gray-Felder

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Foreword

By Denise Gray-Felder

Capturing the essence of participatory communication on paper is by definition an illusive challenge. From the work I've witnessed, helped direct, or just monitored during a long career in communication, my observation is that the most interesting work of a participatory nature can often defy the written word. That is, when reasonably talented writers or public speakers try to explain what it is about this work that is so captivating — and has the potential to so dramatically improve lives — their words fall flat.

That is why, when I had the idea that the Rockefeller Foundation should try to catalog some of the most innovative experiments in participatory communication worldwide, only one person came to mind to write this volume: Alfonso Gumucio. What we needed was someone who could bring both poetry and imagery to his words — yet retain the objectivity of a journalist. We needed someone who could paint vivid pictures with his writing that would allow the reader to experience the type of gut-wrenching, emotional conflicts most of us feel when we visit these projects. We needed someone who could synthesise, yet not overlook. And, we also needed a writer who would devote a hugely unreasonable amount of time to this project, yet still come in on deadline and under budget!

Alfonso lived up to these expectations and more. What follows is a fascinating account of 50 experiments in empowering people — living in poor communities across the world — to seize control of their own life stories and begin to change their circumstances of poverty, discrimination and exclusion. He spent nearly one year researching and interviewing sources for "Making Waves," and has been actively involved in every phase of production. "Alfonso's voice" is evident throughout this work, and it is a tribute to what makes him the ultimate communicator: he has the soul of the good poet and filmmaker that he is, combined with an unwavering sense of justice and fairness.

Following the first introductory chapter — which explains the field of participatory communication for social change and how it is evolving — you will read 50 illustrations of the power of community decision-making and action. Many of the stories are about community radio. We hope you don't find this tedious; but our research and conversations certainly suggest that community-based radio is one of the best ways to reach excluded or marginalised communities in targeted, useful ways.

This bias towards radio also suggests that with participatory communication what matters most is the voice. I recognise that this term has been overused in the context of democracy and development. When I use it I mean the process of hearing about the lives and circumstances of the poor and excluded in words and terms that they themselves use. Radio, by nature, gives us the ability to "hear" content, context, passion and pain.

Video clearly gives us the ability to see and hear these voices, thereby allowing our emotions to be touched in ways never imagined before the advent of moving pictures. Yet, video documentation remains expensive, training is often sketchy, and equipment breaks down and cannot be repaired or replaced. Therefore, at this point, video remains out of reach for most poor villages.

We have found — through this project and the other work of the Foundation's Communication for Social Change grant-making effort — overwhelming evidence of development and aid agencies increasing support for projects that return to traditional forms of communication: drama, dance, music, puppets, drums, storytelling and dialogue circles. We have come to appreciate the true power of face-to-face and voice-to-voice communication. Every meaningful lesson or belief I've garnered in life came from someone I value explaining the issue to me and involving me in the process of **figuring out the solution**. From the mundane (learning how to brush my teeth without

getting my blouse wet) to the magnificent (breastfeeding my first child), I needed a combination of face-to-face, hands-on storytelling.

I like to think this document is just another in a series of communication vehicles that the Foundation can help create for practitioners and community activists across the globe. For every case included in this volume, there are at least five complementary examples. We've only skimmed the surface, especially in capturing the successes of the oral tradition on the African continent. We've not attempted to conduct a balanced survey of the world, but rather to select cases stories that we think may help teach us all how to be better communicators.

As you read, I urge you to focus on the lives behind these stories. As I read the document, I was most often touched by the simple lines of prose: "the village schoolteacher was equipped with nothing more than a pleasant smile"; or "A four-year-old has … taught her parents, her superiors, the basic lesson of life: joy is the first rebellion against oppressors … a defiance of all authority that says life will be suffering."

We salute the people living these lives. They are truly "making waves" by going against cultural norms, rebelling against forces that keep them down, broadcasting tales that were previously unheard by most.

Denise Gray-Felder
The Rockefeller Foundation
New York, NY
February 2001

Introduction

Since April 1997 the Rockefeller Foundation, through its Communications Office in New York under the leadership of Denise Gray-Felder, has been promoting a series of meetings among communications specialists to reflect on communication for social change at the hinge of the millennium.

These meetings in Bellagio, Italy, Cape Town, South Africa, and New York, New York, have helped to define the questions, rather than the models. They contributed to the creation of a position paper that has been widely distributed in print and through various Web sites, in English, Spanish and French.

Some issues discussed during the meetings — and also through e-mail exchanges between meetings — lead the group to realise that much of the ideal communication processes that involve people could be found in a number of grassroots experiences in a variety of forms in many developing countries. The need for more research that would bring to light relevant information on experiences of participatory communication for social change was clear. That is how this exercise came to life.

Case Stories: A Hidden Picture

This report gathers a collection of fifty "case stories," brief descriptions of experiences of communication for social change that were selected for their participatory approaches. Some of them were visited physically; for the others information was obtained through e-mail, fax and the Internet.

Despite the fact that Latin America is ahead in the number of communication experiences and that radio has been the most important medium for development and social change worldwide, the initial criteria of selection were set to achieve a balanced representation between the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as among the media and the tools relevant to the experiences: radio, video, theatre, the Internet and others. It also aimed to select experiences with a strong component of community "ownership."

During the research period it proved very difficult to stick to the principle of selecting only those experiences where community ownership was present. There were other angles to consider. For example, some experiences had community ownership as a final objective even if at the time of the research the degree of the community's involvement in the development was still at an early stage. Other cases proved to be important in terms of social change and participation without including community ownership of media.

The result is a collection of case stories that is important precisely because of its variety and cultural relevance to the people of each community. These examples show that the beauty of participatory communication is that it can adopt different forms according to need, and that no blueprint model can impose itself over the richness of views and cultural interactions. Which is to say that none of these experiences is perfect nor has achieved full "success." The dynamics of social struggle and social development is a process, and the accompanying communication components are also part of the process and subject to the same positive and negative influences. Some of these experiences no longer exist, but they were important for the community when they were still active. Some are in too early stages to draw conclusions about their future. Needless to say, all of them have faced constraints since their individual inceptions and have often failed to reach solutions, but they are still interesting examples to analyse.

Initial Selection Criteria

Although acknowledging the importance that strategies of social marketing and information dissemination have had since the 1960s, an effort was made to select experiences that moved the concept of communication for social change one step forward.

The initial criteria had to be more flexible when recognising the importance of networking projects for communication, projects that are not defined as grassroots, but nevertheless contribute to sustain grassroots efforts.

One of the main objectives was to look at experiences that were well-established at the community level, not just one-time projects with a lifespan limited by donor's inputs. The community itself had to be in charge of the communication initiative, even if the community had not originated it. The initiative should be rooted into the community's daily life. For that matter, we looked at experiences that had at least one year of development since establishment.

Ideally, the project should have been "appropriated" by the community. The foremost example in this selection describes a community that runs the communication initiative in all aspects: financing, administration, training, technical, etc. Some other initiatives included in the report aim at this objective but are still in the process of consolidating.

Another important criterion was to consider initiatives that contributed to the strengthening of democratic values, culture and peace, thus reinforcing the community based organisations (CBOs) and allowing the majority to have a voice. Cultural identity should be central to the communication experience. The community should have assimilated any new tools of information technology without jeopardising local values or language.

The research was set to look at experiences of initiatives that are innovative in the manner in which they build alliances with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), development organisations and other institutions. Also, those experiences aim to contribute to horizontal networking and knowledge sharing.

We didn't concentrate necessarily on the most successful initiatives but also on those that, in spite of their failures, provide important lessons. Similarly, it was important to review a few initiatives that may have already left behind their most successful moments; nevertheless they had 10 or 20 years of development and often provide more valuable information than recently established successful experiences that are still protected by funding and technical assistance.

The issue of a balanced representation was key to the preparation of the report and to the final selection of case stories. All regions in the Third World are represented fairly equally in spite of the fact that Latin America has traditionally been involved in participatory communication, while Africa and Asia lag behind.

Likewise, except for print media, which is seldom employed because of illiteracy levels, almost all other media are represented here: video, radio, interpersonal, the Internet and theatre. Radio is, however, the most often utilised and successful medium for social change.

An additional effort was made to include a balanced representation of experiences initiated by different stakeholders, such as: the community, NGOs, government, international cooperation agencies, regional networks, and religious organisations.

Participatory Communication and Development

In Europe and the United States, the recent literature on communication for development often refers only to books and documents published in English. Thus, studies on the theory of communication development will often include in their bibliography references to the same old paradigms: Lerner, Rogers, Schramm … and some of the new ones: Jacobson, Servaes, White, Korten, Ascroft, Schiller or Habermas, among others. There wouldn't be references to Mattelart, Freire, Agrawal, Nair, Hamelink, Flugesang or Castells if their essays were not translated to English or written in English.

And definitely, the very important contributions of Diaz Bordenave, Martin Barbero, Prieto Castillo, Reyes Matta, Beltrán and others from Latin America, wouldn't be recognised at all if a handful of their articles hadn't been lucky enough to break the language barrier. However, the most substantial part of their work remains unknown by academics in the United States and Europe.

If it's true that the discussion on participatory communication has become popular since the 1980s, it is no less true that most of the existing experiences are still ignored. Much of the available literature is based on a handful of case stories, mostly drawn from countries where English is the enabling research tool. This is one of the reasons why the participatory communication experiences in Latin America — which started in the late 1940s and now count in the thousands — are taken into account far less by academics in Europe or North America.

While a much greater understanding of the role of communication in social change is now spread among development organisations, particularly in developing countries and among academics in industrialised countries, still, little is known about many concrete experiences and projects where communication has been or is instrumental in social change.

Because of the language barriers and the scarce international visibility of most of the grassroots experiences, there is much misunderstanding among development organisations, and even academic institutions, about the essence of participatory communication practices that are alive and well in developing nations. In spite of the increasing awareness about the relevance of participation in economic and social development, the concept of *participatory communication* still lacks an accurate definition that could contribute to a better understanding of the notion. But perhaps it's not so desperately needed.

Actually, *participatory communication* may not be defined easily because it cannot be considered a unified model of communication. The eagerness for labels and encapsulated definitions could only contribute to freeze a communication movement that is still shaping itself, and that may be more valuable precisely because of its variety and looseness. *"The word 'participation' is kaleidoscopic; it changes its colour and shape at the will of the hands in which [it] is held."*[1]

The experiences of participatory communication for social change are as diverse as the cultural and geographic settings in which they have been developing. In spite of participatory communication being a relatively recent topic of interest for academics, its history spans over the last fifty years, from the time *Radio Sutatenza* started in a remote area of Colombia and the Bolivian miners organised to set up community radio stations in their mining districts. Latin America has generally been the nest where the first experiences originated. Nonetheless, with the end of authoritarian regimes in Africa and Asia during the past two decades, new experiences of participatory communication for social change have also blossomed in these regions.

The diversity of participatory communication experiences has always been a sign of its healthy status. However, the linkages with development projects aimed at economic and social change have not always been successful. It looks like, at the grassroots level, the need for communication has been deeply felt by the people who took action to make it possible, while at the planning and implementation level of donor and government driven projects there has been little consciousness about change.

The two ends are eventually going to meet, because of the international cooperation for development lessons learned during past decades. Too many projects failed because of vertical planning and implementation and too much funding was channelled to developing nations that never reached the intended "beneficiaries" until donors and planners started realising that they were doing something wrong. If they had only involved the beneficiaries from the beginning. . . .

Such a simple idea, involving the beneficiaries, didn't come immediately to the minds of international donors and planners, and when it did they were not able to overcome certain obstacles. One of these has been the inertia of channelling cooperation mainly through governments that are often corrupted and insensitive to the needs of their people, and the inability of getting to the real

partners in development. In recent years local NGOs and CBOs have proven to be cost-efficient and trustworthy in the eyes of bilateral donors, and even governments.

Cultural barriers, as well as attitudes of arrogance about knowledge and vertical practices, have not allowed donors, planners and governments to establish a dialogue with communities of beneficiaries. Indigenous knowledge is at best perceived as an acceptable claim from communities, but rarely considered as one of the main components of development.

Communication has been neglected for too long in development projects, and still is. Even when development organisations and staff realise today that beneficiaries have to be involved, they fail to understand that without communication there can be no long-term dialogue with communities. The fact that development projects are mostly in the hands of economists and technicians impedes the understanding of social and cultural issues that are key to a communication strategy.

Too often communication was mistakenly conceived as propaganda or, in the best scenario, as information dissemination, but seldom seen as dialogue. International donors and implementers, governments and NGOs, crave communication when the objective is to gain visibility. Consequently they concentrate on the use of mass media — or worse, billboards, paid advertising in journals — and generally on media activities that have an impact in the cities, rather than in the poorest rural areas.

There has been an evolution in the concepts of development; nonetheless projects have evolved from not taking communication into account, framing it only as a propaganda or reporting tool. Massive campaigns through mass media, especially for health projects, proved difficult to sustain without permanent funding. Moreover the campaigns have not contributed to establishing dialogue with communities. Since the inception, these projects were exogenous to the beneficiaries and too general to be culturally accepted in countries where cultural and ethnic diversity is high. Development organisations from the United States, that largely promoted the marketing of social goods, had to invest additional funds in self-promotion in order to get attention in developing countries.

The concept of establishing a dialogue with beneficiaries all along the process of conceiving, planning, implementing and evaluating a project has been gradually consolidating. At first, implementers understood that beneficiaries should be involved in the activities leading to social and economic development of a community, for the purpose of building up a sense of “ownership” within the community. This was at last perceived as important especially in terms of the sustainability of the project once the external inputs ended.

Next, planners realised that the sense of ownership couldn’t be promoted if the beneficiaries didn’t have a word in the decisions made before a particular project started. For example, the simple issue of deciding where to dig a borehole and place a hand pump could reveal the complexity of internal relations within a rural community. Technical people that had often seen communities as a homogenous human universe went through a learning process that helped them realise that a community — as the society at large — is also a composite of interest groups, rich and poor, whose cultural complexity has to be understood beforehand.

The concept of participatory development has lead to a greater level of understanding of the role of communication for development. More projects now include communication staff and budget funds specifically assigned to communication activities. This has also revealed the lack of trained communicators for development; actually, this specialty seldom exists in universities. Among the thousands of academic institutions that produce journalists, only a very few offer training for people interested in communication for development.

> It seems there are more than 300 communications schools in Latin America, training over 120,000 students. Most of these training centres aim to prepare communications professionals for the mass

> media, the advertising industry, the so-called business communications and public relations. There is not one single school of communications really training communicators for development, scientific communicators or pedagogic communicators. In part, that is the very reason why we find such a distressing situation in the field of communication for development. It is very difficult to understand the reason why that type of communications school and university faculties continue to proliferate while there are not enough jobs for the newly graduated. Our society needs schools that form another kind of communicator, those that do not exist right now, at least not in the quantities that are needed.[2] — Comments of Manuel Calvelo

Communicators for development are a rare species. Most of those that correspond to such a profile are "self-made" communicators coming from other disciplines, who turned to communications because they identified the real need by working on development projects. Agronomists, sociologists, rural extension workers and facilitators have turned into much better development communicators than journalists which are often too biased towards mass media and vertical practices.

Macro and Micro, Pilot and Scale

One very important obstacle for including participatory communication components in development projects is the donors' need for "scale," which either paralyses cooperation or leads to gigantic and artificial projects that result in equally resounding failures. "White elephants" — as we refer in Spanish to those expensive and gigantic projects that never move — have done much more harm than good to developing countries. The issue of scale is often related to the donor's political agenda and internal administrative regulations rather than to development needs. The requirements of proving "success" in the short-term (the "annual report syndrome") or measuring a project in numbers of beneficiaries (the higher the better), while excluding qualitative aspects and long-term benefits, have lead to projects that are only "successful" while funding is available.

In a more reasonable framework for development, scale would have to do with linking communities with similar issues of concern and facilitating exchanges, instead of multiplying models that clash with culture and tradition.

The "macro" level is often a trap in a world diverse in cultures and rich in differences. Going to scale is not always the right long-term solution and massive models cannot replace bottom-up networking. The international donor community is still reluctant to acknowledge 30 or 40 years of failures and millions down the drain because of ill-planned macro programmes. The eagerness to go fast, to show short-term results, and to extend coverage to large numbers of people has actually backfired.

It has also distorted the role of communication, which has been largely misused for the purpose of institutional visibility, and seldom as a development device. Mass media has been privileged over other communication tools, with the results that we know: enormous investments, which do not leave anything at the grassroots level once the technical assistance and the funding are withdrawn.

If real changes are expected in the way communication is applied in development projects, we first need to see changes inside the donor and implementing organisations. Those changes could involve using communication strategies from the initial stages of planning a programme or project — for example, by allocating a fixed percentage of the total budget to communication activities. Also, changes are needed that will affect the profile of the project staff by incorporating development communicators rather than publicists, and sociologists rather than journalists. Maybe at some point

we will all understand better that “macro” is not just a matter of “mega,” but also a matter of participation of the intended beneficiaries. And participation has never been massive if it is driven from the top.

Next: Participatory Evaluation

Some progress has been made, though not enough, in terms of gradually involving beneficiaries at the planning and implementing stages of a project. However, the evaluation of programmes and projects is still a donor driven exercise, which remains external and vertical to the beneficiaries. Surprisingly enough, the whole evaluation system seems totally outdated to deal with participatory development; nevertheless it is still very strongly present. Other than the fact that institutions specialised in doing evaluations represent an industry by itself, there is another reason that explains its current predominance: by contracting private evaluators donors keep control over evaluations.

If we look at it rationally, there are important contradictions in the manner most evaluations are done today, and the main contradiction is that beneficiaries are cut off from the process, seen only as objects of study and not subjects that can contribute to the evaluation process. The following are some aspects that obscure the results of many evaluations.

First of all, the fact that donors and/or implementers sponsor the evaluations of their own projects has an impact on the quality of results; evaluators are likely to be biased to a lesser or larger extent since they depend on future contracts with the same or similar organisations.

Second, who decides on the very objectives of an evaluation? Who will mainly benefit from the evaluation: is it the beneficiaries or the organisation that contracts it? The objectives of evaluations usually respond to institutional agendas.

Third, evaluations are often done by experts with little knowledge about the cultural, political and social context, nor do they speak the language; these are mainly consultants from private companies based in the United States or Europe. Very few projects hire national or Third World consultants with a background that facilitates a higher understanding of local culture. Occasionally United Nations development agencies exchange south-south consultants for this purpose, which is already an improvement.

Fourth, the battery of evaluation instruments is usually taken from already existing models. It’s usually adapted for a particular project without sufficient consultation with the grassroots communities and with little consideration of cultural aspects.

Fifth, for statistical purposes, most of the evaluations avoid open questions and concentrate on checklist type formats that aim to obtain numbers and percentages as opposed to qualitative assessments.

Finally, the timing of evaluations is habitually donor driven and has no relevance to really measuring the benefits of a project to the community. Often evaluations are done just by the conclusion of an institutional intervention, thus capturing a picture of the development process at its best moment.

The type of information that an evaluation may bring is often of more use to the implementers than to the beneficiaries. Problems of inaccuracy of information may also obscure the results and interpretation. Inaccuracy is not only related to the inputs — for example in relation to an AIDS campaign — but often with the lack of knowledge on the culture and forms of organisation of respondents. The “evidence” that evaluators are looking for, may be distorted by the existing gap between the evaluators and the community.

The bottom line is that the evaluation process should also integrate dialogue as an essential tool. The whole concept of evaluation is to be reassessed. During the past decades we have finally moved towards the concept of people-centred development and towards a people-centred communication model. It is time to move towards people-centred evaluation models.

This has happened already at the grassroots level in some of the most interesting examples of participatory communication. During their four decades of growth and development, there were no formal external evaluations of the Bolivian miners' radio stations; but the fact is that their constituency constantly and permanently evaluated the stations and actually directed the process through continuous dialogue.

Honest and useful evaluations will only be possible when donors and implementers are ready to surrender their institutional agendas. Are they prepared to do so? If they are, evaluation should become a process that involves the beneficiaries from the beginning, setting the objectives of an evaluation process.

Radio: Small Waves, Giant Changes

For more than fifty years radio has been the most appealing tool for participatory communication and development. It is without a doubt the communication tool most widely spread throughout the world and has always been the ideal medium for change. Radio had much to do with the changes in the communication landscape of Europe since the early 1970s when the *radio libre* or "pirate" stations popped up by the hundreds in Italy, France and other countries of the conservative continent. Radio Tomate and the others that started in small clandestine rooms of Paris or Milan may have evolved to successful commercial enterprises over the years, but the whole spectrum of radio and television in Europe has changed since their creation.

In the mid-40s, about three decades before diversity in electronic media would spread, small and often isolated communities of *campesinos* (poor farmers) or miners in Latin America had already started operating their own stations, not only to challenge the monopoly of state media, but also to have, for the first time, a voice of their own. The social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, the resistance to military dictatorships that were delivered to power courtesy of the CIA, contributed to the multiplication of independent and community-based radio stations by the thousands. Today, any small country in Latin America can count by hundreds the stations, most of them FM, that serve rural or urban communities with content, that is appropriate to the local language, culture and needs.

Individually, most of these radio stations, often housed in a school, a church or a union building, may not make waves that reach far, but the ensemble certainly has the power of a tsunami. They have rocked down governments and launched new populist leaders. But above all, they have served their constituency on a daily basis, without much noise, mostly open to people's ideas and voices.[3]

Asia and Africa are certainly undergoing the same process that Latin America lived through decades ago. As people repudiate the last dictators, the new voices emerge from various media, and radio is usually in the forefront. As soon as the state monopoly cracks down, small organisations and communities lift their antennas over the villages. Asia provides important examples in the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Nepal, while in Africa several countries are taking advantage of the new democratic winds, the example of South Africa being outstanding among them.

Nonetheless, participatory radio in Africa is still at an early stage of development:

> I think the term community radio doesn't apply to stations in Africa. It implies that a station has evolved from a group of people or a community, a village. That's not the case in Africa. Most private radio stations in Africa are commercial stations. It doesn't mean they broadcast commercials all day long but it does mean that they were set up with the sole purpose of making money. And most radio stations are important for the development of the country. I'd prefer to speak of development radio. More of these stations are popping up

> across West Africa. African culture is based on oral history. Radio now adopts the role of village chief who used to tell stories sitting under a village tree.[4]

The smallest and most precarious community radio station already makes a difference for a community. The presence of a community radio station, even if it is not highly participatory, has an immediate effect on the population. Small stations usually start airing music for most of the day, thus making an impact on cultural identity and community pride. The next step, closely associated with music programming, is carrying announcements and dedications which contribute to the strengthening of the local social networks. When the station grows in experience and skill, local production of health or education-related programmes starts. These contribute to share information on important issues that affect the community.

Community radio stations have multiplied by the thousands all over the world over the past five decades. It is almost impossible to even calculate the real numbers, as statistics do not include the many that operate without a legal license. Essentially they are important within their own community geographic and social universes, though once in a while the names of some of these stations are heard across the borders: *Radio Enriquillo* in Dominican Republic, *Radio La Voz de la Montaña* in Mexico, *Radio Animas* in Bolivia, *Radio Qawinakel* in Guatemala, *Radio Xai-Xai* in Mozambique, *Radio Tubajon* in the Philippines, *Radio Sagarmatha* in Nepal, *Katutura Community Radio* in Namibia, *Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio* in Uganda, *Chikaya Community Radio Station* in Zambia. . . .

The process of communicating through radio has gone through various stages during the past five decades. This report has selected examples that provide a view of the evolution and the new perspectives in using radio as a communication tool for social change. Among the fifty case stories selected, no less than twenty are radio stations, which acknowledges the importance of this medium. Radio has been instrumental for social change and moreover, has invented participatory communication, as we know it today.

The first to appear in October 16, 1947, was *Radio Sutatenza*, in Colombia. Established by José Joaquin Salcedo Guarin, a Catholic priest, the station had two main objectives: to broadcast the Christian doctrine to poor farmers and to teach skills that would contribute to community development. *Radio Sutatenza* grew steadily over the decades until the powerful Cadena Caracol bought it in the early 1990s.

Participation in community radio stations varies from total ownership to different degrees of audience involvement in programming and management.

The classic example of total ownership and control of a radio station by its constituency is the network of miners' radio stations in Bolivia. Having been established since 1949, this network is one of the first experiences and one of the most outstanding examples of popular and participatory communication in the world. It is not often that we encounter radio stations that have been conceived, set up, managed, technically run, financed and maintained by the community. Furthermore, the miners' radio stations are also the paradigm of a communication initiative that is part of a larger political and social change project. Last but not least, the fact that at its peak — in the 1970s — the miners' radio network was comprised of as many as 26 independent stations, which is not negligible at all in terms of scale. Unfortunately, we won't find many other examples of this level of quality.

In recent years we have some other examples of stations where community ownership is an important feature, such as *Radio Izcanal* in El Salvador and the local radio stations in Burkina Faso, formerly known as High Volta, and Haiti. In the last two examples, the stations were actually set up with both external funds and technical assistance. In Burkina Faso the project of creating six local radio stations was a result of the vision that Thomas Sankara had when he was still Minister of

Information, even before he became President and changed the name of the country. The whole project started collapsing when he was ousted and killed by his close friend and arms companion, Blaise Campaore. In Haiti in 1994, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) donated radio equipment and provided initial training for four stations in remote areas of the island, but the stations are still struggling to build their own identity in a country constantly shaken by political upheaval.

Networking has always been a challenge for community-based communication projects. Top-down networking can easily be done by commercial ventures because of the highly centralised organisation, but that doesn't work as easily when dealing with a group of independent radio stations, each one owned by a different community. Maybe the first question to answer is what defines a network? The miners' radio stations of Bolivia were not considered a network because they aired the same programmes or had a central management, but because they were capable of linking their signals when it was judged necessary, and they pursued the same objectives: to improve the life of Bolivian miners and be heard by the whole nation.

The other example of networking that is worth mentioning is *Tambuli*, in the Philippines. These stations, around twenty, were set up with the help of external technical assistance and funding from UNESCO and Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). Some aspects of networking include exchanges of cassettes, training, meetings and overall monitoring from the *Tambuli* Foundation in Manila. But in terms of linking their signal or exchanging material in real-time, no networking is possible as the stations are spread out in the most remote places of the island and can't possibly get in touch through their low-powered transmitters. Technically, *Tambuli* is not a network, although philosophically all the stations share the same objectives and ideas.

The *Local Radio Network* in Indonesia shows radio networking is possible even when the stations that make up the network are all privately owned. Again, this is an example of the diversity that we have found during the research process. It is essential to understand the political context of Indonesia in order to appreciate the relevance of this network to communication for social change. There is simply no other community radio in Indonesia. No law provides for such, and after decades of Suharto's strong military regime, it will still take some time until new legislation on communication is established. Albeit, the need for democratic communication inspired UNESCO to support more than twenty private local radio stations, small stations with little resources of their own, and to spark a process of networking with the help of new technologies. UNESCO provided additional equipment, training and technical assistance so the stations would start producing and airing local news and locally produced programmes. Computers and Internet access enable the stations to exchange news on a daily basis, thus consolidating the networking process. In spite of threats by the army, especially in politically hot regions as Ache, the network continues to grow.

On a much larger scale, *Púlsar* is a news agency in Latin America that provides daily reports and news through e-mail and the Internet, to several hundreds of community radio stations. From a networking perspective, *Púlsar* has been successful in establishing a system of correspondents all over Latin America and the Caribbean, who provide daily feeds and news from people's perception.

Madagascar is following a model similar to the *Tambuli* stations, with its radio stations in Fianarantsoa and Morondava. These two stations — a third is likely to be established in Antananarivo — were set up with support from Switzerland's Développement et Cooperation (DDC), with the objective of serving rural communities in their respective geographical areas of influence. This may not be an example of networking because of the lack of contact among the stations, but may become an example of ownership by the community. During the first two years efforts were directed to establish the two stations as community media, the first stations of their kind in Madagascar. Next, the process is scheduled to transfer total ownership of the stations to the rural associations currently represented on the management board. However, there is much uncertainty as to what will happen when Swiss technical assistance totally withdraws.

Among the most relevant experiences of radio stations that have succeeded in establishing themselves as examples of participatory communication for social change, those originated by Catholic priests are in the forefront. From the first community radio station ever, *Radio Sutatenza* (1947), to the thousands that operate today mainly in Latin America, radio has been the most supportive medium of communities struggling for a better world. The Catholic priests behind these communication projects quickly understood that the survival and development of the radio stations had to be linked to community participation, involving the real social, political and cultural needs of the people, and not just to preaching about faith or against communism.

Again, a classic example comes from the mining districts of Bolivia. Early in the fifties a group of Catholic priests established *Radio Pío* XII in Llallagua, with the objective of "fighting communism and alcoholism" among miners, exactly as *Radio Sutatenza* did a few years before in rural Colombia. Soon after, the station moved so close to the miners' community, that it joined the network of union radio stations. In subsequent years it was often attacked by the army, and literally, under fire, exactly as the other stations and for the same reasons — defending the political and social rights of workers. *Radio San Gabriel* in La Paz, which focused mainly on its peasant constituency, has grown to become one of the most important national radio stations in Bolivia.

Jesuit priests created and are still behind one of the most interesting experiences selected for this report, *Radio Kwizera*, a station that serves the refugee population in western Tanzania, near the borders of Burundi and Rwanda. Several radio stations functioning under the umbrella of the *Tambuli* network in the Philippines, are actually supported at the grassroots level by priests and pastors, such as *Radio Tubajon* and *Radio Loreto*, both located on Dinagat Island, north of Mindanao. *Radio Quillabamba* in Peru and *Radio Huayacocotla* in Mexico, are among the group of outstanding examples of radio stations supported by progressive priests, entirely identified with the local population.

It is not unusual to find community radio stations that have been set up with support from local or international NGOs, but it is less common to find radio stations that were established by government institutions in order to serve the community. There are few of the latter and usually when these stations exist it is more often … the result of good-willed individuals challenging the system, rather than as an expression of government policy to provide a voice for the people. What Thomas Sankara did during the early 1980s in Burkina Faso has not been replicated by other African governments, who have been too jealous to release their tight control over the media.

The Mexican government, on the other hand, does have a policy of promoting community radio, in particular within indigenous communities. *Radio Margaritas* is one of the 24 indigenous radio stations established by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), an official institution. These stations produce and air programmes in 31 local languages and Spanish, and reach an estimated six million indigenous Mexicans. As with some other interesting projects from Mexico, the stations are the fortunate result of political contradictions, and precisely because these contradictions are far from being resolved, the stations have survived through various changes of government.

Radio Kiritimati in the Kiribati archipelago in the South Pacific and *Kothmale Radio* in Sri Lanka are also examples of community radio stations that were established and are partly funded by the government, with little political interference.

Kothmale Radio is an experience worth describing because it is one of the first projects aiming at the convergence between radio and the Internet. Equipped with computers and Internet access, the station receives requests for information from the audience, searches the web for the appropriate data, and returns the results to the listeners, in local language. It is also building a database with information useful to the local constituency.

As a tool for social change and participatory communication, radio has several comparative advantages over the other media. First, it is cost-efficient in terms of investment — both for those that run the station and for the audience. Second, it is pertinent in terms of language and content —

ideal for the huge illiterate population that still remains marginalised especially in rural areas of the Third World. Third, it is relevant to local practices, traditions and culture. Fourth, once the initial investment in equipment is made, sustainability is feasible, though dependent on the level of community participation. Fifth, in terms of outreach and geographic coverage radio has a strong advantage over other media. Last but not least, the convergence between radio and the Internet is providing new strength to community radio and has enormously increased networking opportunities.

Video: The Image of Identity

Video, as a communication tool for development and social change, has always been the subject of comparisons and disputes among the film and the television industries. In order to gain its own identity, the video tool for development had to differentiate itself from the broadcasting system, which is mostly driven by commercial interests.

For many years video has been the “poor relative” of the well-established film and television industries. It has been perceived as a marginalised and low-quality desperate attempt to compete with the commercial networks. Because of the cost of running a television station, most independent projects that aim to promote culture or social issues through television are condemned to have a short life. Even in industrialised nations, the so-called “cultural networks” or “public broadcasting” has a hard life.

During the 1960s and 1970s a few attempts were conducted in Latin America to establish “alternative” television stations in countries such as Bolivia or Chile. None was successful over the years. At one point, each university in Bolivia had its own television channel offering cultural programming, debates and news from a different perspective. But it proved to be unsustainable and as soon as commercial licenses became accessible through bidding, the university television channels faded off. In Chile, as in some other countries, university television channels just had to compete commercially with the others, so little time was left for social and cultural programmes.

On the other hand, independent video networks have managed to survive by revealing a social reality that is seldom seen in television. In spite of peoples’ tastes having been moulded by the commercial offerings of television and cable networks, independent video is still alive and well.

Somewhere within this process, as technology became more affordable and easier to manipulate, video grew as a separate communication tool, with its own comparative advantages over television. The uses of video in social development projects show a great deal of creativity and capacity to adapt to the changing cultural and social context. In third world countries video is now embraced in much the same manner as radio was by the previous generation, as a tool to support education, cultural identity, organisation and political participation.

Many innovative participatory video experiences have developed all over the world. *Video SEWA* in India, the Kayapo Indians in Brazil, FAWO in South Africa, *New Dawn* in Namibia, *Television Serrana* in Cuba, *TV for Development* in Uganda, *CESPAC* in Peru, the *Capricorn Video Unit* in Zimbabwe, *Video & Community Dreams* in Egypt, and *Nutzij* in Guatemala, among many others. The experiences selected for this report illustrate the diversity and flexibility of this communication tool.

Video SEWA (India) among the video-based experiences, is one of the best demonstrations of the participatory potential that this communication tool can unleash. It is also one of the first and long-lasting video experiences in the world. It all started in 1984 when the late Martha Stuart, an international video communications consultant and founder of Martha Stuart Communications, travelled to India and conducted a video training workshop in Gujarat for twenty women, mostly illiterate, from the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA).

The seed that was planted in the right place at the right moment has become an important tool within *SEWA*’s social and organisational work. Among the important outcomes of this experience is

the fact that women with almost no formal education were capable of assimilating the video tool, and their role in society immediately changed as a result. Martha Stuart's children, Sarah Stuart and Barkley Stuart, continued the work of their late mother by supporting similar projects in Nigeria (*Action Health*, 1992) and Egypt (*Video & Community Dreams*, 1998).

Some of the earliest, best and bigger experiences of participatory video were promoted by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and, ironically enough, with the acquiescence of governmental institutions. This is the case for Centro de Servicios de Pedagogia Audiovisual para la Capacitacion (*CESPAC*) in Peru in 1975, Programa de Desarrollo Rural Integrado del Trópico Humedo (*PRODERITH*) in Mexico in 1978, and more recently Centre de Services de Production Audiovisual (*CESPA*) in Mali in 1989. The three were inspired by Manuel Calvelo, a communication specialist who had enormous influence in establishing the guidelines for participatory communication projects in Latin America. Two Peruvian communicators that had been trained by Calvelo in *CESPAC*, in fact, provided technical assistance to the Mali experience. These projects are a live illustration of how individuals are determinant in defining the spirit of participatory projects: Manuel Calvelo at the field level and Colin Fraser in FAO headquarters were instrumental in supporting what may have been considered expensive and weird projects by development officials both in FAO and government institutions.

At this point it is important to underscore that among all the other United Nations organisations FAO has been the leading agency in terms of developing the concept of communication for development, followed by UNESCO which has mostly supported community radio initiatives. The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in spite of having the largest communication staff at the field level, has not been able to sustain a direction where participatory communication would be central to field activities. Following the death of former Executive Director James Grant in 1995, philosophical changes took place within UNICEF. The result was that most of UNICEF's budget now goes to fundraising campaigns and short-term impact activities. The other UN agencies barely count in terms of promoting participatory communication projects and having a long-term vision.

FAO not only supported long-term communication projects that contributed to build a national capacity, but also developed, at the same time, a conceptual framework through seminars, international meetings, and a wealth of publications. The information and communication cluster at FAO headquarters worked best under the direction of Colin Fraser and, later in the 1980s, Silvia Balit. The administrative reorganisation of FAO in the mid-90s, with the relocation of staff, departments and resources, seems to have affected the vision on communication for development that was prevalent in earlier years.

Both *CESPAC* (Peru) and *PRODERITH* (Mexico), as well as *CESPA* (Mali) more recently, are related to agricultural development and peasant organisations. The projects had a strong component of training and video which was initially utilised as a visual tool to spread technical innovations in farming and livestock management. Very soon the peasants themselves voiced the need to also focus on social needs such as strengthening community organisation. This evolution coincided with rapid improvements in video technology during the 1980s: cheaper, smaller and lighter hand-held cameras with built-in batteries and cassette tapes. Video became the ideal tool to facilitate a dialogue between the community and the technical staff, and a means to exchange knowledge horizontally. The video products (video documentaries or video lessons) still remained an important output of these projects (*PRODERITH*'s catalogue lists several thousand productions), but making the video items became increasingly important, as it involved a process of collective reflection and dialogue on each topic.

Using video as a participatory tool and emphasising the process rather than the product are key concepts in the work of *Maneno Mengi*, a group based in Zanzibar since the mid-90s. *Maneno Mengi* ("many words" in Kiswahili) is actually an NGO that specialises in low-cost digital video production, in support of social development initiatives. Its work has benefited fisher folks as well as

peasants of Tanzania. *Maneno Mengi* uses the video camera as a "mirror" for communities to scrutinise their problems and find solutions. The process can last for several months, on a daily basis. The video camera participates in community discussions; the recorded segments are shown once and again to the community or to relevant authorities if needed. After several months, when social changes are already taking place, the material is edited, mostly as a summary of the whole process. Community representatives participate in the editing sessions, which are simplified with the use of computer laptops loaded with video editing software.

Looking at the ensemble of video-based communication experiences, we can categorise three distinct perspectives: those for which the process *before* the video product is essential, those for which the video product itself is the end result, and those that emphasise the process *after* the video product is completed. Certainly these distinctions are not too rigorous, but they allow us to better understand the strengths of each communication initiative.

TV Maxambomba and *TV Viva* in Brazil, as well as *Teleanalisis* in Chile, are examples that show the impact of video after production is completed. This is not to say that these groups do not care about the production process, but they certainly are outstanding because of the way they relate to audiences.

The experience of *Teleanalisis* has long ago folded; nonetheless it had an enormous social impact in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s, under the strong Pinochet regime. *Teleanalisis* was an alternative for news systematically censored in Chilean television under the dictatorship. Aggressive cameramen went out to record peoples' demonstrations, political repression, and a variety of social problems. The material was edited in secret and copied to VHS cassettes, which were distributed through clandestine unions, religious organisations, and community groups.

TV Viva and *TV Maxambomba* in Brazil operate in a different context, a democracy where media is owned by large economic groups, among the most influential in Latin America, such as *TV Globo.* Both TV Viva (from Recife, Brazil, in the North), and *TV Maxambomba* (from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), struggle to offer the marginalised neighbourhoods another image of Brazil, an image that takes into account the problems, the needs, and the overall expression of the local community. In spite of their names, neither is a television station. Their video production touches upon all kinds of issues that can be of interest to the community: politics, health, sexuality, unemployment, education, black culture, citizen's rights and the environment. Humour is an important ingredient that helps to attract audiences. In the streets and open places of Olinda or Nova Iguaçu, *TV Viva* and *TV Maxambomba* deploy their giant screens to project video shows that attract people by the hundreds. It's public entertainment and at the same time educational. Viewing is no longer a passive activity for the activists of *TV Viva* and *TV Maxambomba.*

Television Serrana, in Cuba, is a distinctive experience because it takes place in a country where the government has always had a stronghold on the media. However, it is also a country where film, video and the arts in general have enjoyed great support from the state. The main film festival in Latin America takes place every December in Havana and includes important video selections. Cuban independent video production groups have multiplied over the last decade and have their own national festival. What makes *Television Serrana* different is that the group has established itself in one of the most isolated regions of the island, the Sierra Maestra, famous for being the guerrilla stronghold during the late fifties. *Television Serrana* looks at the social situation of the peasant population and provides an opportunity for local communities to voice their concerns and expectations. Particularly successful items are the video-letters, mostly made with children and addressed to other children in Cuba and the world.

Though video, as a participatory communication tool for social change, is still at the beginning of its journey, the potential is huge particularly because of the forthcoming convergence with Internet-based visual applications. At present, the ratio between video and radio in social change

experiences is, perhaps, one to fifty, but this could change over the next decade as Internet connections speed-up and hard drive memory becomes cheaper.

Video has its own comparative advantages that are worth mentioning. First, new digital technologies are making it more affordable, easier to handle, and very competitive with professional formats in terms of quality; video is no longer a "poor relative" of television. Second, the potential of using video within the framework of an interactive and dialogic process, and still having a video product at the end is an enormous advantage. The instant playback feature of video is one of its most empowering qualities; it enables continuous participation and immediate feedback. This dimension allows those who are the subject and those who operate the technology to collaborate as equals. Third, building on the classic adage "one image is worth a thousand words," the power of visuals in communication is more extensive every day. Images are trustworthy (even if we know they can be manipulated); visuals easily motivate people. Finally, the convergence with Internet-based technologies is very promising.

Theatre: Staging Daily Life

In a world dominated by electronic media, where television antennas can be counted by the thousands even in the poorest shanty towns — and where the profiles of satellite dishes emerge even in the middle of the desert — community theatre has not only survived, but has an important role in communicating for development.

Theatre, puppets, dance and music are firmly rooted in the traditional cultural and artistic expressions of many communities in poorer countries. It is difficult to imagine a community that has completely forgotten any of these forms of collective participation and entertainment. Sometimes the tradition is only sleeping, it has been neglected because of other urgencies (like survival in the globalised world), but it can be instantly revived when a new motivation arises. The old rich costumes set aside through several generations come out from the wooden trunks where they were carefully folded; the colourful masks and puppets glow again under the sun; the drums or locally made marimbas or *balofon* regain their clear sounds. The tradition of expressing the local history and the dreams of a community through music, dance or theatre are alive and well even in the most isolated places on earth. And that is precisely why the communication projects that aim to build on traditional forms of expression have many chances to succeed.

There are several reasons for choosing theatre or puppets or dance as a means of communicating for development and encouraging community participation. The first, and more obvious, is that it's already there at the community level, and it's most appreciated by people. Another reason is that in spite of electronic media being almost everywhere nowadays, very little is there content-wise that can help communities improve their quality of life or to organise themselves better. If only entertainment were not only entertainment. At least radio, compared to television, makes a major effort to reach communities in their own local languages, but too often the contents of programming is detached from local needs and from local cultural identity overall. Many of the drama-based experiences that we know of in the world were established because the available media either were not accessible to the people, or were not responding to their needs for information and communication.

The network of popular theatre in Nigeria was born to serve areas of the country where not even national or state radio, let alone television, had coverage. In the early 1990s UNICEF realised that the investment in radio and television campaigns had little influence in zones of Nigeria where communities lived in complete isolation from any form of electronic-based information. Moreover, the very impact of the radio and television strategy over other areas of the country was in question. The establishment of small drama groups at the level of local governments greatly contributed to support health and education activities with innovative means of communication, using the most

important local resources: people, culture, tradition and language. The proliferation of these groups was challenging in terms of "scale" and the impact on the population could be evaluated immediately, because of the face-to-face communication that was implemented. Scripts on the most important health issues were developed and locally adapted to each particular context.

In Nepal, the *Aarohan Theatre* has been promoting community theatre since 1988. Although the troupe is not based in a specific community, it has placed its technical capacity at the service of training local drama groups who would in turn develop scripts and plays to support local participation for social change. Over the years a network of some thirty groups have been established with the help of *Aarohan*, some in very remote areas of Nepal. Travelling theatre groups supportive of community participation and social change are also well established in the South Pacific, such as *Wan Smolbag* in the Solomon Islands or the *Awareness Community Theatre* (ACT) in Papua, New Guinea.

Theatre is also important to promote social change in urban settings. The examples of *Teatro Kerigma* in Colombia, *Nalamdana* in India and *Teatro Trono* in Bolivia are illustrative of this trend. Street theatre has a variety of forms, including one-man performances and mimes to more organised drama groups. *Teatro Trono* was initially established by street children and youths in El Alto city, on the outskirts of La Paz, Bolivia. It eventually became a larger cultural group and expanded its activities to other urban areas of Bolivia.

Puppets have also been used as a tool for social change in many countries, particularly in India and Indonesia. Among the puppeteer's groups there is much diversity of technique, topic and audiences. Adults benefit from it as well as children. String puppets, glove puppets, shadow puppets and rod puppets are some of the traditional techniques employed, but in recent years computer-controlled puppetry is being introduced in film studios and on television shows.

Various puppeteers' troupes are concerned about AIDS prevention, such as *Puppets Against AIDS* in Namibia (PAAN), active since 1995, *Dadi Pudumjee* in India, and *Nyanga Tshabalala* in South Africa. In Hong Kong, *The Kids on the Block*, a troupe of large-sized puppets, has specialised in educating children on issues of discrimination against children with disabilities.

Some puppeteer's are using television to broaden their audiences, although this has an impact on the quality of perception and participation. Using the national language, Tagalog, the *Batibot Puppet Show* in the Philippines is designed to help pre-school children from low-income families develop skills and values through entertainment. The *Si Unyil Puppet* series in Indonesia has been on television since the early 1980s. Similarly, the *Puppet Theatre* of Ardeshir *Keshavarzi* (Iran) and *Uncle Sargam* by Farooq Qaisar (Pakistan) are popular shows in their respective countries. It is difficult to evaluate how many of these puppet shows really deal with social change and how much of what they broadcast is plain entertainment for children.

It is obvious that the ill-defined television audience forces puppeteers to address culture and content in very general rather than specific terms, without having the possibility of establishing a real dialogue with the audience.

The Lilac Tent is an amazing experience taking place in Bolivia, inspired in various performing arts and housed under a huge circus travelling-tent. The project, which aims to positively affect the sexual behaviour of Bolivian youth and prevent AIDS and STDs, is a mixture of entertainment and educational activities. *The Lilac Tent* is something like a medieval circus combined with modern educational techniques. Wherever it travels, it certainly captures the attention of the whole community. Outside the tent people can watch video documentaries on health issues, puppet performances or evening music shows; while inside *The Lilac Tent* and organised in groups of ten, the visitors have the opportunity of participating in a series of instructive activities and games. Though funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and technically supported by the communication cluster at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), this project has evolved much beyond the usual social marketing model.