

Communication Interventions and Effective Developmental Projects

Abstract: Soft science such as communication has always been relegated to the back seat in terms of talking about developmental projects in developing countries. Lack of communication has been identified as the prime reason of project failure due to its heavy dependence on economic theories without any valuable output and significant results. It is under such a lack of two way informal communication processes that the need for development communication becomes relevant. Focusing on participation and two way communication comprises a necessary ingredient if the mistakes of the past failed development project are to be avoided. The importance of incorporating communication practices into the policies and practices of development becomes noteworthy. Communication is more than transmitting information; it is about using communication to generate new knowledge and consensus to facilitate change. This paper aims to look at how the failure of some developmental projects was a result of lack of proper participation and communication process. It also discusses about the effective solution in such a scenario which helps in avoiding such blunders. By the end of the paper the reader will be able to know that the reasons behind developmental projects failure cannot just be attributed to a single cause of economic concern.

Keywords: Development, Communication, Non-participatory, Implementation, Strategy Design, Communication based assessment, Consultation, Dialogue, Capacity Building, Empowerment, Monitoring and evaluation

Introduction: Media despite being technologically progressive, messages neatly packed and information subtly knitted together do not always result in meaningful and sustainable results. This is because of the absence of an effective two way communication which not just only imparts the message and receives the feedback from the receivers but at the same time holds a good ground in understanding, assessing, exploring, and facilitating decision making changes. This in turn combined with the effective use of one way communication approaches, has been of tremendous help in enhancing results and the sustainability of development initiatives.

In this study, project has been defined as a particular task taken by the government to achieve certain definite goal in a specific time. Development projects on the other hand aims at achieving those aims and objectives which leads to the development of the community in that specific region in a holistic approach. Cultural difference, difference in achieving the targets and also difference in their focus of development are some of the points which distinguish the development projects by government from the private sector ones. This paper looks at only the development projects undertaken by government and the causes of their failures

and lastly providing a solution to these failures. While trying to find a solution to these failures it is seen that communication interventions plays a big role in facilitating the change and bringing about awareness among these rural poor and makes them participatory in nature.

History of development and communication: The terms ‘growth’ and ‘development’ are seen and used interchangeably. Only when growth becomes the result of conscious and deliberate planning and efforts does it take the shape of development. Development can therefore be said to be inclusive of all the knowledge inputs and planned output results. Moreover, development is dynamic and not static.

Economic factor is instrumental in driving the pace of development as emphasized by scholars like Rostow, Milikan, Chenery, Galbraith, and Rodan (Lerner, 1967). Also Robert Heilbroner (1963), Rogers and Svenning (1969), Lucian Pye (1963) hold development as an all-inclusive concept, encompassing economic, social, cultural, educational, political structures of society. Looking at all these definitions we can hold that development cannot be viewed as an economic entity alone but the sum of a balanced and harmonious growth.

In terms of development, communication is inadvertently related to each other in a symbolic process complementing, supplementing and working together in a harmonious growth thus fostering a balanced growth and progress. Research conducted in the relationship between communication and development also indicated a positive association between the two. The best example to cite is Lerner’s study in 1958 in 50 countries which reflected positive association between media participation and urbanization, literacy and political participation.

Development is concerned with the emancipation and empowerment of people. Communication at the same time which is used to disseminate and exchange, information and knowledge among the masses is directly and proportionately related in promoting development. This linkage between communication and development has not been maximized for serving the interests of the people. The mainstream approach to development communication which is top down is heavily relied on west-centric and adopted concepts, practices and ideas deepening in underdevelopment and stunted development. The people for whom these developments had been initiated remains as passive apathetic victims.

Highlighting media bureaucracy as an important segment of development infrastructure, Uma Narula develops a conceptual model of development communication required for the formation of a future media bureaucracy. This, Narula argues, has to be combined with development of an orientation of a future development bureaucracy to a clearly defined development approach for enhancing the quality of life of the masses.

Research methodology: As the research was undertaken to understand the causes that led to the failures of developmental funded projects in the developing countries, qualitative content analysis was mainly

undertaken to analyze the study. The theoretical framework is nested on critical development theory which tries to look at the existing structures of society from a critical view point thereby trying to point out the defects and flaws in the existing schema of things. Qualitative content analysis is one of the major techniques of analysis used in communication studies. It is mainly inductive and in some cases, it tries to create the base so as to generate a theory. Samples for qualitative content analysis usually consist of purposively selected texts which can inform the research questions being investigated. A thorough understanding of groundwork research conducted by P. Sainath in regard to poverty, health nutrition, disease, unemployment of the poorest district in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar along with Paolo Mefalopulos strategies and experiences in working with developmental projects in developing regions which were largely unsuccessful due to the lack of participation and lack of awareness among the community has been analyzed carefully.

The need for investigating the cause of the failure of development projects arise from the fact that a lot number of reports suggest how funding by international developmental agencies gets wasted due to the non-participatory function by the local communities. Though experts and researchers suggest the economic cause as the main criteria in these failures, yet the implicit cause remains invisible and hidden. It is in such a venture in trying to find out the overlying causes behind such failures that the research question arose.

The research question that has been attempted to answer in this paper is:

Are communication interventions necessary for effective implementation of developmental projects in developing regions?

Failures have been reasoned out carefully and well placed solutions have been sorted out accordingly. The methods used for the study is mostly from primary sources and data has been collected from books and referred journals. Empirical data has also been cited from P.Sainath's book '*Everybody Loves a Good Drought*'.

Theoretical framework: It rests with the critical theory which is based on the assumption that the current mode of developmental work projects are deeply flawed and there needs an urgent intervention for changing the structure of the social world of the communities in which these projects run. The aim is to gain knowledge of the current world with the intention for bringing positive change.

Failures of developmental projects in the past in Indian scenario: The main function of development communication is establishing conducive environments for assessing risks and opportunities, disseminate information and induce behavior and social change. The main idea behind any development communication project is to support viable changes in development operations by engaging key stakeholders. (Mefalopulos, 2008). After the deadlock between two paradigms, the dominant and the opposing, we have the emerging paradigm which is more of participatory and rooted in the cultural realities of development.

The noted development journalist P.Sainath reports and writes on how the failure is a result of non-participatory development. “In 1992, USAID gave India US\$325 million (Rs. 800 crores) to be used for population control in the state of Uttar Pradesh. This programme suffered from fatal flaws. First, the hazardous contraceptive like Norplant was pushed onto very rural poor women who had little or no access to proper health care. The same contraceptives were not used at all in the already developed western countries.

Funds usually are hard to come by for say, water borne diseases which account for nearly 80 percent of India’s public health problems and which claim millions of lives each year. P. Sainath in his book *‘Everybody Loves a Good Drought’* accounts how every third human in the world without access to adequate water is an Indian, every fourth child on the globe who dies of diarrhea is an Indian and every third person in the world with leprosy is an Indian. Every fourth living being dying of water borne disease is an Indian. Of the over sixteen million tuberculosis cases that exist at any time worldwide, 12.7 million are from India. Tens of millions of Indians suffer from malnutrition. It exposes and makes them vulnerable to a range of fatal ailments. Yet official expenditure on nutrition is less than one percent of GNP.” (Sainath, 2000)

Thus Sainath dwells on the adequate shortage of funds in development projects related to health and sanitation and then gives a comparative chart on these two areas with other developed countries. “The government in India has never ever spend more than 1.8 percent of GDP on health compared to highly developed countries like Sweden which spends 7.9 percent on health and the United States 5.6 percent. The investment on public health is degrading day by day if we compare India’s first five year plan where the rate was 5 percent which dropped to 1.7 percent in its eight five year plan. Nations like China and Sri Lanka are far ahead in terms of health infrastructure.

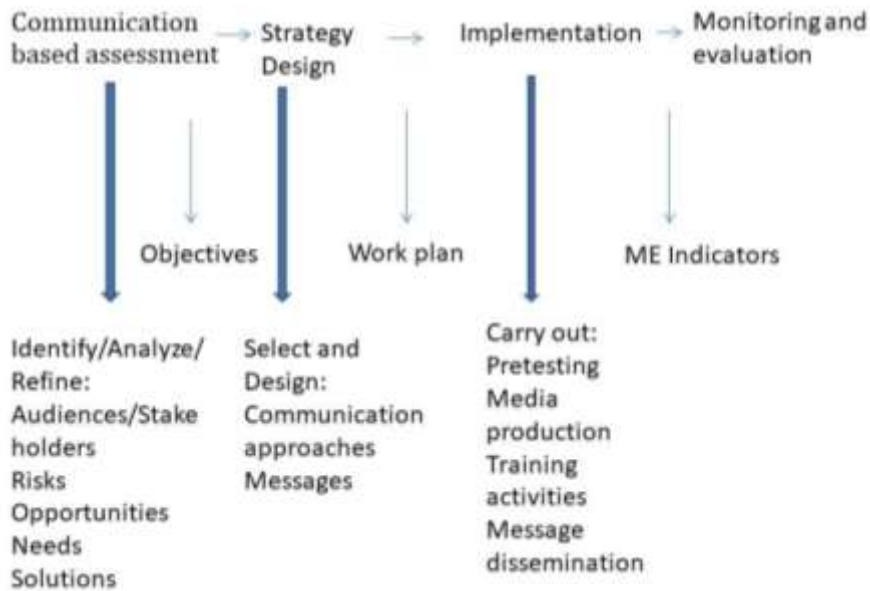
More than 80 per cent of public health is individually borne. It is really surprising to find that only 20 percent of hospital beds are in rural areas where 80 per cent of Indians live. At the same time plentiful of Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and dispensaries function largely on paper and not in reality where they should be existing. More shocking is that many of these PHCs have not seen a doctor for months, even years in some cases. Yet India produces more doctors than nurses. It also exports millions of doctors. Another noteworthy point is more than a few doctors, having been trained at the expense of the poorest people in the world, settle abroad to address the ailments of affluent Americans. So, some of the most deprived, diseases ridden people subsidize the health of the richest.” (Sainath, 2000)

Successful and effective participation cannot occur without communication. As a result too many developmental projects including community driven ones, result in failure due to lack of adequate attention to communication. The failures can be equally attributed directly or indirectly to the limited participation of the affected people in the decision making process. The horizontal use of communication which opens up dialogue, appraises risks, determines solutions, and seeks consensus for action, are the key to success and sustainability of development efforts. (Mefalopulos, 2008)

One of the prime reasons we witness in these project implementation was the developing tools and also the lack of development communication specialists. As such to see major changes and successful results and output from these projects development communication specialists need to have a specific and in depth knowledge of the theory and practical applications of the discipline. It is particularly important for a specialist to be well equipped with participatory research methods and techniques, monitoring and evaluation tools and basic principles of strategy design.

As Sainath's reports exemplify how India as a developing nation is witnessing funded developmental projects without any relevant results particularly meant for the marginalized and the poor. Development communication support can be effective only if the project is planned in terms of participation and community needs and necessities. Even the most well designed communication strategy will fail if the overall objectives of the project are not properly determined, if they do not enjoy a broad consensus from stakeholders, or if the activities are not implemented in a satisfactory manner. Sometimes communication experts are called in and asked to provide solutions to problems that were not clearly investigated and defined, or to support objectives that are disconnected from the political and social reality on the ground. In such cases, the ideal solution is to carry out field research or a communication based assessment to probe key issues, constraints and feasible options. Fixed deadlines and financial limitations often induce managers to hold pressure on communication experts to produce quick results, forcing them to act as spin doctors. In such situations, the basic foundations of development communication are neglected and the results are disappointing over a long tenure.

Solutions and effective results: The areas of intervention and the applications of development communication extend beyond the traditional notion of behavior change to include among other things probing socio economic and political factors identifying priorities, assessing risks and opportunities, empowering people, strengthening institutions and promoting social change within complex cultural and political environments. Development communication can be applied in behavior change process in that its application in health programs is widely recognized by using it in mass media to persuade audiences to adopt certain practices. The kinds of interventions are tangible relying heavily on communication campaigns to change people's behaviors and to eliminate or reduce often fatal risks like AIDS.



*ME- Monitoring and Evaluation

(Source: Development Communication Sourcebook, Paolo Mefalopulos)

While in placing these interventions, the development communication specialist should note down that research on the strategy is highly important before embarking on the problem. The relevant data, identification of the gaps, validation of the project assumptions, are all required to be taken into account. In case of half-done projects whose objectives have been clearly defined and set, even in such a scenario specific communication research should be carried out to check the gaps in the existing data. Assumptions based on the experts' knowledge should always be triangulated with other sources to ensure their overall validity. Such communication research should be carried at the beginning of any development project, regardless if a communication component would be required at a later stage.

CBA (communication-based assessment) and CAN (communication needs assessment) are two altogether different forms of application. While CBA focuses on the need and the capacities of the communication process, the latter implies the use of the two way communication as a tool to investigate and assess the broader situation beyond its strict communication dimension. In each of the investigative reports by P. Sainath, what we witness is a lack of both of these assessments leading to failures despite the huge funding and financial assistance to these health education and other developmental related projects.

The media centric Mac Bride report of 1980 stated how the role of communication was not limited to media and dissemination. It is more of concerned with involving people in the identification of needs and in the design and implementation of selected activities. To yield effective results and to serve the multi-disciplinary nature of communication, a development communication specialist has to be familiar not only with communication do's and don'ts but possess broad analytical skills and use communication methods to assess the cultural, political and social context.

The key factors in the successful implementation for any developmental project are information, communication, participation, consultation, capacity building, empowerment, and dialog. While investigation the overall situation and doing research on communication related issues (media systems, available capacities etc.) continue to be the core functions of participatory communication methods yet they act as key strengths in providing inputs for designing an effective communication strategy.

Information is regarded by many similar to communication which actually is not. Rather it is one of the many outputs of communication. Pasquali (2006) points out the striking difference as –‘while communication can denote an open interactive process among various actors, information is usually related to causality intents: using message (the cause) to affect or change knowledge, attitudes or behavior of the receiving individual.’(Mefalopoulos,2008)

However, participation, conceived at its fullest extent, is unlikely to be adopted in its use, since its genuine application in the current development context is unfeasible more so because the current development policies and practices would have to be modified to allow for the greater flexibility and for other key features of genuine participatory approaches.

The next major component i.e. consultation consist of the review and the preparation of the areas of interest and importance before the consultation and the impartial position on those issues during the consultation (because the primary mode of communication in this case is not engaging in dialog but listening). Development communication with its conversational and investigative connotation can facilitate growth, development and empowerment through training instructions, creating room for working collectively on clearly defined initiatives at an individual, institutional, or community level. By participating in decisions concerning their own lives, the voiceless and the marginalized begin to gain confidence and feel more empowered. The application of communication in facilitation of dialog, knowledge exchange, and joint assessment of the situation, result in participation of stake holders, thereby increasing the growth and empowerment. This in turn leads to the setting of achieving and increasing the sustainable projects’ objectives as well.

Capacity building exhibits a whole lot of complexities. While the broadly identified definition sums up the ability of individuals , institutions and communities to analyze an assess problems and participate in relevant decision making processes, much of this definition changes when it comes to developing countries where capacity building is identified with training, adult education ,learning and participation and empowerment. Regardless of both the definitions communication in both these areas remains a key ingredient in achieving the designed capacity building objectives.

Empowerment is contrary to power which is used to control people and is a widely seen phenomenon both in developed and developing countries. With the rise of Trump era, epistemological foundation of both power and empowerment has seen tremendous changes. Here it is important to note as to how power which

is used to exercise authority over others is in stark contrast to empowerment which is more of an inner condition that people do by and for themselves.

Dialog is another critical component of the present communication paradigm. Dialog in the communication context does not simply deal with discussing issues or communicating information but it also generates knowledge. Bohm (1996) points out that contrary to a discussion where one party tries to gain victory by convincing the others about the superiority of their point of view, in dialog there is a cooperative mode of discussion where nobody wins or better where everybody wins if anyone wins. In short, dialog in the context of development communication should be considered as the professional application of interactive methods and techniques to engage stake holders in exploring the situation and unearthing risks and benefit that can work for the wholesome good and development of the overall community.

Conclusion: Communication interventions planned to construct and support development projects and initiatives are the most important tools available to policymakers. A well designed and executed communication plan achieves four of these significant results: a) reduced political risks, b) improved project design and performance, c) increased transparency and enhanced voice and d) participation. And to ensure a continued attention achieving desired and successful results, to improve and more systematically apply measurement techniques, development communication requires a sustained level of attention and resources from top level management together with the will and ability of communication specialists.

In most of the development communication projects it is seen that minute issues like drilling a borehole for safe water takes the form of a huge clash between the local communities due to lack of required knowledge of the external technical staff of the project on local culture and local setup of the community . In certain cases it is also observed as P.Sainath pointed how the government officials have little or no respect for the community people for whom they are working for in these development projects. These technical staff needs to be equipped with knowledge about where they (communities) come from, their community's past, the key historic episodes that the community lived through, the stories that are told from generation to generation, how the language evolved, the cultural clashes that the community experienced over the years and so on and so forth.

Participation by the local community is a major input and also a crucial result of a communication process that is conceived as horizontal and democratic. It is through participation the collective voices are strengthened. In many cases, only a few voices speak up for the entire community, because the community has not been allowed to have a voice. Development affects every single individual's lives be it in the rural or urban community and by not being a part of those programmes that affect their daily lives which could have been improved leads to an unsustainable development path. The dialogues on knowledges should be central to development and communication is the medium to happen. Communities especial local and residing in remotest area are afraid of dialogue because they have been victims of social, political and economic

injustice for years and their voices have remain unheard. The appropriation of the process of communication in these local communities is what that can strengthen the dialogues thus eventually leading to success of development projects.

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