

Participatory Development Communication (Part 1)

- ▣ **Introduction:**
- ▣ Participatory development communication is a planned activity, based on the one hand on participatory processes, and on the other hand on media and interpersonal communication, which facilitates a dialogue among different stakeholders, around a common development problem or goal, with the objective of developing and implementing a set of activities to contribute to its solution, or its realization, and which supports and accompanies this initiative.

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- ▣ By stakeholders, we mean community members, active community groups, local and regional authorities, NGOs, government technical services or other institutions working at the community level, policy makers who are or should be involved with a given development initiative.

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- ▣ This kind of communication means moving from a focus of informing and persuading people to change their behavior or attitudes, to a focus on facilitating exchanges between different stakeholders to address a common problem. This could lead to a common development initiative to experiment with possible solutions and to identify what is needed to support the initiative in terms of partnerships, knowledge and material conditions.

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- ▣ In Participatory Development Communication we need to go through five stages which are discussed as under:
- ▣ (Note) In today's lecture we will briefly discuss the first stage only, the rest of the stages will be discussed in coming classes (INSHAHLLAH).

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- ▣ **Stage 1:** Establishing a relationship with a local community and understanding the local setting.
- ▣ **Stage 2:** Involving the community in the identification of a problem.
- ▣ **Stage 3:** Identifying the different community groups and other stakeholders concerned with the identified
problem (or goal) and initiative.
- ▣ **Stage 4:** Identifying communication needs, objectives and activities.
- ▣ **Stage 5:** Identifying appropriate communication tools.

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- ▣ Stage 1:
- ▣ Establishing a relationship with a local community and understanding the local setting:

At the beginning of this stage it refers to collect initial information on the community and its environment, entering the community, getting to know the people and the resource persons in the community, developing a more thorough collection of information with the participation of the local people and resource persons, and facilitating a dialogue with them.

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- ▣ **Consulting existing information and planning the approach of a local community:**

Generally, it is researchers or development practitioners who approach a community; the other way round also happens but not very frequently. So in the first situation, there is a process of selection and there is a preliminary collection of information to support this process.

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- ▣ **Choosing a Particular Community to Work With:**
How does one choose a particular community or specific communities to work with?

There are many considerations. Often, researchers will target specific communities because they are representatives of certain characteristics important for the research. Development practitioners will often target a community where they feel the need for intervention is more acute. Both will take into account opportunities for resources or travel to the field.

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▣ Consulting Existing Information:

In many contexts, statistics and other information from secondary sources are not accurate. So visiting resource persons knowledgeable of the community setting or of the problem involved should complement and supplement the information. The selection itself should only be finalized after contacting and discussing with community members.

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▣ Before Going To the Field:

Researchers and practitioners should develop a prior understanding of the local setting before going to the field and conducting formal meetings with a given community.

Research teams and development organizations must be aware of this and should plan time and necessary resources to understand the setting more thoroughly.

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- ▣ **Introducing The Research Or Development Initiative To The Community:**
- ▣ Attitudes should also be given proper attention: it is not the same thing to identify three or four different field sites where a research team will work and establish a working relationship with a certain number of communities.

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- ▣ **How will the research or development initiative be introduced to the community?**

Usually, the process begins with researchers or development practitioners having a set of preliminary planning meetings with the local leaders. A first visit will present the research or development initiative idea to the community leaders and ask for an agreement to discuss the idea and work with the community. Often, another visit to the community leaders will be useful to review the research or development initiative proposal before introducing it to the community.

All this takes time and should be given careful consideration. Often, this phase of the research or development initiative does not receive the attention and time it deserves.

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- ▣ **Conducting a visit to the authorities:**
- ▣ In many settings, a visit to the authorities in the community is part of what is required in order to enter the community. It is often important to visit both political authorities and traditional authorities, in order to inform them of the research or initiative, ask for their cooperation, and understand their perspective on what is being initiated. This should be done modestly and respectfully and is often better achieved with the help of someone from the community making the introductions.

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- ▣ **The role of the researcher or development practitioner:**
- ▣ We must see ourselves as communication actors and realize that our way of interacting with others will influence the way people will or will not participate in the research or development initiative. In that perspective, it is important to facilitate a two-way mode of approach: the research team or development workers approaching a community through community leaders and community groups, and the community approaching the research team/development workers. The intention of establishing a dialogue should prevail over the demand for collaboration.

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- ▣ **Attitudes and perceptions:**
- ▣ Many researchers and development practitioners have been trained to perceive community members as beneficiaries and as future end users of the research results. A shift of perception at that level is also desirable. We have to recognize that the delivery of technologies to end users simply does not work. A first desirable change is to consider community members as stakeholders in the development process, not as beneficiaries. So approaching a community also means involving people and thinking in terms of stakeholders' participation in the different phases of the research process as a whole.

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- ▣ **Discussing Agendas:**
- ▣ It is important at this stage to recognize that the interests of communities, researchers and development practitioners are not similar. Generally, researchers and development practitioners come to a community with a specific mandate. So, if we want to start from the needs and priorities of the communities, it can only be done within a specific category of needs. This has to be clarified at the first moment of approaching a community.

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- ▣ **Avoiding the danger of raising expectations:**
- ▣ In so doing, researchers and development practitioners must be aware of the danger of raising expectations in local communities. To counteract this risk, it is important to be clear on your mandate with community members, to discuss possible negative and positive outcomes of what they will be doing together, and to involve community members in activity planning.

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- ▣ **Understanding Culture:**
- ▣ Among the problems that researchers and development practitioners may face in the course of their work are cultural barriers and systems of beliefs. Cultural and religious characteristics, and the ways people approach and discuss subjects or take decisions, can vary greatly from one region to another, especially when it comes to specific social groups (women and children, for example) or ethnic groups. It is very important that you identify these cultural elements for each specific group involved in the development of the research process.

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▣ Using local language:

There is also the issue of the level of language. The way a topic is dealt with, the vocabulary used, the ways different groups and individuals perceive a topic will differ from one place to the next and from one group to another.

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- ▣ **Taking time into consideration:**
- ▣ Participation demands not only a change of attitudes from researchers and development practitioners, but also from community members. In order for people to participate meaningfully in the development process, they must first develop the perception that they can make a difference, moving from a passive attitude of waiting for donors to an attitude of self-help. This takes time and does not happen in a matter of days or weeks.

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▣ Understanding the local setting:

Understanding the local setting goes hand in hand with the process of entering a community.

This process of understanding involves the following aspects that we will now discuss.

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- ▣ **Entering a flow:**
- ▣ Any intervention happens in a temporal dimension. So it is important for the researcher or the development practitioner to understand that his/her action is connected in a certain way with a given context of past and present development initiatives.
- ▣ Those initiatives may be past or present projects lead by NGOs or international organizations, but they can also be local initiatives developed by community groups and organizations. The knowledge of these interventions and of the other actors involved in these will be very useful, not only to develop potential synergies but also to understand the attitudes of community members and other stakeholders toward the “new” initiative.

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- ▣ **Collecting And Sharing Information:**
- ▣ Classical research tends to be extractive. Researchers have been trained in doing data collection at the beginning of a research initiative. Similarly, many development practitioners have been trained to collect information to feed into the design of a project.

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- ▣ **Using PRA And Related Techniques:**
- ▣ Many researchers and practitioners now use participatory techniques, such as participatory rural appraisal, to actively involve members of a community in quickly gathering the maximum amount of information on the state and management of natural resources, and basic social, economic and political data.

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- ▣ **Using PRA And Related Techniques:
(continued)**
- ▣ The main idea in using PRA is to collect information quickly with the participation of community members and to share it so that everyone becomes empowered by that information and can participate better in the analysis and decision-making processes.

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- ▣ **Collecting Information On Communication Issues:**
- ▣ In this preliminary phase of the research or development initiative, efforts should also be made to identify the different specific groups in the community. It is important not to consider community members as a homogeneous group. It is better, after an initial community meeting, to plan specific meetings with different community groups or members and ask for their own specific perspective.

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- ▣ **Developing Strategies To Identify Reliable Information:**
- ▣ Many community members, approach in the process of collecting information, but mostly they will not speak their mind in response to the questions they are being asked, but say what they think the researcher or development practitioner wants to hear. So validating the information and also developing strategies adapted to specific groups are especially useful.

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- ▣ **Developing Collaboration And Partnership:**
- ▣ These first stages of approaching a community and collecting and sharing information are also a first opportunity to identify resource persons and organizations working in the same area and to involve them in the process. It can be an NGO working with the same community, a rural radio or a theatre group, etc. It is always better to do so in the beginning, where people feel they can play a role in the design of the research or intervention than after, when they perceive themselves as mere contract providers.

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- ▣ **Building Trust:**
- ▣ To close this part of the discussion, we must stress the importance of building trust and understanding between the researcher or development practitioner and community members. During the implementation stage, it will also be important to maintain the motivation and interest of the participants. We cannot expect this to happen by itself without support.

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- ▣ **Building Trust: (continued)**
- ▣ Participatory research or development activities will often be launched in a rush of enthusiasm, yet we must be aware that this is only one phase of a long and complex process that demands sustained attention and dedication. It is essential to be prepared to reinforce this climate of confidence and share the activity's objectives among all participants.

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- ▣ **Building Trust: (continued)**
- ▣ In that sense, the preliminary gathering of information is a way for you to start developing a dialogue with the community and involving local people and resource persons in the process.

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That's All
Thank
You