

PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION (PART 2)

- In the previous lecture we had briefly discussed **Step: I Establishing a relationship with a local community and understanding the local setting.**
- In today's lecture we will discuss the remaining four steps one by one to know further about the participatory development communication and its importance in current era.

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- Step 2:
- **Involving The Community In The Identification Of A Problem:**
- A second step consists of involving the community in the identification of a problem and potential solutions, and in making a decision to carry out a concrete initiative.

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- **Starting with a problem:**
- The most common situation is when the research team or the practitioner seeks to work with a local community facing specific natural resource management problems.
- Identify and analyze the causes and consequences of that problem with the help of a specialist in the area of the question;
- Decide if they can act on that problem;
- Identify potential solutions with the help of a specialist;
- Decide on experimenting a set of potential solutions in particular;
- Define a communication strategy that will support the experimentation or implementation.

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- **Facilitating synergy:**
- Another situation is where an action has already been undertaken within a local community to deal with a natural resource management problem, either by a support agency, a development organization, a technical service or by a local group.
- In this case, when it is possible, you should try to support that community initiative, instead of coming up with something different. You can facilitate the discussion on the causes of the identified problem and on potential solutions and help define the communication strategy, which will support the experimentation or the implementation.

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- **Starting with a goal:**
- There is also a third situation, where the point of departure is a common goal that a community has set. Instead of focusing on what goes wrong, this approach focuses on a vision of where a community (or individuals, or community groups) wants to arrive at in a given period of time. Sometimes it will also be the case of a successful initiative that a given community group wants to share with others.
- As with the process developing from problem identification where a community identifies a set of potential solutions to experiment with, in this case the community will decide on implementing a set of actions to approach that goal.

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- **Putting the community first:**
- In any of these three contexts, it should be the local people, not the research team or the development practitioner, who identify the problem to be addressed or the initiative to be carried on. The global idea is to start from people's own perceptions of their needs, rather than coming in with a preconceived project and trying to fit it in a local community. The role of the research team or development practitioner consists in facilitating this process, not in taking it on herself.

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- **Prioritizing a development problem:**
- When you as the researcher or development practitioner begin a new dynamic with a community, you must be clear on your mandate. As we mentioned earlier, it has to be clarified at the first moment of approaching a community. When resource people come from the outside into a poor community, people will present them with all their problems.
- They will not make the distinction between different categories, such as soil fertility, health and credit facilities problems because it is all part of the same reality for them. But the researcher or development practitioner cannot address all of these issues, so the scope and limitations of her mandate must be fully explained and discussed with community members.

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- **Discussing the causes of a development problem:**
- If communication is to contribute to the resolution of a development problem, the process should bring people to understand the **causes**, identify possible **solutions** and decide what **action** to take.
- There is often a temptation to jump directly from the desired goal (for example, resolving a conflict) to an action (for example, an awareness campaign) without looking closely at the underlying causes of the problem (for example, the lack of an adequate quantity of a given natural resource for all local inhabitants).

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- **Involving specialists:**
- Understanding the cause of a problem often requires not only common knowledge, available locally, but also specialized knowledge. It can be someone from the community holding appropriate local knowledge, or an external specialist contributing with modern knowledge. The recourse to a specialist in discussing the causes and consequences of a given problem and in identifying its potential solutions is quite important: this is where specialized knowledge comes into play. Many problems and questions related to soil fertility or to water for example are so complex that a deficit in information at that level can lead to bad decisions.

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- **Deciding on a concrete initiative to undertake:**
- Once the development problem and its causes have been identified, the next step is for the community to decide if they can act on that problem. As noted earlier, there are some things that communities can do by themselves, with their own resources; then there are cases where other people must be involved, or where there are certain conditions that must first be assembled. Finally, there are things that local communities cannot control directly (policies and laws, for example) and which necessitate the implementation of a complex decision-making influencing process.

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- **Adjusting choices in mid-course:**
- In the course of an experimentation or implementation, we may need to revise the initial choices. As work proceeds, we may find that the action identified at the outset is not appropriate to the problem at hand. A problem of water access in a community may in fact turn out to be a problem of management or community participation. A project aiming to fight bush fires may first demand an initiative on soil fertility. These kinds of situations happen all the time.
- In any case, it is important to adopt an iterative approach and to readjust initial choices as we go on in order to better attain our objective. Going with a plan and not proceeding with any modifications on the way may be a good attitude if you are building a bridge but with human situations, it is totally different.



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- **STEP 3:**
- **Identifying The Different Community Groups And Other Stakeholders Concerned With The Identified Problem (or Goal) And Initiative:**
- Who are the different community groups and the other stakeholders concerned with the selected problem and solution?
- At this stage, the research team or the development practitioner needs to identify the different community groups or categories of people concerned with a given problem or with a given development action, and to identify the best way of making contact and establishing dialogue with each of them. The same applies to the other stakeholders involved in the given problem and solution to experiment. Addressing ourselves to a general audience such as “the community” or “the people of such-and-such village” does not really help in involving people in communication. Every group that makes up the community, in terms of age, sex, ethnic origin, language, occupation, social and economic conditions, has its own characteristics, its own way of seeing a problem and its solution, and its own way of taking actions.

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- **How do we differentiate these groups?**
- The main criterion for identifying the different groups is to identify the various categories of persons who are most affected by the development problem and those groups that might be able to contribute to its solution. The principle is the same if we are speaking of a development initiative rather than a problem: we must identify the people most concerned about it.
- We may distinguish among these categories on the basis of factors: age, gender, language, ethnic or other specific social factors, livelihood or socio-professional categories (and periods of availability), income, educational level, localization, culture, values or religion, behavior or common interests.

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- **Who and with whom?**
- One way to identify those specific groups is to ask first “Who is involved in the problem or in the initiative to carry out” and then ask ourselves “With whom are we going to work?”
- A first list can be made out of three global categories: community groups, policy makers and other stakeholders. We then identify every group in each of these categories who is affected by the problem or can play a role in the solution. In a second list the research team or development practitioner will identify within these groups those with whom they will work as a priority.

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- **How well do we know each specific group?**
- Each specific group has its own characteristics and these must be taken into account in any communication action. In the same way, each group will be concerned with a given development problem in different ways.
- It can be useful here to draw up a profile of each group as if we were trying to describe the group to an outsider. This profile should specify:
 - Physical characteristics: age, sex, etc.
 - Ethnic and geographic background.
 - Language and habits of communication.
 - Socio-economic characteristics: lifestyle, income, education, literacy, etc.
 - Cultural characteristics: traditions, values, beliefs, etc.
 - Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour with respect to the development problem to be dealt with through communication.

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- **Step 4: Identifying communication needs, objectives and activities**
- **Starting with communication needs**
- When planning communication strategies, many tend to take a very broad problem as a starting point (desertification, for example), and then to move right into planning communication activities (information sessions, awareness campaigns). The result is that the target is often missed and, despite all the activities undertaken, the problem remains untouched. To avoid situations of this kind, we should start from the needs expressed by local communities and identify the communication objectives we want to achieve before undertaking specific activities.

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- **Material needs and communication needs:**
- Development needs can be categorized broadly between material needs and communication needs. Any given development problem and attempt to resolve it will present needs relating to material resources and to the conditions to acquire and manage these. However, we will also find complementary needs which involve communication: for sharing information, influencing policies, mediating conflicts, raising awareness, facilitating learning, supporting decision-making and collaborative action etc. Clearly, these two aspects should go hand in hand and be addressed in a systemic way by any research or development effort.
- Participatory development communication puts the focus on the second category of needs and ensures that they are addressed, together with the material needs the research or development effort is concentrating on.

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- **Material needs and communication needs: (continued)**
- For example, in an initiative aiming to resolve water conflicts in a village, we will probably find a need for an improved access to water, and development initiatives are needed to address that need. At the same time however, we may find out that in order to find adequate solutions in the present context, we must first understand the reasons behind the conflicts, such as the time schedule for various categories of users or the conflicting needs of herders, women and farmers. Or we may find that villagers do not know how to set up or manage effectively a water management committee. Or there may be a need for the village authorities to advocate for more water access, such as the drilling of another well, to the national water program.

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- **Communication objectives:**
- Communication objectives are based on the communication needs of each specific group concerned by a specific problem or a set of research activities. These objectives are identified and then prioritized. The final choice of objectives may be made on the basis of the needs that are most urgent, or those most susceptible to action. They are then defined in terms of the action which needs to occur for the objectives to be achieved.

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- **Step 5: Identifying appropriate communication tools**
- **Communication tools and the planning process:**
- Until now we have gone through a planning process which starts with identifying specific groups, their communication needs and objectives, and goes on to identify communication activities and then communication tools. The process is different from when people say, “we’re going to do a video, or a radio program, or a play”, without knowing exactly what contribution it will make to the initiative.

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- **The Expression “Communication Tools:**
- Everyone is familiar with the notion of communication “media”. Generally, we distinguish between the mass media (newspapers, radio, television), the traditional media (storytelling, theatres, songs), “group” media (video, photographs, posters), and community media such as short-range rural radio broadcasting. The media, and the different forms of interpersonal communication, are our communication tools. If we use the expression “communication tools” here, it is to stress the instrumental nature of these media: their purpose in this case is not to disseminate information, but rather to support the process of participatory communication.
- In that perspective it is important to choose those communication tools which will support two-way communication and which are in relation with what we want to do and the people we want to work with.

REFERENCES

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That's All
Thank
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