

Helpdesk Research Report: Impact of Communication for Development (C4D)

29th March, 2011

Query: How does Communication for Development (C4D) make development more effective? Give practical, tangible examples of where C4D activities have improved development outcomes or helped achieve development goals. If possible, include examples which demonstrate that without C4D those goals would not have been reached.

Enquirers: AusAID

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1. Summary and key messages

Development agencies are increasingly recognising the potential of communication for development (C4D) to improve development outcomes and to enhance the overall effectiveness of aid programmes. This coincides with growing evidence of the impact of C4D on the MDGs (Feek, 2008). This report provides some practical, tangible examples of where C4D activities have improved development outcomes or helped achieve development goals.

What is C4D?

Communication for development (C4D) aims to amplify voice, facilitate meaningful participation, and foster social change. The 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development defined C4D as ‘a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It seeks change at different levels, including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change’. Similarly, the working definition of the UN General Assembly emphasizes ‘...the need to support two-way communication systems that enable dialogue and that allow communities to speak out, express their aspirations and concerns and participate in the decisions that relate to their development’ (Resolution 51/172, December 1996: Report of the 11th United Nations Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development).

In practice, C4D is associated with a broad range of functions and practices that centre on dialogue, participation and the sharing of knowledge and information. These activities may not always be classified as C4D by development agencies (Report of the 11th United Nations Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development, March 11 – 13, 2009, Washington, D.C, p. 14).

The impact of C4D

C4D is seen to have both instrumental and intrinsic value in development processes. From an instrumental perspective, there is evidence that communication structures and processes are intimately related to better, more transparent and accountable governance, the creation of a vibrant and dynamic civil society, and with rapid and more equitable economic growth (Panos, 2007). Knowledge and information are seen as essential for people to respond successfully to the opportunities and challenges of social, economic and technological changes, including those that help to improve agricultural productivity, food security and rural livelihoods (FAO, 2010). Communication also plays a vital role in changing societies and individual behaviour (World Bank: Development Communication website, accessed March 2011; Panos, 2007).

Communication processes that give poor people a voice also have intrinsic value, as Panos (2007) concludes: ‘poor people – indeed, all people – long to speak and be heard. This is a challenge as

important as any of the MDGs, for it underpins them all. It is time to take this challenge seriously' (Panos, 2007). C4D can help address the lack of inclusion and participation of poor people in national development processes, and provide opportunities for them to communicate their perspectives into public policy debate. In so doing, it can 'help transform public disillusionment into a more positive engagement in public policy development' (UNDP, 2009).

C4D has had a tangible impact on improving development outcomes across a number of sectors. Examples of this include:

- A variety of initiatives have successfully used citizen access to information to mobilize citizens to demand better governance and public services.
- Mass media and information campaigns have impacted on people's attitudes and behavior in the health sector, and have generated positive results in addressing the global HIV and AIDs crisis (FAO, 2009).
- Media and ICTs have created opportunities for women's empowerment and in some cases changed attitudes around gender relations.

More broadly, strategic communications can increase the overall effectiveness of aid programmes by helping to foster the political support, public will and buy in of key stakeholders necessary for success. Well-planned communications strategies have helped address the political economy of reform across a range of interventions (CommGAP, 2008).

In addition, C4D is seen as critical to addressing some of the most pressing challenges for development, in the following ways:

- Access to information is an essential aspect of community-based adaption to climate change.
- New research is also drawing attention to the critical role of communications in state-building in fragile and conflict affected states (Fortune and Bloh, 2008).
- ICTs are increasingly seen as important in establishing effective early warning systems and community-level disaster risk reduction and response activities.

2. The role of communication for development

2.1 Communication and the democratic public sphere

Communication structures - including a free media and access to information - link citizens, civil society, the media, and government forming a framework for national dialogue through which informed public opinion is shaped (CommGAP, 2007). These structures are seen as fundamental components in the construction of a vibrant civil society. They also underpin the formal and informal networks among individuals, groups, institutions and organisations that facilitate public debate and

build social capital. Empirical studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between widespread access to mass media and societies with high social capital (Panos, 2007).

Communications are also at the heart of social networks and social movements. Social movements rely on interpersonal communication, associations and information to bring people together and advocate effectively to amplify the voices of poor people (Vincent, 2009). The highly successful Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa, for example, harnessed the communication tools of advocacy, mass movement and political pressure to influence the South African Government's policies on antiretroviral (ARV) drugs (Panos, 2006).

2.2 Media, democracy and development

A free, independent and plural media can be a critical check on state abuse of power, enable informed and inclusive public debate on issues of concern to poor people, and give voice to marginalised citizens (DFID, 2007). Where the media can overcome political and capacity constraints, and is able to perform the roles of agenda setter, watchdog and gatekeeper effectively, it can contribute to democratic governance and accountability (Norris and Odugbemi, 2010). Empirical studies have consistently indicated a correlation between a free press and lower corruption and better governance indicators. A recent paper from the University of Oxford, for example, analysed empirical data on mass media penetration, the spread of ICT and press freedom to assess their impact on corruption, inequality and poverty. The results provide strong evidence that higher mass media penetration (newspapers, radio and TV ownership) is associated with lower corruption. Furthermore, lower poverty is robustly associated with higher newspaper circulation (Bandyopadhyay, 2009).

In many countries the media promotes transparency, despite constraints on journalists (Norris and Odugbemi, 2010). A well known study in India (Besley and Burgess, 2002) found that having an informed and politically active electorate strengthens incentives for government responsiveness. This study found that state governments were more responsive to falls in food production and crop flood damage where newspaper circulation and electoral accountability were higher: a 1% increase in newspaper circulation was associated with a 2.4% increase in public food distribution. In other words, states with higher levels of media development were more active in protecting vulnerable citizens.

In situations of crisis, when the mainstream media suffers restrictions, social media offers opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and to connect with each other (Mäkinen, M., and Wangu Kuiru, 2008, p. 334). For example, social media functioned as an alternative medium for citizen communication and participatory journalism during the media ban and post-election crisis in Kenya in 2007. The images of the monks' protests in Burma (2007) made it onto television screens around the world thanks to the courage of underground video-journalists (VJs) who risked their lives to document

the protest. With donor support, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) has gone from being staffed by untrained refugees broadcasting birthday greetings, to gaining a unique reputation within and outside Burma for giving voice to the Burmese people and the right to information (SIDA, 2010, p. 26).

Community radio has a strong record in enabling real participation, in giving legitimacy to development processes, and in helping to achieve the MDGs (BBC World Service Trust, 2010). Communication at the grassroots level can empower people to become advocates for change in their own communities. An example is *Choti Choti Batein* (CCB), a community radio programme in Bihar, India, which aims to inform and empower the state's adolescent community on issues of reproductive health, good governance, and the environment. It has made a measurable impact on the lives of young people in the area: from securing scholarships and free school meals to providing evening education for children working in brick kilns (Panos, 2010).

2.3 Communication and governance

Communication is seen as vital for connecting states with society, facilitating inclusive political systems, giving 'voice' to poor and marginalised groups, and enabling citizen participation and social accountability. Communication is essential to the development of state capability, accountability and responsiveness: without communications structures and processes that enable the two-way exchange of information between state and citizens, it is difficult to imagine how states can be responsive to public needs and expectations (GSDRC, 2010). Two-way communications allow citizens to monitor state activities, to enter into dialogue with the state on issues that matter to them, and to influence political outcomes.

Cross-country analysis shows that countries with better information flows, as measured by the provision of economic information and the existence of a Freedom of Information Act, score more highly on indicators measuring government effectiveness and accountability and encouragement of investment. Even after controlling for variables of political history and legal heritage, there is a strong positive relationship between transparency and better governance (Islam, 2006).

3. Communication for development (C4D) and aid effectiveness

Studies have suggested that the strategic use of communications can increase the overall effectiveness of development interventions. Specifically, political communications tools and methodologies can influence the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of key stakeholders and secure the political will necessary for reforms to be successful on the ground (CommGAP, 2007). As the World Bank puts it: 'well-conceived, professionally implemented communication programs that are tied

directly to reform efforts or development project objectives that bring understanding of local political, social and cultural realities to bear in the design of development programs can make the difference between a project's success and failure' (excerpt from 'World Bank: Development Communication' website, accessed March 2011).

The World Bank's Communications for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP) has compiled a series of case studies that demonstrate how communications strategies may address some of the recurring challenges confronted in bringing about sustainable governance reform. These challenges include lack of political will, resistance from middle managers, vested interests, hostile public opinion, and lack of citizen demand for accountability (CommGAP, 2008). The studies suggest ways in which communications strategies can tackle the political economy of reform, and are a vital accompaniment to technocratic solutions which alone are often insufficient to bring about sustainable change (CommGAP, 2008). One study shows how the World Bank's attempts to reform the water sector in Delhi were severely hampered by lack of political commitment on the part of government leaders, opposition from the NGO sector, and lack of adequate information in the public domain. The study concludes that mobilizing stakeholders, creating space for public participation, and using the media more effectively could have enhanced the legitimacy of the programme (Singh, 2008).

There is wide agreement that development projects are more sustainable where they involve communities – in other words, where there is broader public engagement in and better public buy-in to development strategies. Meaningful communication can help build consensus through raising public understanding and generating well-informed dialogue among stakeholders ('World Bank: Development Communication' website, accessed March 2011). By actively engaging stakeholders from the start and by seeking a broader consensus around development initiatives, participatory communication can induce better results (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009). Where people are involved and engaged in discussions of issues that affect them, societal attitudes and individual behaviour are more likely to change (Panos, 2007). In Timor-Leste, for example, communications strategies have been successfully used to enhance local people's awareness of and participation in local governance and help realize the full benefits of decentralisation. By developing the government's public relations and internal communications capacity, strengthening links to the media, and training local officials on consultation with local communities, the programme has encouraged active community participation, increased media coverage and enhanced political dialogue around draft local government legislation. (UNDP, 2009, for further information on this programme, see: UNCDF Timor-Leste website: www.uncdf.org/english/countries/timor_leste/index.php)

At the international level, information and communication flows are recognised as important in fulfilling the commitments to democratic ownership and mutual accountability set out in the Accra Agenda for Action. Better use of communication is also necessary to improve co-ordination between agencies

and to overcome some of the challenges of the harmonisation agenda (BBC World Service Trust, 2010, p. 2).

4. The impact of development (C4D): case studies

4.1 Communication for better public services

There are several examples of communication processes (e.g. debate through the media, public information campaigns, social accountability mechanisms) having encouraged government responsiveness to citizens' demands and having resulted in better public services. Access to and use of information is a precondition for any form of social accountability (accountability that relies on civic engagement) (World Bank, 2007). 'Increasing citizen demand for better governance and improved service delivery – a central preoccupation of much development debate – depends fundamentally on improved information and communication flows' (BBC World Service Trust, 2010).

A variety of initiatives have successfully used citizen access to information to mobilise citizens to demand better governance and public services. Evidence from one randomized controlled trial across three Indian states indicates that providing information through a structured campaign to communities about their oversight roles in schools could be an effective policy tool to improve school outcomes. In this study, information campaigns had positive impacts on process variables such as community participation, provision of student entitlements and teacher effort (Pandey, P., Goyal, S. and Sundararaman, V., 2009).

Providing users of public services with access to information may also be an effective strategy to combat local corruption and the capture of funds. An often-told story is that of the Ugandan newspaper campaign which encouraged schools and parents to monitor a large-scale grant programme by publishing evidence of the degree to which money was leaking out of the system. The newspaper successfully prompted greater transparency on the part of the government and the flow of funds increased dramatically – from an average of 13 percent reaching schools in 1991–95 to about 80 percent in early 2001 (Reinikka and Svensson, 2004). Though the impact of the information campaign may have been overstated in this case (other contextual factors were important), subsequent studies have concluded that it did play a critical role in curbing corruption (Hubbard, 2007).

Similarly, the groundbreaking Bangladesh Sanglap TV program has facilitated more accountable and responsive government by providing an open forum for ordinary citizens to ask questions of elected officials and for officials to explain their policies and decisions. The show has been running since 2005 with a weekly audience of 7 million people. There is evidence that it has succeeded in

encouraging active citizen participation, mobilizing civil society, generating demand for debate and accountability, and encouraging political leaders to become more accepting of the media's legitimate role in questioning public authorities. Surveys have shown that between 80-90% of Sanglap audiences believe the programme has improved political debate, helped raise the 'voice of the people', especially those from deprived backgrounds, and established a good standard for political discussions programmes on TV and radio (Prosser 2008, Survey information available on: BBC World Service website: 'Creating Political Dialogue in Bangladesh

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/whatwedo/where/asia/bangladesh/2008/03/080226_bangladesh_sanglap_project_overview.shtml)

4.2 Changing attitudes, opinion and behaviours

Communications for development often explicitly or implicitly seeks to change the way people behave (Inagaki, 2007). There are a series of well documented cases of the use of vertical (largely media-based) communication campaigns to provoke changes in people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, particularly in the health sector (Inagaki, 2007). For example, a multi-sectoral campaign that mobilised district offices, NGOs and local leaders to raise awareness of vitamin A deficiency in Nepal was successful in changing opinions about the value of supplements: Vitamin A deficiency is no longer a public health problem in Nepal (UNICEF, 2005). A similar multi-media communications initiative successfully increased husband's involvement in safe motherhood in Indonesia. The Suami SIAGA Campaign was a multi-media entertainment-education intervention, implemented in 1999/2000, that targeted husbands with messages about birth preparedness. An impact evaluation found that husbands who were directly exposed to the messages and engaged in interpersonal communication stimulated by the campaign gained new knowledge and that birth preparedness activities occurred. The evaluation concluded that communication campaigns to educate husbands and to stimulate discussion about birth preparedness could contribute to improved birth outcomes in Indonesia (Shefner-Rogers and Sood, 2004).

Participatory communication – an approach based on dialogue, which allows the sharing of information, perceptions and opinions among stakeholders – can also generate community-level responses to development problems. There are several cases where horizontal communication among participants allowed people to identify, acknowledge and produce bottom-up solutions to identified community problems (Inagaki, 2007 p. 37). In their study of an entertainment-education radio soap opera in India, Papa and others (2000) found that exposure to the radio soap opera set off a series communication processes that produced village-level social changes. Audience members initially developed parasocial interactions by identifying themselves with the characters in the radio program. Parasocial interactions then stimulated horizontal conversations among audience members on issues raised in the radio broadcast. The interpersonal communication finally led to the formation

of collective listening groups in the village, not only to listen to and talk about the radio program together but to collectively address and act upon real social issues in their locale (Inagaki, 2007 p. 18).

Similarly, a dengue control project implemented in Cuba employed a variety of community-based, group communication methods to successfully reduce the breeding grounds of mosquitos. In this participatory project, the participants devised a series of communication activities including community gatherings and debate, interactive puppet shows, drawing competitions, educational chats for children, and drama sessions played by senior citizens at clubs. An evaluation study found that the community residents responded well to these communication activities, and, as the result, the number of houses or containers infested with the mosquito larvae declined dramatically in the intervention area, while no changes were observed in the control area (where intervention did not take place) (Sanchez et. al, cited in Inagaki, 2007 p. 25).

4.3 Addressing the HIV and AIDS crisis

There is growing cross-country evidence that mass media programs developed with input from their audiences have an important role in impacting on HIV and AIDS preventative behaviour. The Soul City initiative in South Africa is a prominent and extensively evaluated example. It uses multimedia entertainment-education, also known as 'edutainment', in the form of television episodes, radio drama, and information booklets, to address social issues and promote health and social change. Evaluations have consistently shown that Soul City has influenced the prevention of HIV infection by having a positive impact on sexual behavior: Compared with respondents with no exposure, respondents with exposure to Soul City multimedia over six series were four times as likely to report always using a condom with a regular sexual partner (Goldstein and Scheepers, 2006, cited in Report of the 2007 World Congress on Communication for Development, p. 15).

Mass media campaigns can reach large audiences to promote behaviour change. A campaign in Cambodia – including a television soap opera, three radio phone-in and discussion programmes, television and radio public service announcements and a print magazine – had an impact on condom usage. The number of sexually active males reporting having used a condom increased from 36% to 49%, and the figure for females rose from 14% to 24%. The infection rate in the general population is now declining (BBC World Service Trust, 2011).

4.4 Changing attitudes around gender

Media and ICTs can create opportunities for women to empower themselves, to make the case for equality and act together to overcome prejudice and inequity (Panos, 2007, p. 33). There have been

positive outcomes from a variety of communication initiatives that have sought to address deep-seated attitudes towards gender and gender relations. The fourth series of the widely acclaimed Soul City initiative in South Africa, which focused on domestic violence, was shown to increase knowledge about domestic violence and use of a dedicated helpline for women. An impact evaluation indicated a 10% increase in respondents disagreeing that domestic violence should be considered a 'private affair' – a view that is seen as a key barrier to countering domestic violence. At the interpersonal and community level, qualitative analysis suggests the intervention contributed to enhancing women's and communities' sense of efficacy, enabling women to make more effective decisions about their health and facilitating community action (Usdin et al, 2005, see also: GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report: Communications initiatives to change attitudes/opinions around gender, March 2011).

A study of entertainment-education programs on family planning in Nepal (Sharan and Valente 2002) demonstrates that the interaction between mass media messages and spousal communication has led to the empowerment of women in the context of spousal relations. The communication intervention consisted of two entertainment education radio serials, supplemented with radio spot ads, national-level orientation workshops, district-level training workshops and printed materials. The radio serial provided information on contraceptive techniques, pregnancy and birth spacing, and dealt with broader issues influencing family planning use, such as gender bias and family planning decision-making. The research found that in the earlier period, contraceptive use was highest among couples in which the husband alone made family planning decisions, but in the later period, contraceptive use became most prevalent among couples in which the husband and wife jointly made the decisions (and lowest among the couples in which the husband alone made decisions). A shift in the balance of gender power relations thus took place during the course of observation (five years). Although the immediate impacts of the broadcast were at the individual level, the shift indicates the initiation of a social change, redefining gender relations and empowering women's voice (Inagaki, R., 2007, p. 27).

An initiative involving radio, film and community workshops aimed at countering early marriage in Yemen resulted in increased awareness about the benefits of delaying marriage. It also resulted in the postponement or prevention of a number of child marriages, and buy-in from political and religious leaders (Freij, 2010 see also: GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report: Communications initiatives to change attitudes/opinions around gender, March 2011).

4.5 Supporting livelihoods

Knowledge and information can help people develop strategies to improve their agricultural productivity, food security and rural livelihoods. Knowledge in the form of farmers' innovations, latest research findings, or pressing policy issues can impact on livelihoods strategies (see website of the FAO: Communication for Development <http://www.fao.org/oek/oek-what-we-do/communication-for-development/en/>). Mobile phones and the internet are offering new opportunities for this knowledge to

be shared, for example by allowing farmers to know what price their products are fetching in local and national markets, giving them a stronger negotiating position with intermediaries (Panos, 2007). Owning a mobile phone has been shown to have measurable welfare benefits for farmer's in Kenya: an empirical study which looked at household consumption across 135 villages found that owning a mobile phone was associated with a large positive impact on the growth rate of per capita consumption (Labonne and Chase, 2009).

5. Emerging areas for communication for development (C4D)

5.1 Communication and state-building

New research is also drawing attention to the critical role of communications in state-building in fragile and conflict affected states (Fortune and Bloh, 2008). The focus here has been on the role the public sphere in shaping state-citizen relationships and helping to (re)build social contracts, particularly in states where state-society relations are weak.

Managing communication to build public understanding and trust – ‘strategic communication’ – is a necessary and legitimate task of governments (Panos, 2007). It is in the interest of governments to communicate effectively about the work they do on behalf of their constituents; where governments provide citizens with adequate information on priorities, programmes, and activities they can enhance their legitimacy and stabilize a political situation (CommGAP, 2009). Post-conflict environments often face particular public sphere challenges including high public expectations coupled with lack of public trust, and the prevalence of fear, rumours and uncertainty. In such environments, establishing the government as a reliable source of information and developing a national dialogue around key issues can help restore public trust and support for reconstruction, and counter peace-spoilers strategies. Communication opens a channel by which citizens’ unrealistic expectations – which tend to be great in a post-conflict context – can be managed adequately. It is one of the most effective tools to build confidence in post conflict governments. When done effectively, it can provide momentum for reform and improve the government image (Fortune, F., and Bloh, O., 2008, 21).

Where governments fail to engage with society and manage expectations about the pace of reconstruction, citizen-state relations can quickly deteriorate. This was the case in the 2006 crisis in Timor-Leste. A lack of constructive citizen-state engagement and unfulfilled hopes for a peace dividend led to rumours and mistrust, and gave voice to destructive non-state actors who manipulated civic grievances to engender political violence. The crisis of 2006 brought to light the magnitude of the citizen-state disconnect and caused donors to look at these relationships and to renew media development activities. A few donors are now seeking to create and improve the much-needed public sphere links to address communications deficiencies. Incorporating a public sphere framework into

post-conflict assistance may be an important step towards building sustainable peace and democratic governance (von Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008).

5.2 Communication for climate change adaptation

Knowledge and communication are central to community-based adaptation (CBA) to climate change. Documented experiences have shown that the systematic design and use of participatory communication processes, strategies, and media to share knowledge and information among all stakeholders in a particular agro-ecological context can enhance people's resilience and capacity to cope with the effects of climate change. Early lessons from FAO programmes in the rural areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jamaica, Bangladesh and Bolivia indicate that the communications approach to community-based adaptation 'can facilitate participatory research and horizontal knowledge sharing; improve the quality of advisory services for technology innovation; enhance adaptation processes and disaster risk management; bridge the gap between global environment information and local communities' knowledge, and strengthen policy dialogue between institutions and small farmers' (FAO, 2010, p. 2).

Within vulnerable livelihood systems, ICTs can help people identify and undertake different actions to better withstand the effects of climate change-related events, and use the opportunities that may arise from change. The Livelihood Adaptation to Climate Change (LACC) project in Bangladesh, for example, demonstrates how communications can combine global scientific knowledge and local knowledge systems to help farmers put in place their own local adaptation practices (FAO, 2010, p. 24). Sharing knowledge helps people identify different income generating opportunities, and to self-organise. Illustrating this potential, ICTs available in Village Resource Centres in rural India have enabled end users to interact with scientists, doctors, professors and government officials located in urban locations (Ospina and Heeks, 2010).

5.3 Disaster risk reduction and community response to disasters

Information and communications technology (ICT) can play an important role in establishing effective early warning systems and emergency preparedness and response activities. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami disaster was a lesson in the costs of inadequate information flows, and has given great impetus to the need for early warning efforts and the need for led humanitarian agencies to pay greater attention to information needs (UNESCAP, 2009). People in affected communities can recover faster if they can access and use information. For example, a five-minute daily bulletin in Burmese broadcast on the BBC Burmese service after Cyclone Nargis covered basic health and sanitation advice and aimed also to provide some psychological comfort (United Nations Foundation, 2011).

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Experts consulted

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