

# Making integrated rural development programmes work: A communication strategy for ending poverty in Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDPs) and more recently, Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs), have become the gateway to poverty reduction, food security and sustainable development. However, in spite of their importance and the fact that billions of dollars are being poured into these programmes, their success rate has been dismal at best. Based on a careful review of the literature and backed by field experience, the paper argues that IRDPs and PRSPs suffer a common calamity—their managers are unable to address human dimension concerns, such as participation, integration and capacity building that are deemed *sine qua non* to success. The paper offers Communication for Development (C4D), a new academic discipline and profession, as the key to meeting these human dimension concerns, and challenges developing countries to give the C4D approach a try. The paper notes further that leading development organizations, such as the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, recognize the value of C4D; and in their 2007 joint policy report, *World Congress on Communication for Development: Lessons, Challenges, and the Way Forward*, urge developing countries to mainstream C4D in their poverty reduction programme as a way to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It follows from the foregoing that The Bank will assist poor countries with grants or soft loans to pilot-test the C4D strategy. The C4D strategy has been field-tested and, therefore, offers great promise of making poverty reduction programmes work more sustainably. It is inexcusable, therefore, for developing countries not to try it.

Research and development note. Received 22 Nov 05; revised 30 Sep 10.

## Introduction

Integrated Rural Development (IRD), as a poverty reduction strategy, has been around since the mid-1970s. It was introduced by the World Bank to promote holistic development. It was to replace the traditional or piecemeal approach whereby each sector of government pursued its own independent course of action with little or no regard to whether it harmonized with the activities of other sectors (Coombs, Ahmed & Kale, 1976). The rationale for the IRD strategy is that

development problems are complex and to address some, but not the others, is to fall prey to the fallacy of single factor determinism; that is, any gains in the focused areas will be easily eroded by losses in the neglected sectors. Therefore, the way to lasting rural progress, it is argued, is to tackle all, or as many development problems as possible, at once (World Bank, 1975). However, after almost 40 years and at the cost of billions of dollars, success with the IRD approach is dismal at best. In 2000, the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund, which have promoted the IRD strategy for decades, replaced it with what they called *Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes* (PRSPs), in the hope that the later will have greater local participation. However, after 10 years, the PRSPs are not better than the IRDPs they replaced.

This paper argues that local participation, integration and capacity building are crucial to the success of IRDPs and PRSPs, and failure to achieve these objectives may explain the dismal development record. The World Bank introduced the IRD strategy in the 1970s; critics noted that it was complex, and the keys to success would be the extent to which local people were involved in its planning and implementation (Hurni, 1980; World Bank, 1975; Mickelwait, Sweet & Morss, 1979). Robert McNamara, President of The Bank at the time, had warned that, “no program will help small farmers if it is designed by those who have no knowledge of their problems and operated by those who have no interest in their future” (World Bank, 1975). He added that, “experience shows that there is a greater chance of success if the institutions provide for local leadership and decentralization of authority”.

It is the author’s conviction that whereas the IRDPs and PRSPs are often designed with the best of intentions and well funded, being unable to address human dimension concerns (such as participation, integration and capacity building) is mainly responsible for their failure. The strength of this paper is that it offers Communication for Development (C4D) as a strategy for overcoming human dimension elements, and urges developing countries to mainstream C4D in their poverty reduction programmes. The World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) acknowledge the importance of C4D; and in their joint 2007 policy report, *World Congress on Communication for Development: Lessons, Challenges, and the Way Forward*, stress that “communication is integral to development and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. For this reason, it must be

built into development planning and embedded in strategies for poverty reduction, health planning and governance”. It is hoped that developing countries will take advantage of The Bank’s support for C4D to secure grants for pilot-testing the strategy, using the model provided in this paper. The paper is based on the author’s extensive experience in African development, backed by his expertise in Communication for Development.

#### **Challenges in implementing integrated rural development programmes**

Many experts concerned with rural development and poverty reduction believe that the IRD strategy is the best way to go. However, the challenge is how to make it work successfully. The author has had first-hand experience in implementing IRD programmes and is convinced that the critical issues are bringing about local involvement, interagency collaboration and strengthening the capacities of field staff in dealing with the dynamics and complexities of the development process. Development is the end goal of poverty reduction programmes; yet field staff, such as agricultural extension workers, hardly study it. Development studies has become a fully-fledged science and it is difficult, if not impossible, to expect extension workers to be effective in facilitating development without an opportunity to study it (Rivera & Qatar, 2003; Maguire, 2001).

The author was involved in implementing the first IRD project in Ghana, the Upper Region Agricultural Development Programme (URADEP), a 5-year, \$60 million undertaking that was started in 1976 (Chambers, 1980; Agunga, 1982). Two other IRD programmes were carried out in Ghana: the Volta Region Agricultural Development Programme (VORADEP) and the Northern Region Agricultural Development Programme (NORADEP). In all these projects, the field staff had no training in development studies, integration or capacity building (Agunga, 1983; Chambers, 1980). Not surprisingly, these

programmes failed, like the IRD programmes that mushroomed all over the developing world landscape, like shooting stars shone briefly, brightly and vanished without a trace.

Africa has received over \$600 billion in aid over the past 45 years, but “there’s basically been zero rise in living standards” (Easterly, 2007). Rondinelli (1993) found that 88 per cent of 277 projects in sub-Saharan Africa sponsored by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) faced communication problems, such as “managing the participation of beneficiaries, creating interest in the project among intended beneficiaries, and implementing management improving programs”. Childers & Urquhart (1994) also found that 37.5 per cent of 1,800 World Bank projects in 131 countries, involving loans totaling \$138 billion and completed by 1991, had failed because of the inability to involve beneficiaries in project decision-making. Lastly, Venkatesan & Kampen (1998) noted that the World Bank-financed IRD programmes pursued since the mid-1970s failed because of weak inter-sectoral coordination and linkages of participating units, lack of integration of development partners, poor management, lack of beneficiary involvement, and failure to build institutional and financial sustainability.

In a nutshell, many poverty reduction programmes fail because of poor management, especially in dealing with people's participation, integration, and capacity building. Pressman & Wildavsky (1979) and Wohlgemuth (2008) noted that project implementation does not get the scrutiny it deserves because governments and donor agencies often turn their attention to other issues once funding for an IRD programme is secured. They often assume that those charged with implementation have the expertise to do so. Unfortunately, that is often not so. May (1981) noted that many development managers perpetuated what he called “dead-end projects” because when they failed on one project, they were often promoted and transferred to another project, and the failure continued. Ascroft &

Masilela (1994) contend that many poverty reduction programme managers are often appointed based on their technical expertise (such as agronomy, engineering, or health sciences), not on their management or communication skills.

This study confirmed it in 2004 through a survey of 134 officers of the agricultural extension services in the Upper East Region of Ghana. They were to indicate the importance of extension communication skills to their work and also their ability to perform these skills (Table 1). The study showed a wide gap between the skills agents thought were important and their ability to perform these skills. Many agents had Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the agricultural sciences, but felt highly inadequate in social science or communication skills.

#### **Making IRD programmes work through communication**

Perhaps the main reason why developing countries have failed to find answers to their poverty reduction woes is that, guided by international funding agencies, they have focused primarily on finding economic and technological solutions to the virtual neglect of the social science or communication aspects (Patel, Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck (2009). For example, agricultural extension is a major vehicle for promoting change; yet as the FAO (1989) noted, “extension systems differ from country to country and, sometimes, from within countries”. Roling & Jiggins (2009) have described the situation shameful because extension should be based on science, not on a rule-of-thumb approach. They noted further that the virtual absence of social scientists in development practice has forced natural scientists to take on, albeit unsuccessfully, social science functions such as participation, integration and capacity building.

In an attempt to fill this niche, the multidisciplinary academy and profession of Communication for Development (C4D) was established. Ascroft (1992), a leading C4D scholar

TABLE 1

*Extension Communication Training Needs*

<i>Extension communication skill</i>	<i>Importance of skill (f)</i>	<i>Ability to perform (f)</i>
Collaboration or facilitation skill	117 (87.3%)	91 (67.9%)
Capacity building training	117 (87.3%)	89 (66.4%)
Extension programme planning and evaluation	116 (86.6%)	95 (70.9%)
Promoting farmer participation in decision-making	113 (84.3%)	81 (60.4%)
Dealing with the complexity of rural development	111 (82.9%)	61 (45.5%)
How to implement popular participation in projects	105 (78.3%)	78 (58.2%)
Encouraging women participation in development	103 (76.8%)	93 (69.4%)
Coping with changing development approaches	103 (76.9%)	75 (56.0%)
Understanding social science roles in development	93 (68.4%)	61 (45.5%)

and practitioner, noted that the development problem is at root, a communication concern. The development problem, simply stated, is that innovations, technological and financial, designed to benefit the poor fail to diffuse in spite of all the overtures of development organizations. The fact is, between the good intentions of donor agencies and realizing those intentions by local people lies a wide gulf of often unexamined assumptions about rural needs, inadequate information, cultural misunderstandings, inappropriate strategies, and poor communication techniques that must be overcome before development messages can be adopted by small farmers. This is what C4D is about.

Gray-Felder (2003), the then Vice President of The Rockefeller Foundation, observed that while there is "demand for a new type of professional communicator for development, the supply of communicators for social change—those that can apply strategic thinking in communication to issues of social development—is very limited". Axley (1996) also observed that "many of today's most pressing organizational and management challenges—leadership, empowerment, shaping organizational culture, building effective teams, and managing change—hinge on communication activities, and can best be understood and met in terms of communication and communicating". The need for C4D has become even more acute,

given the paucity of public administration. Dwivedi (1994) stated:

"The story of administration for development in the Third World is a story of various policy failures and administrative mishaps. It is the story of failed development goals, told through the looking glass of administration. But more, it is about the role of the state in directing, managing and controlling the means used in and by Third World nations to achieve development goals; and finally, it is about the process of development administration by which those goals are supposed to be met".

Communication for Development, as a strategy, was conceived by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the late 1960s. It was called variously as Development Support Communication (DSC) or Development Communication (DevCom); however, C4D has become the common name (World Bank, 2007). Although the concept has a long history, its implementation was slow to spread simply because there were no universities training graduates (Brody, 1985). The situation changed in 1982 when the University of Iowa, USA, and the University of the Philippines at Los Banos, simultaneously established graduate programmes in this area (Agunga, 1997). Since then, the number of universities offering related training has expanded. However, none is in Africa where C4D

is needed most (UNESCO, 2007).

Perhaps the most significant event in the history of C4D was the *2006 World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD)* held in Rome, Italy, which brought together over 800 development experts and practitioners around the globe to discuss the future of C4D (Agunga & Anyaegbunam, 2007). The Congress has convinced many donor agencies of the value of C4D in poverty reduction programming. This led to the World Bank and FAO 2007 policy document and similar others, such as the United Kingdom's Department for International Development's (DFID) report, *The case for communication in sustainable development: Promoting dialogue, debate and changes (2006)*; and Panos London's (2007); *At the heart of change: The role of communication in sustainable development*. Both decry the need for a communication approach to development. Panos noted, for example, that billions of dollars committed by the G8 Nations to support good governance, sustainable investment, peace and security in Africa will most likely be wasted if communication does not form an integral part of development investment. For many concerned officials, the question is not whether communication is necessary for development, but how it can be mainstreamed in development programmes to help make poverty history, to borrow the words of President Mandela. The paper turns to this end.

The C4D strategy proposed in this paper was first tested in the mid-1990s in a regional project in southern Africa (covering Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia) known as the Southern Africa Regional Communication for Development Project. It was funded by the Government of Italy and executed by the FAO (Ascroft, Boeren & Agunga, 1993). Another experiment was carried out in Nepal (Khanal & Thapliya, 1992). This paper builds on these experiences. The C4D strategic framework is relatively simple and inexpensive to adopt. Many agricultural extension systems in Africa are well

structured to incorporate the C4D strategy. All that is needed is a C4D adviser, for 2 to 3 years, to strengthen the capacities of the extension staff to apply the C4D methodology. The process calls for a three-pronged approach. One is transforming national, regional and district extension services into Development Facilitation Centers (DFCs) to provide training in capacity strengthening for all development organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental. African countries are calling on their extension systems to take on more responsibilities in development management (Davidson & Ahmad, 2003; Leeuwis, 2004). The C4D approach enables extension systems to meet the challenge.

The second aspect is upgrading the agricultural communication branches or information support services of the Ministries of Agriculture into state-of-the-art multimedia and print production facilities, especially at the national and regional levels, to provide communication support for development projects and programmes at a reasonable fee. The communication centres will also serve as knowledge centres, offering virtual distance learning programmes and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) services. The strategy can include establishing what the author calls Millennium Classrooms at the district centres, the last miles of electricity supply. The idea is to establish at least one classroom equipped with 40 to 50 computers at the district level where rural kids can be used in to gain computer literacy, which will make them competitive with their urban counterparts when it comes to searching for 21st century jobs.

The third and last arm of the C4D strategy is establishing a post-graduate degree programme in at least one university in each country or region to ensure national self-reliance in C4D capability. In Ghana, the University for Development Studies could offer such a programme. In other countries, the programme could be located in Extension Education, Journalism, or any of the social sciences. It is important that the curriculum be closely linked to the DFCs and the multipurpose

communication centres to ensure that it meets practical development needs.

By charging for training services and multimedia and printed materials, and by serving as many development organizations as possible, the C4D strategy becomes financially self-sustainable. It should be stressed that the key to the success of the C4D strategy lies in the professionalism of the C4D strategist. As the curricula of universities offering C4D programmes vary, each C4D graduate has to prove himself or herself. Fraser & Villet (1996) identify functions of the C4D strategist as including promoting participation and mobilization, coordination and linkage; instructional design and training; development, pre-test and conduct of development campaigns; and advising governments and donor agencies on communication for development policy. Ascroft (1992) added that the student must have an in-depth inquiry into the field of development studies and practical communication science, including systems theory.

Lastly, it should be clear to the reader by now that the C4D strategist differs from audio-visual specialists who dominate the development scene. An audio-visual specialist is skilled in one or a few communication skills, such as radio or video production, and often tries to solve all communication problems with that tool (Brody, 1985; Mefalopulos, 2008). The C4D strategist functions like the carpenter with a tools box. The communication tool to use depends on the problem at hand. Above all, the C4D strategist is not a one-person shop; rather, it operates like an orchestra, a team of audio-visual specialists with the C4D strategist at the helm (Ascroft, 1992). The C4D strategist takes on the goals of the organization, and its effectiveness is measured in terms of whether the goals have been met.

Table 2 is a functional model of C4D showing activities the C4D strategist must address. First, delineating development guidelines or basic rules that projects should adhere to, such as participation, integration, and gender equity.

These cannot be compromised, and the C4D strategist's job is to ensure that they are abided by. The middle two columns represent development goals and objectives. The basis for C4D intervention is that the strategist buys-in the objectives of the development organization.

### Conclusion

The integrated rural development approach is key to poverty reduction and sustainable development in Africa. However, its success will depend on the ability of project managers to address social science concerns, such as participation, integration and capacity building. Given that IRD managers tend to be agronomists, engineers, or medical scientists, the paper argues the need for including communication scientists in IRD programming to help deal with human dimension concerns, such as participation and integration, under the rubric of Communication for Development (C4D). As C4D is a relatively new concept, the author argues that the need is to promote awareness of it and to encourage developing countries to pilot the strategy in one IRD programme first before replicating it in other regions.

Given that funding is always a major consideration, the author urges developing countries to seek support from international aid organizations, such as the World Bank, which is in support of the C4D approach. All they have to do is approach their country directors and ask for assistance. The key to the success of the C4D strategy lies in capacity building; that is, it seeks to enlighten field workers about the development process and provides them with the knowledge and skills to function effectively in that process. The ultimate goal is to empower developing countries to be able to design and manage their own development with built-in processes for transparency, accountability and efficiency, thereby reducing the need for technical assistance, which is not only expensive but unsustainable.

The limited field tests and critical review of the

TABLE 2

*A Functional Communication for Development Model for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development*

<i>Guidelines for IRDPs/PRSPs success</i>	<i>Programme goals and objectives</i>		<i>Development and communication strategies</i>	
	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Programme bottlenecks</i>	<i>C4D functions</i>
1. Popular participation You cannot help people permanently by doing for them what they can be taught to do for themselves	1. Food Security National and household food security	1. Promoting innovativeness Making smallholder farmers aware of innovations	1. Lack of political support for poverty projects Has improved recently	1. Community mobilization and involvement Community-driven develop
2. Rule of integration Enjoins all sectors to cooperate and coordinate efforts for efficiency and timely delivery of services	2. Increase livelihoods Alternative means of income, fishing, trade	2. Resource availability Making credit, fertilizers, information and other inputs available to farmers	2. Lack of financial support for poverty projects Has improved recently	2. Coordination and linkage Fostering partnerships across development orgs
3. Appropriate technology Technology for development must be easy to communicate to users, not displace labour, and create no dependency	3. Poverty reduction Household safety nets Means of livelihood	3. Increasing outputs • Agricultural outputs • Commercial enterprises Education for children	3. Lack of employment opportunities A serious problem	3. Multimedia production Develop and pilot-test, use multimedia for dev. campaigns Industrial enterprises
4. Gender mainstreaming There is a tendency to bypass women unless singled out for inclusion	4. Economic growth Commercialization Manufacturing/Exports	4. Increased incomes Higher purchasing power	4. Inadequate markets Better markets for farmers: Internal and external	4. Communication needs assessment Strategic comm. campaigns
5. Immanent change Exhaust local solutions before foreign Foreign importations	5. Improved living standards	5. Employment opportunities • Increased wages • Public/Private employment	5. Infrastructural development Roads, water, electricity	5. Advising governments and advocating for C4D Research, teaching, practice
6. Experimentation Carry out a pilot to see if it works	6. Industrialization Use local resources	6. Public services • Job training/education	6. Limited manufacturing Need for more processing • Health and welfare, etc.	6. Ensuring cost-recovery and financial sustainability and manufacturing Market products and services
7. Replication Develop prototype for replication	7. Environmental sustainability	7. Decentralization • Good governance • Community-driven dev.	7. Lack of people involvement in decisions Dev. & test alternatives/	7. Promoting post-graduate degree programme in C4D National self-reliance in C4D
8. Cost recovery Achieve national self-reliance Reduce aid dependency	8. Middle income nation From \$700 to \$3,500 per capita per annum	8. Regional cooperation SADC, ECOWAS, CAADP, NEPAD, FAFA, etc.	8. Weak governmental systems	8. Establishing and managing multipurpose C4D centres for training and material prod.
9. Capacity building or strengthening Strengthening local capacity Reduce technical assistance	9. Weld influence at global meetings	Non-aligned movement	9. Ethnic and regional conflicts, civil strife Conflict negotiations	9. C4D standardization and accreditation
10. Impact assessment Should make a significant difference	10. Africa to become a global super power			

literature indicate that the C4D strategy has the potential to render IRD or poverty reduction programmes more effective. Therefore, the time to give it a try is now, and the author is available to help make it happen.

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