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16 January 1981

REFERENCE:

Dear JUNIC Colleagues,

DSC Working Group at JUNIC, Tokyo

I must apologise for the long delay in writing to you, through the JUNIC Secretariat, about the status of work on the paper on DSC.

Because not all JUNIC members were sent copies from Nairobi, a draft paper is being circulated as JUNIC/1981/R.4, as prepared by Mr. Fuglesang of HABITAT with assistance by UNICEF-Nairobi, Mr. Fraser of FAO and myself. In his covering letter, Mr. Fuglesang advised that there was not time to incorporate any case studies; expressed the belief that these are vital for the "argument"; and urged that we do a consultancy to complete the paper including such examples.

The original work plan, as you will recall, presumed that the Working Group would meet over the Nairobi draft towards the end of 1980 so that we could finalize it, with any needed headquarters perspectives or language, and submit to JUNIC at Tokyo for approval as a submission to the Spring 1981 session of the ACC. Because the draft is incomplete, the basis of such a pre-Tokyo meeting was not there, especially bearing in mind the travel expense for either the Western or Eastern Hemisphere members.

I therefore propose that the Group meet at Tokyo (Bertrand de Loos has provided for such a meeting) to concert views on what else is needed to finalize the paper; decide how we should now proceed to do this; and, if it has to be through a consultancy, how we would co-finance that. If I may take liberty to suggest, it would be very helpful, it seems to me, if we could gather well armed with the comments on the draft of our respective D/PSC associates, and their views on how difficult or otherwise it would be to provide case-study material which I might undertake then to incorporate as an alternative to having to hire a consultant.

If we can move ahead with despatch after Tokyo, we could contemplate circulating a more complete paper to JUNIC members for their mail comments, in order to get it submitted to the late-1981 session of ACC, thus only losing a half-year from the originally planned schedule.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Erskine Childers', written over a horizontal line.

Erskine Childers
Director
Division of Information



UNITED NATIONS

JUNIC

Joint United Nations Information Committee

United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017

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Joint United Nations Information Committee
Eighth session
3-6 February 1981
United Nations University Headquarters
Tokyo, Japan

JUNIC/1981/R.4
22 December 1980

Item 9 of provisional annotated agenda

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN DEVELOPMENT: DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

Terms of reference: JUNIC Report ACC/1980/11,
section C paras. 24 and 25

1. During the discussion on the item, based on background paper prepared by Vision Habitat for the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), it was generally recognized that information should be planned as an integral part of the entire development process and that in particular it should be included as an essential development or project support communication component at a very early stage of all projects. It was also recognized that JUNIC members should establish closer and more regular contacts with the people directly involved in the implementation of those projects at the national and local community level.
2. JUNIC decided that a background paper on the role of information in development at the operational level would be prepared by a group of information officers of organizations of the United Nations system based in Nairobi (Habitat, UNEP, UNICEF, FAO, UNESCO). The paper would be subsequently transmitted to an Ad Hoc Working Group on the Development Support Communication to be established by JUNIC under the chairmanship of UNDP. It was also decided that the background paper should reach the Working Group by next August. It was further decided that the Working Group would elaborate on the paper, incorporating observations on development support communication for management level (headquarters level) and that a final report 1/ on the matter would be submitted to JUNIC at its next session.

1/ This report will be made available in Tokyo after the JUNIC Ad Hoc Working Group on Development Support Communication has met.

Introduction

3. Although for many years information professionals within and outside the United Nations family have accepted the notion that communication is a social function of much wider implication than public information, this fact has not until recently been clearly expressed and recognized. The final report by the Sean MacBride International Commission on Communication Problems issued in 1980 states in a complete section on the subject the following:

"All nations have to make choices in investment priorities. In choosing between possible alternatives and often conflicting interests, developing countries in particular, must give priority to satisfying their people's essential needs. Communication is not only a system of public information but also an integral part of education and development. The communication component in all development projects should receive adequate financing... So called "development support communications" are essential for mobilizing initiatives and providing information required for action in all fields of development - agriculture, health and family planning, education, religion, industry and so on."

4. However, this recommendation does not necessarily imply that the concept of development support communication has been widely accepted by Governments of developing countries or within many United Nations agencies. This report will try to focus on the evolution of the concept of development support communications, as distinct from public information activities of the United Nations system, to state some of the constraints found in implementing this concept and propose recommendations for the United Nations system and the international community.

History

5. Between approximately 1960 and 1965, a small number of then unconnected information-communication specialists working in or as consultants to several organizations, especially UNDP, UNICEF and FAO, were observing a number of increasingly clear sociological deficiencies in the design and techniques of implementation of development projects in many sectors.

6. In turn, it was increasingly evident that in most developing countries, the development of human resources for information and communication media was taking place in terms of "transferred" Western models - whereby, for example, many personnel in Information-Broadcasting-Film Ministries or the Information branches of sectoral ministries, had been trained in the West and would not perceive development support as part of their responsibilities at all, since this instantly implied socially purposive work.

7. This small number of concerned DSC "pioneers" were increasingly aware that little or no human communication was taking place at the design stage between the planners of development projects and the communities who were supposed to implement and benefit from them -- so that the designs of many projects were "top-down", city-to-village, "inputs" to be "transferred to" communities.

8. The mysteries of securing "popular participation" in rural development activities began to be discussed. But the very terminology of this newly expressed concern was itself reflective of a still essentially external view of such development... for "participation" implied that a development project had a viability of its own, but would be better and quicker if the local populace "actively participate"... where the reality was that rural development is either by and then for a community, perceived and planned in its terms, or it will not be development of any lasting and appropriate kind.

9. Here and there in various agencies, the perception thus emerged that the first acts of human communication needed in a development process must be in the very design of projects, jointly by technical planners and communities. It would then be necessary to provide, within the project for the various organized (and multi-directional) flows of communication needed to implement the project; and to anticipate staff, software, hardware and resultant budgetary requirements to ensure such flows.

10. From 1965 onwards, these and other related perceptions of need were reaching enough decision-makers within the UN development system and in some bilateral assistance agencies for the advocates of Development Support Communication to receive first official "blessings" and resource allocations. The late Secretary-General U Thant and UNDP Administrator Paul Hoffman, and UNICEF Executive Secretary Henry Labouisse, gave explicit encouragement to the formation of a research and demonstration effort in Asia which resulted in a major UNDP-supported regional Development Support Communication Service (DSCS, after 1975 renamed Development Training and Communication Planning, DTCP). Within UNICEF, which adopted the variant term Project Support Communication (PSC), the concept and practice steadily grew until it had become a significant arm of numbers of UNICEF-supported projects in all regions. In FAO, after a period of development of the DSC idea in Africa, a distinct DSC Unit was established at Rome within the Division of Information, leading to numbers of country and project-level DSC programmes and components. In UNFPA, where the information-education requirements of fertility regulation programmes were early perceived, the concept and practice of DSC quickly became accepted, and was in fact subsequently extended beyond family planning communication campaigns, when UNDP's Division of Information was asked to design and execute DSC components in UNFPA-supported Census projects in African countries.

11. The period between 1975 and 1980 was marked by a combination of some advances in systematising DSC as an element of programmes and projects; considerable advances across the world in acceptance of the concept among communication professionals; but continued overall neglect of the entire human communication factor in development.

12. An example of systematising was the introduction into UNDP's standard internationally distributed Policies and Procedures Manual of an instruction that all projects be examined for their DSC needs at time of formulation - though a very great deal remains to be done to ensure adequate response to this instruction.

13. These developments of the DSC concept within the UN system were paralleled by similar developments in other sectors such as education, development extension and mass media. In one Asian country, for example, a university faculty

of agricultural extension renamed itself Faculty of Development Communication, explaining that the DC or DSC concept provided a far more comprehensive conceptual and design framework for what was really involved in agricultural and rural development communication. On the other side of the world, a centre for audio-visual and educational technology supported by a major donor-country's aid agency renamed itself Centre for Development Communications. The prestigious International Institute of Communications took Communication for Development as its major theme for one of its annual global Assemblies, and has continued to promote the concept ever since. In these and innumerable other manifestations, slowly but steadily the basic concept of the importance of human communication in development, and of the vital role required of communication science and practice in effective development action, has taken hold within the profession.

14. Perhaps a culmination of this process could be seen in the inclusion in the Final Report of the Sean MacBride commission quoted in the introduction.

Nominal Acceptance

15. If the foregoing rapid survey of some of the essential history of the "DSC idea" suggests, however, that the idea is now accepted in all segments of the development community, this should quickly be dispelled. The acceptance and recognition has been of a mostly nominal nature. There may be a theoretical understanding of the need for communications and there may be even a willingness to apply such activities, but when it comes to the practice the consequences are not realized, the professional conclusions are not drawn and the managerial decisions are not taken. This lack of dynamics in the progress of the development communication concept may have its cause in the fact that the concept of development itself has been undergoing a slow change - a circumstance which may be most appropriately demonstrated by the change in view of the well-known communications scholar Professor Everett M Rogers.

16. In his early definition Rogers considered development "as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into the social system in order to produce higher per-capita incomes and levels of living through the modern production methods and improved social organizations". However, in his second definition he states that "development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment".

17. Communication professionals in the two UN Agencies which may have the longest and most profound experience in development communication, UNICEF and FAO, echo this change in recent reports. As far as UNICEF is concerned it is stated as follows:

"UNICEF's concern with project support communications arose logically from its shift from a supply to a human resource oriented organization in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The shift was from distribution of skim milk powder to the promotion of house and community gardens; from the mass distribution of drugs

and insecticides to health education and training of paramedics in preventive services. The basic services approach with its emphasis on popular participation, which was adopted by UNICEF in the mid 1970's and the primary health care approach, jointly endorsed by WHO and UNICEF, further underscored the importance of better communication at both national and grassroot level."

In FAO the DSC experience was recently summed up as follows:

"To sum up, ten years of work in rural communication have brought some worthwhile experience and lessons. One, which has perhaps been evident in several parts of this article even if it has not been overtly articulated, is that communication as a means of promoting participation in development programmes can only succeed if there is a clear and continuing government policy in favour of such participation. And in our humble opinion, without participation and effective communication, no development project can ever have any worthwhile impact in the betterment of rural life. On the other hand we can continue to make progress in applying communication techniques for the improvement of the training at grass root level, and this in itself is an important contribution. However, if we could make similar progress in the field of communication for participation, the impact in development terms would be considerably greater."

18. The conclusion to be drawn from a decade of practical experience in the implementation of DSC seems in other words inescapable and it has two important dimensions. Development support communication is fundamentally concerned with the issue of public participation. The practical consequences of this very concern pose as major constraints for a comprehensive implementation. It seems as if little progress can be made unless these constraints are analysed and understood.

Operational Constraints

19. As it appears from its history the ground-work was well done by the DSC pioneers. There are, for example for UNDP or FAO projects no formal obstacles to the inclusion of development support communication components at the project design stage. The practical question is: why does it not happen? Constraints can be discerned at various levels and in various connexions.

Apprehension of governments

20. FAO underlines the constraint which seems to be of the most fundamental nature. It is reflected in a series of other constraints once given closer scrutiny: "We all know that a successful participatory communication experience among under-privileged people will, as the people are mobilized to improve their conditions of life, lead also to a more questioning attitude towards the existing state of affairs, and we know too that conservative, entrenched interests and authorities are usually allergic to a questioning attitude from among the under-privileged." "We must continually remember that successful participatory communication will always lead to change and that change in one quarter will probably cause discomfort in another." There is little doubt that the day-to-day consequences of a successful participatory communication project component

invariably are so dramatic and loaded that government officials confronted with them get scared and begin to backtrack. This socio-political constraint seems strange considering that governments each fall in the General Assembly pass a series of resolutions which call for public participation, but is nevertheless an operational fact which must be considered of fundamental importance. Verbal commitments are made to public participation and communication activities, but when the practical implications are realized the action dissipates.

Economic and physical approach to planning

21. The traditional model for development based on economic and physical criteria still severely constrain the practical application of the DSC concept. Economic and physical considerations permeate the thinking of the development planners, and, as a consequence, high priority is given in project preparation to feasibility studies and surveys in such areas. This approach yields quantifiable and tangible, "hard" facts for use in decision making. In comparison "the human aspect" of a development project appears indefinable. Consequently, development support communication is considered a "soft" area in the planning process, not sufficiently justifiable and therefore not meriting serious consideration and ultimate inclusion in the project description. The UNESCO report to the "Intergovernmental Conference for Co-operation on Activities, Needs and Programmes for Communication Development" (CC-80/conf.212/5) gives a measure for the level of support to communication activities in general. It estimates that -- "the proportion of commitments to communication in relation to total aid commitments is not going to exceed 2%."

Operational misconceptions

22. Another constraint seems to derive from misconceptions on the managerial and operational side. A review of the implementation of development projects indicates that there is a tendency to assume that a development project carries within it its own logic and momentum of communication of additional expertise and replicable techniques to the project "audience" (administrators, extension agents, communities) - where in reality many such "messages" are not moving through the project chain, either because of inadequate provision of the technical means for such transmission or because the messages are couched in inherently alien or inadequately explained language. Similarly there are unjustified assumptions of co-ordination. For example the government officials concerned with a project may state that "Ministry of Information will look after conveying farming messages to the farmers," when very often no one is actually taking care of the planning and implementation of such a function with that Ministry - or the fact of the matter is that a Western style dissemination of messages by mass media is not conformant with the communication needs of the project which would probably rather lend itself to the use of inter-personal media. Another operational constraint is that the communication process, when it is tried, seldom if ever is begun early enough; and it is next to useless to begin communicating only when the project faces misunderstandings, apathy and even hostility.

/...

Underestimation of the information function

23. It is probably not quite wise for information people always to advance the notion that the function of information is generally underestimated. Nevertheless this seems to be a major constraint which is also transferred to the propositions of development support communication. National or international civil servants can sometimes be observed to hold a disdainful view of "information people". The essence of this view seems to be that "everybody can write or talk to people, so creation of a filmscript or organizing inter-personal communication are not really specialized professions".

Low priority rating by governments

24. Development planners and government officials are confronted with the need for setting decisive priorities in their national budgets and IPF's from UNDP. High priority is by necessity given to capital investment in industrial development, food production, building schools, hospitals and other infrastructure. Inflation, pressure of national debts and domestic political problems aggravates the situation. This poses a constraint for the application of development support communication, which like other communication/education activities are perceived to be of low, if not lowest priority.

Successful Project Examples

25. Clearly, well-documented examples of development projects which have succeeded because of proficiently planned and implemented DSC components, would provide the only convincing evidence for the need to expand these activities. The authors of this report recognize that such examples would form the best basis for the educational effort the DSC concept still requires in relation to government officials, development planners, project managers and field staff. The authors set out with the intention of collecting reports of such examples. It became, however, quickly clear that such a work is time consuming and requires considerable amount of action-based research and verification before a necessary credibility can be achieved. The authors do not have the resources available for this task and suggest it should be undertaken by JUNIC on another basis. Here, shall just be mentioned work which has already been done and published by clearing house for Development Communication, Washington, under the title "Project profiles".

Recommendations

26. Well-founded recommendations could only be based on well-researched practical examples. Our simple analysis of the operational constraints indicate, however, that there are certain main points which should be given consideration.

Strategy of the small scale

27. Large-scale introduction of a DSC component through nationwide use of mass media as radio and TV can be risky, because the response sparked off may be too

big for the government to cope with, operationally and politically, and it becomes a threat. The response may also reveal opinions and ideas which government consider undesirable. The whole effort may therefore end as a reinforcement of governments apprehension. Small-scale introduction of DSC through group-work and selective media does not suffer from this basic drawback. The communication process can be better monitored and kept in pace with the governments ability to respond. Experience shows that it is much easier to break DSC in by providing assistance for communication techniques allied to small-scale training and non-formal education activities, than it is to fostering of public participation or large-scale motivation of the population.

Cautious media selection

28. From the recognition of the necessity of a small-scale approach flows the need for a prudent selection of media. This is also compounded by the financial constraints - simple slide series rather than the fashionable colour films, the selective medium of a cassette player rather than an expensive television production - and a general recognition that in participatory communication people cannot be replaced by media technology.

Human feasibility surveys

29. Communication professionals would enhance the image of the DSC concept among project planners and create a more solid basis for decision-making by carrying through systematic human feasibility surveys which parallel the economic and physical studies customarily done at the design stage of development projects. Well-documented and possibly quantified studies of the social, cultural and behavioural characteristics of the population concerned including judgements as to its possible responses to specified project inputs, would represent a major progress. It is necessary to enlist the support of experienced sociologists, social psychologists or social anthropologists to do such work.

Training

30. Development of appropriate curricula, texts and case studies for training in communications for social development in Third World countries is another matter the UN system should address itself to. Too much communication theory and practice is still based almost exclusively on Western models. There is urgent need to develop training materials based on the Third World experience.

Persistent action along such lines may be able to ease many of the constraints which are presently limiting progress in the DSC field.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

JUNIC MEETING IN TOKYO - 3-6 FEBRUARY

At the JUNIC meeting we committed to send to Leila Doss at the earliest possible moment, details of what materials UNICEF is producing (description, free quantities available, and cost if any) for various U.N. themes and conferences, including IYDP, the U.N. Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa and the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

Hélène Gosselin should handle the IYDP and the IDWSSD. With regard to the Conference on the Least Developed Countries, scheduled to take place in Paris next September, we are requested to send a list of UNICEF-assisted projects in those countries. We should have a meeting in the Division as to what information materials we wish to produce for this important Conference.

Regarding the April Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, Mehr Kamal and Mr. Nanji should take the responsibility of reviewing what material we intend to prepare for the Conference. Liv Ullmann and James Grant will both be attending the Conference. A photo exhibit and a fact sheet may be called for.

Since the Conference on Least Developed Countries and the African Refugee Conference will both be held in Europe, Geneva (John Williams) should be consulted as regards our input.

With regard to Dev/Ed, UNICEF was asked to continue its role as "responsible organisation" chairing the ad hoc group. There was, however, considerable criticism on the part of the World Bank and UNESCO about the concept and definition of Dev/Ed. I believe that the presentation of the report with a long list of themes at the beginning of the report gave the impression, as perceived by the World Bank and UNESCO, that Dev/Ed was trying to do everything that JUNIC was doing. I responded by saying that it was an attempt by the Dev/Ed group to show its full support to every aspect of JUNIC's work.

/C0ntd.

JUNIC has now asked that the Dev/Ed group prepare a report with recommendations for consideration at the next Special Session of JUNIC to be held in Geneva this summer. It was also assumed that the report will be discussed at the Dev/Ed Meeting (OECD). The report should contain three parts:

1. A general overview including the definition of Dev/Ed.
2. In-school activities.
3. Out-of-school activities, especially with NGOs.

The themes should be treated in an annex to indicate the substance of the material. Jeanne Vickers should follow this matter up with Ross.

I further committed UNICEF's support for Development Forum - the base figure of \$25,000 in 1980 with an inflation factor for subsequent years.

Discussions on PSC/DSC stirred quite a lot of interest, more so because the Rector of UNU in his opening address, urged JUNIC to play a more broadened role in communication, vis-a-vis development in general. We are committed to share the cost of a consultant to prepare a report for ACC this summer. The person mentioned is Professor Joseph Ascroft as a candidate. I suggest Revy follow-up with Paul Boyd of UNDP on this matter.

cc: Mr. Jack Glattbach
Ms. H el ene Gosselin
Ms. Mehr Kamal
Mr. Nanji
Mr. R.R.N. Tuluhungwa
Ms. Jeanne Vickers, OE
Mr. J. Williams, OE
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12 February 1981
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