Development communication as part of culture

C W Malan
Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)
Pretoria
Email: CWMalan@silwane.hsrc.ac.za

Abstract

In this survey of approaches to Development Communication (DC) the position is taken that DC, like development itself, should be regarded and studied as part of culture. A cultural perspective is particularly suited to revisit basic DC, communication and cultural concepts that have been obfuscated. Each of these concepts can only be understood within a particular discourse, a framework of meaning-producing and sense making, and here the cultural framing predominates. "Old" and "new" paradigms of DC are compared and relevant policy approaches are surveyed. The main section deals with local knowledge and cultural contexts, and the various functions within a development situation as they relate to communication. In conclusion the importance of "cultural translation" which is regarded as essential to effective DC, is highlighted.

Introduction

It is only through cultural mediation that data gets transformed into information, information into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom.

Towards the end of the millennium it was inevitable that concepts and developments related to development communication would be critically scrutinised. The second half of the 20th century was called the era of development and closely linked to the advent of mass communication, which paved the way for the information age that introduces the third millennium. Development communication (DC) was considered to be one of the strategically most important ways to harness the powers of mass communication. During the transition to the next century the password has become "technology" and the focus has moved from DC to IT, Information Technology. Digital, telematics-based information technologies, with the Internet as centre, have become the *open sesame*. When necessary a digital "C" gets added: ICTs, for Information and Communication Technologies, but all too often the communication aspects are neglected in the development process.

So, "what's in a name"? At this stage we know that naming is no innocent "language game", and the substitution of DC with DSC, Development Support

Communication, represented nothing less than a paradigm shift. Then again, with the strong emphasis on democratisation towards the end of the century, the term PC (Participatory Communication) seemed to become "PC", in the sense of politically correct. In this survey some of the main concepts and approaches related to DC will be revisited on the most basic level, for the purposes of analysing these concepts within the cultural contexts that they are used. To start off then, development communication (DC), will be used simply as an umbrella term for all forms of communication used in the development process.

DC as a "discipline", a strategic focus area in development planning and a field of study and training has no prominent history in South Africa. Yet interviews, literature and situation analyses reveal that vital aspects of communication intervention have been part and parcel of most development processes, in the form of consultations, meetings, information dissemination, feedback sessions and so forth. Since the transition to a democratic dispensation in 1994 and the strong government focus on large-scale development programmes, the position of DC has also changed in many respects, as will be discussed below.

In spite of the changes the questions remains: why has such as pivotal aspect as communication for development for years not received the attention that could be expected in academic, training and planning contexts? The short answer could be very simple: because development communication has previously been regarded as part of culture and, like culture, taken for granted.

In this survey the position is taken that DC, like development itself, should rightfully be regarded and studied as part of culture. A cultural perspective is particularly suited to revisit basic DC, communication and cultural concepts that have been obfuscated. Each of these concepts can only be understood within a particular *discourse*, a framework of meaning-producing and sense making, and here the cultural framing will predominate.

In DSC/PC theorising much lip service has been paid to the role of culture in development, but often little is done to specifically incorporate it in planning. If DC facilitators want developers to seriously incorporate culture in their programmes, it is imperative to shift the emphasis from a "nice to know" to a "need to know" basis. Below some aspects that are *essential* to successful DC and development planning will be listed, such as factors of continuity and change, cultural translation, evaluation, etc.

For development purposes it is also important to stress that culture is no longer only an "instrument" of socio-cultural reproduction, but has become a primary resource and an instrument of production. Moreover, the entire information revolution has a cultural basis. In their analysis of the profound influence that information will have in the coming economic revolution that will change the nature of employment and even the nation-state, Davidson and Rees-Mogg

(1997:50) remind us: "Major transitions always involve a cultural revolution, and usually entail clashes between adherents of the old and new values". The emergence of the so-called cyberculture represents a revolution on its own, and at this stage one can only speculate about its eventual influence on development as more and more communities attain access to the boundless networks and information of this cyberculture.

The theoretical discussion below will be followed by a cursory survey of local and international policy, and eventually the focus will be on the practical implications of the interaction between DC and culture. References to practice will be informed by case studies conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

Revisiting DC concepts and approaches

Development communication

The old paradigm of "top-down" development communication was stereotyped and shot down on the basis of its dependence on mass communication. However the entire concept of "development communication " in its DSC and PC contexts has also been stereotyped. Usually it is seen as the communication that takes place between a developer (or an intermediary such as a facilitator or change-agent) and a community who are the "recipients" of a development project, thus between a benefactor and a beneficiary, and mostly in a rural context. This communication model may be typical of the average development situation with its usual emphasis on economic and infrastructural improvement, but it remains restrictive for the conceptualisation of DC as a general cultural phenomenon.

New approaches to DC have been mainly concerned with the impact of developmentalism on rural communities, and certainly this focus presents the most challenging problems, such as the influence on communities' identities. However the rapidly expanding influence of ICTs and globalisation have forced DC theorists and practitioners alike to address issues related to urban and peri-urban (but increasingly also rural) communities as networks, or "virtual communities" (see the contributions in De Haan and Long, 1997).

If development is seen as the process of improving one's material, spiritual and other conditions, usually by means of self-improvement, the DC area cannot be restricted to material, infrastructural development projects. It then includes development in the areas of capacity building, education, economics, health, the environment, agriculture, culture, etc. Moreover, a new niche role for DC should be defined within the National Information and Communication Infrastructures that are now being established in various countries in Africa.

In short, in this discussion development communication is therefore seen as *all forms of communication that are used for the improvement of an individual,*

community or country's material, cultural, spiritual, social and other conditions. Culturally, the areas of development and communication will overlap to the extent that both involve processes of making sense, giving meaning, reaching goals, improvement and finding solutions, creatively changing one's environment, and creating visions based on values and beliefs.

Stereotyping has also subjugated DC theory and practice to ideological imperatives. Various ideologically charged concepts were at first internationally hailed as solutions to development problems, then almost inevitably identified as scapegoats for the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots: socialism, capitalism, (Western) imperialism, modernisation, mass communication, diffusion of innovation theory, etc. (see Agunga, 1997:137-168).

At the end of the day, after the ideological tugs-of-war, a very basic question was asked by the writer Carlos Fuentes (in WCCD, 1995): "Both capitalism and socialism ... have shown themselves incapable of extricating the majority of our people from misery ... And the cultural question therefore is this: is there another solution, a solution of our own? Don't we possess the tradition, imagination, intellectual and organizational reserves to elaborate our own models of development, consonant with the truth of what we have been, what we are, and what we want to be, responsible before the civil societies which have been expending themselves in our countries from below and from the periphery?" It is indeed a "cultural question", because it is only within the heart of culture as a way of life, a way of making sense, of innovation and finding solutions, that lasting answers to the fundamental question about the nature of development can be found.

It is important for the rest of the discussion to realise that the conceptualisation and definition of "development communication" is itself part of culture and therefore subjected to the power struggles inherent in cultural discourses. The same applies to the constituent elements of "communication " and "development".

Communication

The close relationship between culture and communication is well known (see Edelstein, Ito and Keppler, 1989; Thomas, 1987). Still, the restriction and stereotyping of the DC concept is compounded because the term "communication" is often used as within the first of the two types of definitions of communication identified by O'Sullivan *et al.* (1994:50): "The first sees it as a process by which A sends a message to B upon whom it has an effect. The second sees it as a negotiation and exchange of meaning, in which messages, *people-in-cultures* and 'reality' interact so as to enable meaning to be produced or understanding to occur" (1994:50) (italics added). The constituent elements of the second group of definitions fall into three groups: the text, its signs and codes: the people who "read" the text, and an "external reality" to which both text and people refer

(1994:50-51). The two approaches to the term coincide with the two main "old and new" DC paradigms, which will be revisited below. For the DSC/PC approaches the negotiation and exchange of meaning by means of culturally determined interaction is of primary importance.

At the threshold of the "information century" it has become quite clear that DC theory has to redefine its role within mass communication theory – firstly because for many years communication in development has been perceived narrowly as the use of mass media (Agunga, 1997:11) and secondly because DSC/PC theorists rebelled against mass communication as an overrated development medium. The three important shifts in focus in current international mass communication theory identified by Jansen (1996:13) all have direct implications for the "cultural" perception of communication. They are (a) the recognition of the central importance of sense-making and of the acting and willing human agent, (b) a movement away from an interest in cognition towards an interest in culture (the most recent expression of the need to study culture is cultural studies), and (c) the realisation that development of the so-called "information society" is bringing about a fundamental transformation in modes of communication, although the actual transformation can hardly be assessed. To Jansen's analysis one could add that there is little doubt about the emphasis on interactive, interpersonal, participatory and emancipatory forms of communication. The struggle for the recognition of DSC/PC approaches has been considerably aided by the recognition of the role of culture, the acting human agent and the diverse functions of the human mind.

A cultural perspective is eminently suited to rethink fundamental communication issues in the light of new ICTs, as the academics and researchers in Knutsson (1998:24) point out. They feel that a renewed cultural critique might now be able to win back some of the key concepts that have been previously attacked as being closely associated with a problematic kind of technocratic views of communication as "unidirectional chains of transmission of fixed contents from encoding senders to passively decoding receivers. The Latin origin of 'communication' for instance implies and intersubjective sharing that 'makes common' to the participants a set of meanings and thus joins them in an interpretative community, without necessarily making them uniform."

It has been shown internationally that DC practitioners should be sensitive to the various ways in which interpretative communities acquire and communicate their often widely divergent identities. They may define themselves as a community geographically, but also linguistically, discursively ("we think alike") and lately even virtually, e.g. when a group communicates through the Internet. In a "rainbow nation" such as South Africa it is impossible to use the concept of *community* in the sense of a homogeneous group of people with a fixed set of values. One can only hope to identify an interpretative community, based on the way they culturally see and communicate their own sense of community.

Generally, the approach to communication as a cultural phenomenon will therefore facilitate a better understanding of its position as part of the ICTs chain, and to see Information and Communication Technologies as a holistic system where the parts are interdependent. The focus on knowledge (science, including information) and know-how (technologies) will be integral to the concept of culture that will be used here. It remains a constant challenge for DC proponents to define the DC role within the broad ICT context. The best development information will mean nothing if it is not communicated to, and understood by, the intended message receivers. The process of *cultural translation* will therefore be discussed below.

Culture

Today it is widely accepted that the term culture is situated within a number of discourses: social, political, religious, etc. It is therefore "multi-discursive; it can be mobilized in a number of different discourses. This means you cannot import a fixed definition into any and every context and expect it to make sense. What you have to do is identify the discursive context itself" (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994:68). The importance of the dynamics of discourse and power to any study of culture is taken for granted in this discussion.

For the most part, cultural policy studies have been fairly pragmatic in its approach to the definition of culture, as Bennett (1996:1) indicates. The discursive context makes it possible to regard culture as a resource to be managed, or as an industry or, perhaps the most frequently cited policy interpretation, as a whole way of life. "It is most frequently cited to establish a broad and inclusive ambit for cultural policy, one that will encompass all kinds of culture irrespective of whether they are conventionally valued as high or low." This inclusive definition of culture also allows culture to be thought of as a reformer's science, according to Bennett (*ibid.*).

For pragmatic DC purposes culture could therefore - according to the particular discursive context -be seen as either "high" or "low"/popular, as a resource and industry by itself, or as a mediating agent and a tool for development. True to the constantly changing nature of culture, during the past 40 years the sphere of arts and culture has been expanding to a point where the society-culture relationship has undergone an important qualitative transformation, as summarised by Lacroix and Tremblay (1997:30-31). In the current context of communication and technology convergence and the creation of information highways, culture is no longer only an "instrument" of socio-cultural reproduction, but has become a primary resource and an instrument of production (of knowledge and the imaginary). It is thus an integral component of the emergent new process of social labour (1997:30).

For DC purposes it seems expedient for approaches to culture to be situated within the broad theoretical framework of cultural studies. According to Jenks (1993:157-

158) cultural studies operates with an expanded concept of culture; it regards culture as emergent, dynamic, as continual renewal. This interdisciplinary approach recognises the socialisation of one's own identity through the process of mass communication and sees all aspects of social life as "cultured". As is illustrated by Escobar (1995) and Sachs (1992) cultural studies offer particularly useful tools for deconstructing the representations of social reality connected to development. Critical theory, one of the theoretical approaches favoured by cultural studies, can be used to "deconstruct" and understand development, as Romm (1995) does.

The choice of any particular definition of culture is usually a strategic decision, and for strategic purposes it also seems expedient for the interdisciplinary and multi-facetted DC to follow a holistic and inclusive approach. The holistic definition of culture that applies in the *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* seems to be in line with the most important DSC/PC features. Culture is seen as "the dynamic totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features, which characterise a society or social group. It includes the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, heritage and beliefs developed over time and subject to change" (South Africa, 1996:10).

The rise of "the cultural" has been widely recognised towards the end of this century, particularly in the sense of the affirmation of subjectivity. Culture was perceived as a vital nexus between politics and personal experience, mediating human needs and desires into publicly discussible form. This "rediscovery" of culture and the investigation of knowledge/power relationships paved the way for a cultural conceptualisation of the information revolution. As Toffler (1990:409) reminds us, in the next century development strategies will have to be based on the new role of knowledge, of the mind. "The 21st-century path to economic development and power is no longer through the exploitation of raw materials and human muscle but through application of the human mind. Development strategies make no sense, therefore, unless they take full account of the new role of knowledge in wealth creation..."

It follows that for DC purposes it will also be prudent to highlight the role of knowledge as a central constituent of culture. This has been done in the HSRC's Cultural Reconstruction and Development (CURED) research programme where culture was viewed as: "A dynamic system of knowledge, values and actions which is located in those processes of experience, interpretation and creativity by means of which individuals and self-defined groups give meaning to life and through which they express themselves both tangibly and intangibly, and in relationships" (Malan, 1995:6). For the purposes of DC it is further necessary to distinguish between knowledge (science) and know-how (technologies, also modes of social, political and economic organisation).

There is of course the danger that "knowledge" may be perceived only as belonging to the "world of learning", science and technology. In the same way culture has been stereotyped as either something elitist and artistic, or at the other end of the scale (particularly in the case of development) something ethnic, tribal or peculiar. It is indeed true that DC knowledge in the information era cannot be separated from ICTs and other technologies, highly sophisticated telematics networks, etc. However the lesson has been dearly learnt that DC will have little impact, and surely no lasting one, if it is not culturally "translated".

The harmonisation of development with culture can become more of a reality if the DC facilitator approaches culture as action- and improvement-oriented. In their discussion of community intervention Rivera and Erlich (1995:203) define culture as a collection of behaviours and beliefs that constitute standards for deciding what is, what can be, for deciding how one feels about it, what to do about it and deciding how to go about doing it.

Not only should DC have its roots in culture as everyday life, but also it should also not be seen apart from popular culture. The term popular was taken from *popularis*, meaning belonging to the people, and popular culture can therefore be understood as that made by people for themselves. In a very real sense DC should focus on that which a community wants to make for itself within its own frame of reference. Van Staden (1997:53-54) finds that development discourse in South Africa is (at an academic level at least) shifting away from top-down notions of imposed development towards models of participatory development. "With regard to popular culture, such development should thus not concentrate only on the issue of production and/or dissemination and/or consumption (that is, the institutional deployment of popular culture), but on the very conditions of its production/dissemination/consumption within a social sphere that is increasingly shaped by transnational market forces (often to the detriment of vulnerable communities)". The discussion below is based on the premise that the process of developing DC tools, including popular performances and other forms of entertainment with a "message", cannot be isolated from globalisation, the mass distribution of popular forms such as fashion, etc. The tensions between "global" and "local" are clearly manifested at the level of the popular, as Van Staden stresses: "The popular - the site for enjoyment, relaxation, leisure, etc., the site of affective organisation - is also a site for development, as it is within the field of the popular where trajectories for empowerment or disempowerment may become visible" (1997:54).

Development

The very concept of *development* has become the site of an often vicious cultural contestation, and for sound reasons. Even though the focus of a particular development project may be on housing, physical infrastructure or land development, development is meaningless if the people who are living in these

settings do not remain central to the planning. And of course, the very nature of human habitation is determined by cultural contexts. As UNESCO's World Commission on Culture and Development points out in the first paragraph of their report (1995:15):

Development divorced from its human or cultural context is growth without a soul. Economic development in its full flowering is part of a people's culture. This is not a view commonly held. A more conventional view regards culture as either help or a hindrance to economic development, leading to the call to take "cultural factors into account in development". But the argument advanced in this Report is that development embraces not only access to goods and services, but also the opportunity to choose a full, satisfying, valuable and valued way of living together, the flourishing of human existence in all its forms and as a whole. [...] Culture's role is not exhausted as a servant of ends ... but is the social basis of the ends themselves. Development and the economy are part of a people's culture.

The Commission states that, if one confines the meaning of culture "to 'ways of living together', and if by 'development' one means 'the widening of human opportunities and choices,' then an analysis of culture and development refers to 'a study of how different ways of living together affect the enlargement of human choices'" (1995:24).

The challenge facing DSC/PC proponents is to establish the perception that economic development is part of a people's culture, instead of viewing culture simply as a kind of appendix to economic development. This is particularly difficult in a country such as South Africa, where the gulf between the haves and the have-nots is growing instead of diminishing - in spite of the introduction of the utopian Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). It is almost inevitable that economics will dominate development discourses.

A "culture of poverty" is one of the most fundamental and broadest points of departure for development; it refers to an entire way of life. For many impoverished South Africans the very concept of "development" has acquired a negative reputation, particularly since it has been "popularised" by the RDP. To many of these still marginalised people, the RDP means little more than "promises, promises". Since developmentalism has internationally created more expectations than anyone can hope to fulfil, it has in many cases bedevilled rather than improved people's quality of life. As a cultural phenomenon on its own, the RDP has at least been very influential in placing development on the national agenda, including the focus on the role of culture in development. The focus of the national GEAR (Growth, Equity and Redistribution) strategy on economics has moved the limelight away from culture.

It is essentially within the DC field, and in particular at the level of the cultural production and exchange of meanings, that the most crucial questions about the

nature and processes related to development will have to be asked. In the first place the concept of "development" will have to be problematised, along with the discourses of development (surveyed by Crush, 1994, Norgaard, 1994, Servaes, 1995 and Agunga, 1997).

In his critical discussion of the concept, Esteva (1992:10) points out that it cannot delink itself from the words with which it was formed - growth, evolution, maturation. The word always implies a favourable change, but for two-thirds of the people on earth this positive meaning "- profoundly rooted after two centuries of its social construction - is a reminder of *what they are not.* It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition" (1992:10). When culture is seen as giving meaning and quality to life, as growth and self-improvement, the serious implications of this perception of inferiority can be better understood.

It is clear that DC and development scholars, often informed by the critical positions of cultural studies, have been fundamentally rethinking the power/knowledge relationships underlying development, particularly since the 'nineties.[1] This intellectual movement is neatly summarised in the title of Apffel-Marglin's publication: *Decolonizing Knowledge: From Development to Dialogue* (1994). Dialogue, of course, is not only the heart of sound communication, but also of cultural interaction.

If DC facilitators are serious about situating any development process within a community's way and quality of life, of making and giving sense, they should realise that they can no longer use or even "sell" the concept of "development" as a panacea for poverty, inequality and misery. After tracing the historical evolution of the myth of development, Esteva concludes (1992:22-23): "Development has evaporated. The metaphor opened up a field of knowledge and for a while gave scientists something to believe in. After some decades, it is clear that this field of knowledge is a mined, unexplorable land. Neither in nature nor in society does there exist an evolution that imposes transformation towards 'ever more perfect forms' as a law. Reality is open to surprise. Modern man has failed in his efforts to be a god." It is ironic that the very forms of scientific-technological knowledge that developers previously used to lend credibility to their projects are now being used to expose the myths.

The metaphor of development in its modern guise may have evaporated, but development as a basic form of (self)-improvement of one's living conditions has to be as old as human communal existence. And DC was there from the beginning - maybe when Abel, the shepherd, gave Cain, the agriculturist, some unwanted extension advice. Certainly the optimistic uses of the term development persist everywhere, particularly in South Africa.

[1] (See Escobar, 1995, Sachs, 1992, Apffel-Marglin and Marglin, 1990 – locally Boonzaier and Sharp, 1988, Coetzee and Graaff, 1996, Kotze, 1997, Sonderling, 1997).

A situation of "post-development" can only be attained through cultural mediation and transformation. The essential DC challenge will then be to redefine the community's role from being passive beneficiaries of "hand-outs" by outside agencies, to actors using investments by these agencies for job creation, skills development and a process of growth that is determined and owned by the community. However, the process of "unmaking" development, Escobar (1995:217) warns, "is slow and painful, and there are no easy solutions or prescriptions. From the West, it is much more difficult to perceive that development is at the same time self-destructing and being unmade by social action, even as it continues to destroy people and nature."

DC and its variations in historical perspective

Old and new paradigms

After the brief survey of the key concepts of DC, communication, culture and development, their discursive interaction will now be traced historically, with emphasis on the role of culture.

The last quarter of the 20th century has seen what is sometimes called a paradigm shift in regard to communication for development. It is described as a movement "from the concept of development communication (DC) with its emphasis on top-down, big-media centred government-to-people communication to development support communication (DSC) focused on co-equal, little-media-centred government-with-people communication" (Ascroft and Masilela, 1989:16-17; see also Melkote, 1991:262). In one of the most recent surveys, Agunga (1997:223-268) traces the evolution of concepts and approaches to modernisation, dependency, diffusion of innovation and related theories.

By the middle of the seventies, in the area of development the quantitative or GNP (Gross National Product) paradigm had revealed itself to most "Third World" countries as unattainable and undesirable. All the alternative models seem to agree on six areas, including the following (Jayaweera, 1987:xvii): that the pursuit of modernisation was neither practicable nor desirable, that the "basic needs" of Third World societies should instead be satisfied, and that "(d)evelopment is unthinkable except within a framework of culture and that the customs, values and traditions of a people should be harnessed for development rather than be treated as impediments" (Jayaweera, 1987:xvii).

In spite of its obvious failures the discredited older DC model (simply referred to as "DC") seems to have been too easily stereotyped by DSC/PC proponents. To present the model in its extreme portrayal as a caricature, it can be described as top-down, one-way, mass communication-based, big media, "high tech", global, international, Westernised, Eurocentric, anti-traditional, academic,

(post)modernist, product- and profit-centred, imperialist strategies by Western manipulators to enslave the illiterate and impoverished, underdeveloped souls of the Third World.

Surely this set of assumptions should be subjected to critical enquiry as the site of complex cultural and political power struggles. Can large-scale development ever be divorced from mass communication and high technology in a country such a South Africa, where millions are in need of the most elementary information about health, education, employment, security, capacity building, etc.? The new millennium and the concept of the "information revolution" herald the phase to move away from the negative aspects of the much discredited "DC model" to a critical investigation of those features of the old paradigm that can be utilised constructively for the enhancement of the "new" paradigm. A cultural approach will highlight the "human" element and the possibility of using media campaigning to promote resource allocation and availability.

Development Support Communication (DSC)

The DSC approach was developed as a reaction against the old DC model by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN and various academics (e.g. at the Universities of Iowa and the Phillipines at Los Banos – Agunga, 1997:251). The key concept is *support*, because DSC is communication that is specifically designed to support a particular development programme. It can therefore work effectively within its limited sphere, even in the absence of DC throughout the rest of society (Jayaweera, 1987:xviii). In the comparative table of Jayaweera and Amunugama (1989:xix) it is pointed out that DSC differs from DC in the following respects: DSC applies to micro or local entities, it is goal-oriented and concerned with effects, time bound, message-oriented, uses a whole range of culture-based media, is invariably interactive and participatory, researching is easy, and it has gained enormous credibility.

Like most of the new DC approaches goal setting by the communities involved was considered to be essential in DSC. Unlike the authoritative, dominant paradigm, the exact nature and role of DC in the new approaches will depend on the normative goals and standards set by the host communities. "Communication in the new approaches could help in the development of a community's cultural identity, act as a vehicle for people's self-expression, or serve as a tool for diagnosis of a community's problems" (Melkote, 1991:270).

As has been stated, in South Africa the DC discourse has been underdeveloped until recently, and a potential debate was soon initiated by Sonderling's (1997:34) claim that DSC "is another made-in-America attempt at gaining compliance with the objectives of development initiated by the powerful Western development industry" (*sic*). This is no platform to fully engage in the debate, but it should be obvious that the paper's conclusion is in contradiction to the entire DSC

philosophy discussed above. A few responses to the paper are relevant to the present discussion.

In spite of early forms of collaboration between scholars who promoted the DSC approach (Agunga, 1997:251), no "DSC school" as such has emerged. Certainly the small group of DSC theorists singled out for the brunt of Sonderling's attack (Ascroft, Masilila, Jayaweerda and Agunga – without the benefit of Agunga's important 1997 book) represented no uniform movement with an influential agenda. Moreover, the critique is based on a one-dimensional model of DC, where the "DSC agents" are portrayed as being "double-agents of deception" because they are required to engage in the manipulation of images and messages between the "evil" funding organisation/"benefactor" and the "innocent" community. In this particular model the change-agents are engaged in "careful managing of the information and images of the local scene" in order to present an image of homogeneous rural community participating in development as is required by official policy (Quarles van Ufford, 1993:140). Safe to say that if and where such a situation indeed exists - and there is no denying that it is widespread - most DSC proponents will be the first to exclaim that it is precisely this manipulation of the cultural basis of DC that gave rise to the emergence of the new paradigms of DSC/PC.

Of course the critical questions about the power relations involved in DC should not be sidelined. Even if it is agreed that DSC is more of a philosophy and an approach in line with PC, a more nuanced framework for basic communication approaches in the DSC paradigm seems necessary. In this search for focus, culture could play a guiding role, as Mukasa (1996) believes in his argument for a retaxonomisation of development support communication. He bases his view on two knowledge generation frameworks: "(a) an indigenous cultural knowledge framework where people's experiences form the basic epistemological framework within which they define their *Weltanschauung* (world view) and (b) technical-scientific knowledge from research and cross-cultural analysis of other people's experiences." He believes that these two frameworks must have "a symbiotic relationship based on a dialectical hermeneutics or understanding through dialogue". One could of course argue that there are more than two frameworks, but Mukasa's focus helps to distinguish between people's view of their own reality and their attempts to change it, their knowledge and know-how,

Participatory Communication (PC)

Towards the last decades of the century the driving force of democratisation contributed to the emergence of concepts such as participation, empowerment and emancipation. DSC and approaches such as Another Development opened the way for a new model, not only for DC, but also for development in general. In a survey of DC theories. Servaes (1995:43-47) compares the diffusion/mechanistic model with the participatory/organic model. The second model coincides to a large extent

with some of the main characteristics of DSC. In this case Servaes (1995:46) emphasises the central role of cultural identity, empowerment and participatory communication. Two major approaches to participatory communication are today accepted as common sense: the first is the dialogic pedagogy of Paulo Frere; Frere insists that subjugated peoples must be treated as fully human subjects in any political process. The second discourse is the UNESCO language about self-management, access and participation (Servaes, 1995:46-47).

Participatory communication, needed to mobilise open-ended self-expression and self-management for self-development, was defined by UNESCO in 1978 as *the social process in which groups with common interests jointly construct a message oriented to the improvement of their existential situation and to the change of the unjust social structure* (in Mody, 1991:30).

It may not be necessary to distinguish too precisely what the DSC model within the larger, general participatory model means. Most HSRC (DESCOM) research associates (e.g. Agunga, 1996, Melkote, 1996, Mukasa, 1996, 1997) felt that the term DSC is not very important, but rather the participatory focus. Melkote (1996) explains the situation as follows: "Development support communication implies an agency-centred and agency-driven communication model. Participatory communication, on the other hand, seems to be more open-ended. However, there is the danger of overgeneralization and a lack of focus in the term DSC."

Theoretical squabbles aside, towards the end of the century the participatory model was in vogue and it left no doubt about the central role of culture. Norrish (1997) feels that books such as Servaes *et al.* (1996) and White *et al.* (1994) indicate some agreement about PC. She favours the summary of Lie (1997) that the effect/outcome of PC is "progressive, positive, societal change; favouring decentralisation, democracy, grassroots interests, interpretative and bottom up perspectives, local knowledge systems, two way communication and education, open ended, cyclical and horizontal processes, dialogue and discussion, involvement, awareness, commitment, conscientisation, empowerment and social mobilization".

Towards the end of the century there can be little doubt about the basic approaches of DSC/PC models that have been tested internationally. Still, relating these models to cultural contexts remains the greatest challenge for DC specialists. Any DSC/PC models that can have a measure of success in South Africa will have to take account of a unique set of circumstances, e.g. strong government intervention and control by means of the RDP, GEAR and state-controlled bodies, a high degree of illiteracy co-existing with sophisticated high information technology, rural isolation and poverty, vast cultural differences, etc. Given these variables, any development or DSC/PC model can have only limited applicability and will have to be adapted to local circumstances within a community.

"Top-down" development and DC	"Grassroots" development and DSC/PC
Paradigm: Dominant paradigm of externally directed social change Beneficiaries "developed" and "empowered" through intervention of benefactors	Participatory paradigm of an endogenously directed quest to maintain control over basic needs Self-development and self-empowerment
Model: Diffusion, mechanistic	Participatory, organic
Agency: Controlling or mediating agents and benefactors, directed from "First World" to "Third World"	Community-based or –related agency, or no agency. Roles of benefactors and beneficiaries are interlinked.
Communication paradigm: Linear SMR (sender-message-receiver) paradigm: an expert sender conveys the development message through an effective medium to the beneficiaries	Dialogic, horizontal and contextual communication; emancipatory and interactive
Information dissemination: Centralised, e.g. at community centres	Decentralised; oral, folk and traditional media used when feasible
Cultural contexts: Universal modern culture, to be shared by all nations Values, perceptions, etc., of controlling agents dominate	Unique cultural identity of the community Development in symbiosis with their world view
Source of knowledge: Technical-scientific knowledge "Expertise" of trained developers	Indigenous cultural knowledge framework. Wisdom of locals acknowledged

Table 1
A comparison between "old" and "new" approaches towards development and DC

Taking all these limitations into account, listing and analysing the contradictions between the "old" and the "new" by means of binary oppositions may be the first step towards the evolvement of a series of alternative local models. An important critique of this way of thinking has been developed by deconstruction philosophy and cultural theory, where binary divisions into "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad", etc., have been attacked as being a favourite Western way of representation and structuring "reality". While taking this critique into account, it may still be valuable to present a list of oppositions and the "paradigm shift" as a means of conceptualising and presenting two general approaches to development and DC. The hypothetical oppositions in Table 1 are based on the typical approaches of an "old" DC model as opposed to a DSC/PC model, from Melkote (1991:263), Jayaweera and Amunugama (1989:xix) and a variety of other sources. Only oppositions related to culture are highlighted here.

South African policies

The possibilities of cultural policies for development, even and particularly in the fast lane of the information super highway, have recently been recognised on a global scale - following the lead of UNESCO. Since 1994 South Africa has also seen a dramatic shift in focus towards ICTs and the possibilities for development opened up by the information revolution. The country hosted various influential international ICT-related conferences and played a pivotal role in the establishment of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI). Considerable academic attention has been given to DC theory, research and training, and in new policy documents the promotion of development information and communication is given priority.

At national level innovative approaches to DC will mean little if they are not translated into national policy and at the same time, related to international trends. National and provincial policy is at present being developed in the areas of communication and arts, culture and heritage.

Apartheid has ensured that even references to the role of culture in development have been contaminated. Apartheid "development" has resulted in the forced separation of "cultures". In its efforts to counteract the legacy of apartheid, the RDP seems to move to the opposite extreme of emphasising a "South African culture" as a holistic concept. While such an integrating approach could be important for nation building, it does not significantly recognise the importance of cultural diversity and heterogeneity that is central to DSC/PC approaches. As UNESCO's World Commission on Culture and Development concludes: "Attempts at 'nation building' through making all groups homogeneous are neither desirable nor feasible" (1995:17).

In South Africa the broad and idealistic approach towards development in the RDP is well known. This ethos is repeated in the macro-economic planning document,

GEAR. Development is usually locally seen as the process of "enabling people to achieve their aspirations by improving their present situation. This implies that people are helped to help themselves through a process of change, which includes development of skills, self-image and courage. Development also involves raising expectations to new levels and getting involved to reach those new expectations" (ESKOM, 1995:6). It is precisely the raising of expectations that gave birth to the widespread charge of non-delivery against the RDP.

The new South African arts and culture policy is based on a close link between culture and development. As stated in the *Draft White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage the* activities of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology are located "within the framework of reconstruction and development, through addressing its goals of meeting basic needs, building the economy and human resources development and realising the Growth and Development strategy" (South Africa, 1996b:8). Again, the development context is listed as one of the seven most crucial areas to address in giving content to a new dispensation, i.e.: "integration of arts and culture into all aspects of socio-economic development" (1996b:19).

The RDP Base Document (incorporated in South Africa, 1995) aims to ensure that cultural resources and facilities are made available to all South Africans, to conserve and promote our national cultural heritage, to entrench culture "as a fundamental component of development". Policy-wise, at least on paper, the door has been opened for culture to be integrated with development.

The *White Paper on Science & Technology* (South Africa, 1996c) leaves little doubt about the importance of information and communication: "The ability to maximise the use of information is now considered to be the single most important factor in deciding the competitiveness of countries as well as their ability to empower their citizens through enhanced access to information" (1996c:9). One of the five themes, which are regarded as fundamental to the expression of a sound science and technology policy, is: Promoting an Information Society. However without effective DC strategies there is little hope that communities will reap the fruits of the information revolution.

Development is afforded a special position in the emerging new national communication policy. The Communication Task Team (COMTAST) (South Africa, 1996a:65) identified the following as important features of the proposed development communication system (in addition to information dissemination and directories, the use of electronic devices and multipurpose community centres):

- "participation in innovative strategies of information-sharing for human development" and, most important:
- "acknowledgement that informal (indigenous) information plays a significant role in developing countries. A major development challenge is to harness this latent potential into a coherent contribution to the needs. of the government

communication service. Indigenous information is largely unstructured, very informal in extent and content, quite spontaneous and embedded in a cultural context."

There are clear indications that multi-purpose community centres and variations such as information or resource centres, but with the focus especially on telecentres, will in future play a major role in the dissemination of development information. This poses a challenging role for the DC facilitators at these centres, who should not only do the cultural translation of data and information at the centres, but should help establish a two-way communication flow that will allow informal, indigenous information to be fed into the system. Centres without the services of trained DC professionals (Agunga, 1997:241) have little chance of being widely used.

Imperialism and the "three worlds"

In general it seems that South African ICT- and DC-related policies are creating an encouraging climate for culture-based DC approaches. However, in the era of globalisation national policies cannot be isolated from global trends and the policies of transnational organisations such as the UN, UNESCO, World Bank, etc. In an age of global capitalism, many contradictory pressures determine contemporary efforts at community mobilisation and empowerment, as Agunga's survey (1997:17-168) and the case studies in Craig and Mayo (1995) illustrate.

The entire concept of development in and of the "Third World" and the manipulation of the concept of "three worlds" in development-speak (Worsley, 1984) has long been criticised. Inevitably the "Third" world is portrayed as inferior and "in need" of handouts from the "First" World. As was the case with apartheid, the concept of the three worlds is often based on vast cultural stereotyping. The African philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe (1988) even contends that Africa has been "invented" in discourse, and that African worlds have been established as realities for knowledge in Western discourse (1988:xi).

Since the Second World War development efforts by the North have done much to define cultural relations between them and the South. It has led to the fixed roles of "benefactors" and "beneficiaries", and the stagnant position of continual dependency. The radical questions about Western cultural imperialism in the name of development (Soyinka, 1994, Nyang, 1994, Stevenson, 1988, Nyamnjoh, 1996) and through the use of mass communication (Schiller 1971, 1976) are well known by now.

A number of scholars such as Herbert Schiller (1971, 1976) exposed the "cultural imperialism" of the American information empire in the early seventies. There is of course also another side to the coin. Stevenson (1988) defends the scapegoat of DSC proponents, the Western media. He questions the validity of the dependence

theory that viewed the world as a single system and found "imperial centres" which controlled the flow of goods, services, and capital between themselves and nations on the periphery of the system (1988:6). "Cultural dependency was a tidy and appealing explanation for the sad state of the Third World a decade or two after liberation from colonialism and it flourished in the hospitable environment of UNESCO" (1988:7-8).

Be it as it may, a direct challenge to "Western imperialism" is continually being posed by the approach of endogenous development, based on the traditional way of life and values of the community. Turning the focus around to self-development, self-empowerment, self-improvement, requires little less than a complete shift in mind-framing, but it is essential if the socio-cultural setting is to determine the development context.

In a post-apartheid South Africa governed by a predominantly black ANC government who gave birth to the RDP, where hi-tech development exists side by side with rural traditionalism, the stereotyped dichotomies of "developing the Third World" have little relevance.

UNESCO

The United Nations, and particularly UNESCO, played a significant role in placing culture on the development map. In the 1960s the dynamics of development were seen as a linear process. The development of Third World countries implies "catching up" with the advanced countries (Alechina, 1982:18). Growing disillusionment with the diffusion development model brought an about-turn. In the 'seventies the United Nations decided that all development should have an essentially endogenous nature. "By endogenous development is meant development that corresponds to the internal characteristics of the society in question, that takes account of its special features and its integrative qualities. When a country develops endogenously, its way of life should be based on respect for its traditional values, for the authenticity of its culture and for the creative aptitudes of its people" (Alechina, 1982:19)

Recently, at long last, there seems to have been a decisive breakthrough in the struggle to get recognition of the crucial role of culture - particularly with the release of the report of UNESCO's World Commission on Culture and Development (1995). The report resulted in the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, held at Stockholm in March 1998. With its main theme significantly named "Cultural Policies for Development", an international action plan to integrate culture and development was adopted by the delegations of governments across the world (UNESCO, 1998). One of its main objectives is: "Promote cultural and linguistic diversity in and for the information society." Particularly relevant to DC are the following guidelines for this objective:

- "Provide communication networks ... which serve the cultural and educational needs of the public" and encourage the commitment of the media to cultural development issues, such as "the promotion of local, regional and national cultures and languages, exploration and preservation of the national heritage and promotion of the diversity of cultural traditions and indigenous and national cultural identities".

- "Promote the development and use of new technologies and new communication and information services, stress the importance of access to information highways and services at affordable prices and the equal use of languages ..."

At the conference it was made clear that the media and mass communication were seen to be important partners in the promotion of cultural policies for development. In their proposed agenda for international co-operation and research for cultural policy which played a guiding role at the UNESCO conference, Bennett and Mercer (1998:15) identify the following priorities for culture and community development: (i) communications development programmes, with the focus on the role that the introduction of communications technologies can play in connecting isolated and remote communities to mainstream processes of economic and political development, and (ii) indigenous media systems that can facilitate a sense of ongoing cultural involvement and identity on the part of indigenous communities whose members are sometimes spread across vast distances..

In Africa none other that the Economic Commission for Africa was responsible for giving culture a prominent role in the comprehensive policy strategy of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI, 1996). One of the main challenges for the AISI is culture, and specifically the lack of knowledge about different African cultures and growing problems with the preservation of cultural heritage and access to cultural sites and artefacts (AISI, 1996:20).

Empowerment and participation

The kind of critical attention that cultural studies give to the manipulation of cultural power in society has obvious implications for DC. Particularly important is the misuse of cultural master codes, particularly of race, class and gender, to marginalise and disempower. Other codes that are used to structure communication in a biased way include literacy, education, elitism, age and technological expertise. All too often communication for development is conveyed by powerful, educated and middle-class men, in written and highly technical format. Cultural, political and other forms of hegemony and imperialism are maintained by means of these cultural codes. One example of marginalisation that has received attention in international literature lately (Riano, 1994), is the way the role of women in development has been underplayed for many years (Karl, 1994). The kind of critical analysis needed for an investigation of the underlying power relations

relevant to DC can be well served by the methodologies of postcolonialism, postmodernism, feminism and critical theory.

The notion of empowerment is an important social innovation that even meant the creation of a new concept; this results in people's direct participation in the decision-making process (World Commission, 1995:93). As Serageldin (1994:18) puts it: "Empowerment includes the power to express themselves to the full richness of their evolving cultural identities ... evolving by their own manifest abilities in response to their own wishes and aspirations. It is found in giving voice to the disenfranchized, in allowing the weak and the marginalized to have access to the tools and the materials they need to forge their own destinies". The recognition and use of cultural identity lies at the heart of real empowerment.

According to Singh and Titi (1995) in their survey of empowerment, the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development are only likely if the idea of empowerment and its practical institutionalisation in the law, the educational process and the machinery of government becomes a reality. DC techniques that do not succeed in having the marginalised articulate their own needs. and preferences are doomed to failure in the long term. In South Africa, the democratisation process has created a unique desire for personal and collective empowerment

Not surprisingly, cultural metaphors are often used to describe the process of empowerment. Ordinary people become creators, authors of their own destiny, narrators of their own stories, interpreters of their environments and the value systems that are central to endogenous development. Creative and enriching participation is the basis of "autonomous development", as Carmen (1996) calls the process. He sees development as an act of creation whereby people exercise their inalienable right to "invent their own future" as authors of an ongoing process of humanising and transforming the landscapes they inherit. Popular participation in the development process is the sure way of finding "a voice for the excluded" as Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) call it in the title of their survey of participatory struggles and initiatives.

People who write, tell, interpret, transform and participate in a creative way, are by definition centrally situated in any communication process. More often than not, communication originates from them.

All enduring forms of empowerment should begin with people's sense of place, time and identity, the way they see and experience themselves within their unique worlds and contexts. Ekins (1996) believes that sustainable development (according to the new paradigm) will increase human capability (and not only "satisfy needs.") and above all, will be environmentally sustainable. To him, sustainable development is a process that enables people, especially the less well-off, to realise their potential and improve their quality of life, while protecting and enhancing environmental systems that support their well-being and prosperity. This

focus on people/culture is vital; the world's leading environmental thinkers warn that "global ecology", seen in the managerial perspective, may degenerate into an effort to redesign and manage Nature in order to keep economic growth going in the face of a rising tide of resource plunder and pollution (in Sachs, 1993).

A survey by Wolfe (1996:92-178) lists the many problems of participation and communication still encountered in development internationally. They often originate at very basic cultural levels: e.g. "traditional" social groupings (family, neighbourhood, community, tribe, and religious congregation) are under attack. "From an economic-liberal point of view, the 'traditional' groupings are hindrances to a free market and to mobility of capital and labour" (Wolfe, 1996:95).

The challenge for development practitioners and researchers is to relate development communication and information directly to individual and community empowerment. As Melkote (1996) formulates the problem: "We cannot talk about bottom-up communication or co-equal knowledge-sharing unless there is a fundamental change or reorganization of the power structures. Village communities need to be empowered so that they be in a position to put forth their ideas as 'equal' actors in the process of development planning, design and execution." In South Africa the solution to this problem is already being sought in local development forums and the strengthening of civil society structures at the famed "grass roots level".

Local knowledge and cultural contexts

Experience with the HSRC research in rural and informal settlement communities shows that the development process is hampered by problems such as laborious processes of consultation and negotiation, a lack of ICT infrastructure, illiteracy and inherent limitations of development guides. Communities are generally notoriously suspicious of the involvement of "outsiders" such as researchers and developers (Malan and Grossberg, 1997).

It is clear that, particularly in rural areas, "alternative" forms of DC and information should be explored. The challenge is to recognise and use "local knowledge" and its cultural basis for development, and not rely on Western rationalism and prescriptions. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reports considerable success through its culturally sensitive development approaches, backed by its Development Support Communication Programme (Lowrey, 1995:10-11). A key factor of their accomplishment is attributed to culturally based community participation: "If we put the *culture* back into *agriculture*, perhaps the rural poor will get the chance to be the authors of their own development" (Lowrey, 1995:11).

Development needs and culture

The importance of development aimed at addressing the self-identified and basic needs. of communities has long been recognised in development theory and should always be the guiding force in DC strategies. This needs assessment usually leads to the elaboration of a national development strategy aimed at satisfying the basic needs of the poorer masses of the population (Alechina, 1982:61).

Still, a lesson might be learnt from the Organization of Black Communities in Colombia: "We don't know exactly when we started to talk about cultural difference. But at some point we refused to go on building a strategy around a catalogue of 'problems' and 'needs.' The government continues to bet on democracy and development; we respond by emphasizing cultural autonomy and the right to be who we are and have our own life project. To recognize the need to be different, to build an identity, are difficult tasks that demand persistent work among our communities, taking their very heterogeneity as a point of departure" (in World Commission, 1995).

In view of the emphasis on the economic basis of development, it was not surprising that the role of culture in development was for many years largely ignored. During a visit to South Africa Prof. Manfred Max-Neef pointed out: "We are dismantling cultures in order to establish economies. People are made to serve the economy, instead of vice versa. Yet we are told that it is the economy which will solve all problems. What we are actually experiencing is the worst case of impoverishment in history" (in Swarts, 1996:45).

Various needs addressed by development are concurrently culturally determined and based. Effective DC should take a variety of needs. into account. No one can deny the urgent need for development addressing the basic needs for subsistence in poor communities. However, Max-Neef and his colleagues have formulated a widely recognised theory of human needs for development (Max-Neef, 1991). An interactive system of nine such needs is proposed, viz. the fundamental needs for

subsistence	understanding	creation
protection	participation	identity
affection	idleness	freedom

These needs are stable and universal; the satisfiers are varying and numerous, changing according to cultures, circumstances, the environment, etc. In this paradigm people become subjects, rather than objects of the development process. According to the author, there is no possibility for the active participation of the people in gigantic systems where decisions flow from top to bottom. The role of culture and the arts in satisfying the needs for creation, identity, participation, freedom, etc., is obvious and should be emphasised

In terms of fundamental needs the RDP and many other development blueprints address mainly the need for subsistence, However the tide is turning - also in South

Africa. At a 1996 international symposium organised by the HSRC and UNESCO, "Culture, Communication, Development", there was consensus among delegates that development should be seen as part of culture, as argued by Thornton (1996), and that culture should be defined as an integrating development framework (see Mukasa, 1996), part of an institutional paradigm (Bekker, 1996). Some common characteristics of prevalent perspectives in the area of discussion that were identified at the symposium (listed in Malan, 1996b:5-8) were the following: emphases on interaction, empowerment, participation, co-equal knowledge-sharing, decentralisation, the importance of the human agent, and the dismantling of many "Berlin Walls" between cultures, countries and communities.

Culture was described as "a reformer's science"; it is highly normative if it is seen as a whole way of life for policy purposes (Bennett, 1996). All aspects of social, political, educational and economic life are "cultured". The symposium emphasised the need to establish multiculturalism together with multilingualism, promote diversity and give post-apartheid meaning to the concepts "multi-" and "intercultural". These priorities were reiterated and related to practical proposals at the follow-up conference/workshop in September 1997.

A number of South African publications and papers have indicated the need for new, critical approaches towards culture in relation to development, ICT-related areas and DC.[2] More case studies are urgently needed to relate the theoretical groundwork to local circumstances.

The functions of culture within a development situation

Even though the important role of culture in development is now widely recognised, development practitioners who have to deal with the concrete realities of economics, land and housing allocation, physical infrastructure, etc., often feel that the concept of culture is so "vague" and without boundaries that they have little use for it in their planning. The discursive decentralisation and expansion of the concept within cultural studies has done little to allay this scepticism. However, it is cultural studies that can contribute immensely to mapping out various functions and modalities of culture within development scenarios.

UNESCO's World Commission on Culture and Development (1995:82) lists some of the uses of cultural expression at the local or "grassroots" level; it has been used by development agents working with communities to strengthen group identity, generate social energy, overcome feelings of inferiority and alienation and enter

[2] Some relevant sources include critical approaches towards culture in relation to development (Boonzaaier and Sharp, 1988, Tomaselli and Aldrigde, 1996, Thornton, 1996, Malan, 1996c), ICT-related areas (Tomaselli, 1988, Tomaselli and Louw, 1996), discourse analysis (Levett, 1997), intercultural interaction (Steyn and Motshabi), local knowledge (Treurnicht, 1997) and including culture in development evaluation research (Klitgaard, 1993, 1996)..

the economy directly. Of particular importance to DC is the use of culture to foster democratic discourse and social mediation, help cope with the challenges of cultural differences, teach and raise awareness and promote creativity and innovation. (World Commission, 1995:82)

Cultural identity

The recognition of cultural identity is a way of ensuring that receiving communities do not remain passive during development. "With the preservation of cultural identity becoming a major issue among developing societies, the acceptance of the content of communication media across international borders includes an acceptance of foreign cultural values which could, perhaps, be antithetical to the values of the receiving society" (Reddi, 1987:51). Globalisation thus remains a constant challenge to the development of local communities.

Identity is constituted, among others, by the following factors that should determine the nature and success of development. The implications of these aspects for DC in a local context should be analysed by facilitators.

- *Worldviews and values.* As Rajasunderam (1997) emphasises, the participatory communication at the community level can only become a reality through meaningful human relations, driven by perennial values such as compassion and solidarity. Western, "First World" worldviews and values centring on modernisation theories informed the now discredited older forms of DC.

- *Knowledge.* Local knowledge, ways of making sense and "naming the world" (Freire), have been recognised as essential to successful DC. Knowledge should inform know-how.

- *Traditions.* Traditional ways of communicating, particularly those based on oralcy, should be utilised for DC.

- *Customs.* Communication may break down at the first level if customs such as the recognition of hierarchy, status and social position are not recognised.

- *Beliefs.* Beliefs in the presence and guidance of the forefathers and respect for their graves may have a considerable enormous influence on land development.

- *Symbols.* Carl Jung has illustrated the enormous influence of symbols that originate within the personal and collective unconscious. A single symbol within a DC context may say more than a thousand words.

Culture as a facilitator of development

Since the seventies culture has re-emerged as a facilitator of development, and not only as a backdrop to the development processes. Folk media and popular art forms can themselves very effectively be harnessed to convey messages for development projects, as has been illustrated worldwide. Since they originate from within the heart of culture, various folk media are particularly important (Ranganath, 1980), including folk theatre, puppetry, story telling, folk dances, ballads, and mime. They have served as vehicles for communication and entertainment for centuries (Melkote, 1991:211); however, locally, their potential for development support has scarcely been recognised.

Traditional media can of course also be misused for manipulation. In commenting on the use of folk media by development agents, a Latin American specialist Juan Diaz Bordenave warns that the agents' "obsession with goal achievement and not with human growth may take up these folk media as another set of instruments for changing a people's way of thinking, feeling and behaving. And this is not the purpose and the function of the traditional communications media. Their purpose is expression, relationship, communion, escape, fantasy, beauty, poetry, worship" (quoted in World Commission, 1995:83).

The danger of portraying traditional media in a romantic, agrarian fashion as an *open sesame* for unscrupulous developers should be faced. For people who experience these media as a natural expression of their lives and views, there is of course no "danger".

Some of the best known forms of cultural expression are the following:

Popular/folk theatre and related forms of performance. Community theatre, often improvised, has yielded spectacular results in developing countries throughout the world (Reyneke, 1996). It is often combined with other forms of performance mentioned below, such as song and dance. Locally, the scandal surrounding the production of the play *Sarafina 2* which was developed for HIV/AIDS education and caused an outcry when it was revealed that it had received state funding of R14 million, has undoubtedly seriously harmed the concept of using theatre and dance for conveying messages. On the other hand, it has introduced the possibilities of these forms of cultural expression as communication media to the public's attention.

Storytelling and other forms of narration. Since they entertain, command attention and have an intrinsic logic, stories and other forms of narration (dramatic, poetic, mimetic, and so on) have since times immemorial been some of the most effective ways of conveying a message. DC facilitators can learn much about communities and contribute to the preservation of "living culture" by inviting individuals to "tell their own story". These can be recorded and transcribed to be preserved as a part of the community's heritage.

Mime. This has been perfected to an exquisite art form in the East, but "primitive" man has always had a love of mime.

Puppetry. Man-sized puppets have been used with remarkable success for HIV/AIDS education in this country.

Folk dances. Again, the use of bodily movements to convey messages is probably as old as the history of *homo sapiens.*

Ballads and songs. The combination of various forms of narration with music has always had a particular kind of appeal - it combines entertainment with an effective transmission of a message.

Intercultural interaction

A range of intercultural relationships is part and parcel of development: developers are often Western experts who have to interact with "third world" people. A range of intercultural factors are relevant for DC: world views, values, ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism, experience of space and time, individualism as opposed to collectivism, etc.

Creativity and innovation

UNESCO's World Commission on Culture and Development points out that creativity as a social force is often neglected and that its corollary, innovation, is frequently seen as being in conflict with tradition (1995:81-82). The harnessing of the natural creativity and innovation that can be found in any community for DC will go a long way towards ensuring success. A well-known example is direct community participation in improvised community theatre that is used to convey DC messages.

Cultural factors of continuity and change

Even a DC facilitator with a sound knowledge of the community's identity, language, customs, etc., is often faced with the daunting task of systematically listing these factors in order to draw up a cultural profile of the community. When attempting to assess the extent to which culture and development are compatible, two categories of factors are distinguished by UNESCO. On the one hand, there are those that constitute the heritage and the history of a society (its continuity), and, on the other, the intrinsic creative elements and elements of change it contains (UNESCO 1995b:93).

Continuity factors (or slow variables) include modes of life, ways of thought and production, practices, customs, traditions, beliefs, value systems, events

experienced as cultural in their own right, languages and other forms of non-physical heritage.

Factors of change (or fast variables) include needs. and aspirations of the people, survival strategies; knowledge (science) and know-how (technologies, modes of social, political and economic organisation); creativity, migration and changes to the environment, economic exchange and trade. Important for the purposes of DC these factors of change also include spoken language (in particular ways of speaking and vocabulary), technology transfers and intercultural communications.

Indigenous socio-cultural forms as a basis for development

Colletta (1980:17) believes that there are three assumptions why indigenous culture is the fabric within which development can best be woven: indigenous elements have traditional legitimacy for participants in development programmes; these elements contain symbols that express and identify various valid perceptions of reality, and they serve multiple functions. The following social/cultural forms that he discusses - along with traditional leadership, socio-economic processes, organisational forms, etc. (1980:17-40) - have clear implications for DC:

- *Traditional communication systems* (social exchange, assemblies, etc.). Observers are often amazed at the effective and speedy way that notices of meetings, etc., are conveyed by word of mouth in South African townships and rural communities.
- *Indigenous knowledge systems* (farming practices, health promotion, etc.). Locally the importance attached to traditional healing practices is well known, and it should be considered when structuring health promotion messages.
- *Traditional aetiology and belief systems* (especially cause-effect relationships, religious symbols, etc.). It could have grave consequences for land development if community bonds with burial sites and the ancestors are not taken into account.
- *Indigenous technologies and transfer* (using local materials and resources, and the transfer of skills to use them).

A cultural approach is central to the Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal Methodology (PRCA) explained by Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi (1997). This methodology is used by field workers and extension staff to do participatory research as a first step to prepare a communication programme. It helps field workers to understand how people perceive and define their world, to get a profile of the community, to understand the information and communication networks of the community and their interaction groups, and in general to analyse community needs, problems and solutions.

Cultural translation

Since the DC facilitator is the linkage between all the development agencies and the community, he/she should do "translation" in various senses of the word during the facilitation process. The term *cultural translation* will therefore be used here to denote the very essence of effective DC. Basic data and information have to be culturally translated in order to have any lasting impact on development. This form of "translation" includes the following:

- *Relating basic messages and knowledge to the community's way of life and everyday experiences.* Illustrations and references to well-known situations, contexts or spaces are essential. Knowledge could mean very little if it is not related to the way people perceive and define their world – e.g., in a Zambian village the people did not implement most of the extension workers' recommendations because the villagers did not see themselves as farmers (Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 1997).

- *Linguistic translation.* If the DC facilitator cannot speak the community's language, which is of course ideal, it should be learnt. In the process of learning the change agent accesses and appreciates indigenous knowledge and learns local norms of interaction and communication (Robinson, 1997). In any case at least essential aspects of the message should be translated – this also serves as reinforcement if most of the original message is understood.

- *Re-coding writing-related messages for illiterates and even literates.* Illiteracy is without doubt one of the major challenges facing any form of DC in this country. The use of indigenous cultural knowledge and oral and non-written visual communication are crucial to effective DC in situations of illiteracy. But it should also be kept in mind that oral and visual media are generally more powerful in Africa than written media.

- *Presenting ICTs as user-friendly aids.* End-users should be guided to perceive all forms of technology as non-threatening. Illiterate people will not respond to a pamphlet, but may do so to a drawing or cartoon strip; computer-illiterate persons could be fearful of a computer, but may be persuaded to type a few pre-programmed commands, or use touch-screen technology.

- *Adapting development messages to the community's communication networks and systems.* This adaptation is necessary to identify and use the most effective channel, depending on the need for mass, group or interpersonal modes (Mody, 1991). With multimedia technology available, messages can be conveyed in a variety of stimulating and interesting ways.

- *Channelling information of international and national networks into local networks.* Local Area Networks (LANs) can be linked to the Internet, with many benefits. These intranets should be adapted to be as user-friendly as possible to the community. Introductions or summaries in the local languages

is one option. One skilled person can open the treasures of the entire World Wide Web to the community.

- *Negotiating the context-specific meaning of development itself.* This is probably the most crucial form of cultural mediation for the DC facilitator. In a typical "worst scene scenario" of development, the community could be faced with the possibility that developers will move into their village with large machinery, disturb their environment and leave them with an unwanted structure. The community representatives should therefore answer the following kind of questions put to them by the facilitator: "Given the fact that the developers have indicated that they would like to learn from you, what are your most important needs in this situation? How would you like to address them *yourselves* and how are you going to be involved as a community? In which ways are you going to take over ownership of the project?" It is equally important that this interaction should result in two-way communication and negotiation with the developers.

- *Establishing the cultural discourse within which the project will be executed.* Related to the factors listed above, the development project and process should therefore be situated within a specific *discourse*, a framework of meaning producing and sense making. Moreover the general development discourse are usually an integration of discourses at the levels of technical development planning (which could be imbedded in the culture of "technocratic developmentalism") and community involvement (which could be related to a culture of "politically expedient populism"). These discourses could differ considerably and it is the job of the DC facilitator to provide bridges between the discursive frameworks.

The list makes it clear that a variety and skills and knowledge are needed for cultural translation. Of particular importance are the areas of cross-cultural or one-way mass communication, intercultural or two-way interaction and interpersonal communication, and even comparative communication between "cultures", as studied by an observer (Thomas, 1987:5-6).

At a participatory level close interaction with the community is essential for good cultural translation. Since Rivera and Erlich (1995:203) define culture as a collection of behaviours and beliefs that constitute standards for deciding what is, what can be and what to do about it, their list of a community organiser's qualities include the following: cultural and racial identification with the community, familiarity with customs and traditions, social networks and values, and an intimate knowledge of language and subgroup slang, in addition to analytical, organisational and other skills (1995:208-221). Ideally these qualities also apply to the DC facilitator.

Negotiations and mediation are needed to deal with issues such as the following: (a) ownership, location and distribution of infrastructure, (b) transmitted values and the language of transmission, (c) content determination and formulation, (d) the purpose and process of skill acquisition necessary for community handling of tools, (e) programme extensiveness and effectiveness, and (f) the level of community participation in decision-making regarding the operation of facilities.

A considerable range of skills and knowledge is required of the DC facilitator who can do good cultural translation. He/she should have competence and knowledge regarding as many as possible of the areas of local languages, journalistic and communication skills, computer training and particularly the exploration of the Internet, development and literacy theory, management principles, etc. The competent DC facilitator will certainly see this formidable list not as an obstacle, but as a challenge.

Conclusion

If anything is to be "salvaged" from the much-tainted concept of development, the lack of progress in incorporating DC planning and research should be a cause for concern. One of the reasons for the present situation is the tendency to leave DC research and development to communication experts only. In South Africa they are a relatively small segment of the academic community, who have to cover an enormous field of communication studies. The survey above should point out the need for an interdisciplinary approach to DC research and planning. The essentially interdisciplinary cultural and developmental studies are the obvious areas where DC studies should be initiated, but a range of contributions from disciplines such as cultural and linguistic studies, economy, sociology, the information sciences, education, etc., are needed.

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