The socio-cultural contexts of development communication at the Tswaing Crater – a South African case study

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Abstract

The main discussion on the process of development communication as a core component of a sustainable development project at the Tswaing Crater Museum near Pretoria. The article initially surveys some local studies and lessons learned in an effort to contextualise the Tswaing project. Various approaches, such as Participatory Communication, and Development Support Communication are discussed and related to communication structures for the project. New forces in democratisation have contributed to the crucial role of concepts such as participation, empowerment and emancipation. These approaches rely on normative goals and standards set by host communities in the development of a community's cultural identity, and act as a vehicle for people's self expression. Socio-cultural contexts of the developmental and communication process are therefore specifically discussed. Finally lessons learned provide a means of recommending possible solutions to development communication problems.

South African case studies

Introduction

Quietly, without much public scrutiny, a remarkable development project 50 km outside Pretoria has been giving new form and content to concepts such as holistic development, community ownership and participatory communication. It is centred on an even more remarkable meteorite crater, the Tswaing Crater, which has been developed as an ecological museum in itself. The project, the Tswaing Crater Museum Development Project, will be the basis of analysis of development communication practices below.

The gigantic explosion of the meteorite two hundred thousand years ago resulted in a mountainous ridge around the crater. Within the water-filled crater no fewer than eight ecosystems have since evolved. Along the hiking trails the remnants of both Stone Age inhabitants and modern industrial technology - when salt and soda were extracted early in this century - can be found. "Modernisation" also heralded the

period when the greedy hand of apartheid tried to clutch the crater away from the people around it. Since 1993 the National Cultural History Museum has embarked on an ambitious project which is largely representative of the transformed democratic South Africa. The aim is to return a truly beneficial ownership of the crater to the people. In this case "the people" translates into no less than fourteen geographical communities.

In this process of transformation communication is crucial. Without effective communication it, it is possible that sustainable development and the restitution of ownership may remain a pipe dream.

Geographical, demographic, environmental, cultural and other contextual factors play a pivotal role in the conceptualisation and execution of the project. It is therefore fitting to survey some of these contextual factors and other case studies on local development communication, before focusing on the Tswaing Project.

In many respects the greater metropolitan Tswaing substructure is representative of the areas of this country where development is most urgently needed. The areas surrounding the Tswaing Crater Museum have over one and half million people, of whom a significant proportion is unemployed. Vast informal settlements exist, in many cases without basic facilities, water, or electricity. Numerous immigrants and refugees from neighbouring countries have also settled in the area. The problem of addressing local development needs is a perennial concern. Prior to the Tswaing Project, the rich cultural environment and good tourist potential have not attracted much attention from developers.

Since the greater Tswaing area is perceived as a "gateway" to the Gauteng urban area and living space is relatively freely available, Tswaing is experiencing the fastest population increase in the country. Rapid urbanisation brings with it many problems as it places huge demands on land, water, housing, transport and employment. The rate of urbanisation in South Africa has increased speedily since the 1950's. In 1997, 57% (21 million) of South Africans live in towns and cities, an average level of urbanisation of a Third World country. It is estimated that by the year 2010, 73% of the population will be urban - 43,7 million people.

Caught between the problems of impoverished ruralism and largely unstructured urbanisation, the Tswaing Project is grappling with the most challenging communication problems in such a complex development situation. After a previous political dispensation has isolated the communities from the crater for years, how can they be persuaded to take over ownership and become actively involved in self-improvement? How can they be convinced of the benefits of environmental sustainability when they have to use every available resource such as wood to survive?

The Tswaing Project has not provided neat answers to these questions, and maybe it never will be able to, but it has produced some viable possibilities and a fascinating holistic approach to development as a way of giving meaning and self-improvement.

South African case studies

The investigation at Tswaing will be discussed as a case study on development communication. The general, generic term "development communication" (DC) will be used in a neutral sense, without engaging in the theoretical debates between the "old" top-down DC and later approaches such as development support communication (DSC) and participatory communication (summarised in Malan, 1996:14-17). Many interesting and valuable DC case studies exist with regard to developing countries such as India, Ghana and the Philippines (Agunga, 1997b, Melkote, 1991). However it is at the interface between DC messages and very specific socio-cultural contexts that the greatest challenges for effective DC facilitation is located. Valuable as they may be, lessons to be learnt from other countries with their specific blend of cultures, languages, technologies, etc. will always have basic limitations.

There is a clear need for DC case studies in South Africa with its unique and diverse forms of cultural contexts (Agunga, 1996, Mukasa, 1997, Malan, 1996a). Some guidelines can be deduced from two Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) research programmes which will be discussed below.

Relatively few case studies with a specific DC focus have been produced locally; some will be surveyed in the next section. As frequently happens, also in other countries, DC is mostly seen as a "natural" part of a development project and does not receive any particular attention. In the absence of a considerable body of research, generalisations in this regard are based on the formal and informal interviews that the authors have had with a number of development stakeholders.

The range of these stakeholders gives a good indication of the bewildering variety of interests and considerations that have to be taken into account in typical DC situations. The stakeholders who were consulted for the larger research programme include *DC and development theoreticians* (national and international), *development authorities* at national, provincial and local levels (mainly in Gauteng and Northwest), private sector *developers* (representing development agencies, mine companies, ICT groups, etc.), *funders* (the DBSA, IDRC and other sponsors), *non-governmental organisations* (NGOs, operating at a trans-community level), *community-based organisations* (CBOs, working within the community, such as women's, youth, cultural and church organisations) and the most important role players in any successful development project: the ordinary *members of the community*.

Inevitably, the strategic planning and project phases of all experienced developers interviewed gave a clear indication that the most important DC aspects such as consultation, information-sharing and participatory communication were incorporated into the planning. However if communication planning is not treated as a strategy on its own, it could result in serious communication problems. In local case studies this has been pointed out by Henning and Louw (1996:3-4), Louw (1995), Grossberg and Malan (1997) and others, but also in many international case studies (Agunga, 1997b, Melkote, 1991).

In their Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) study, Henning and Louw (1996:11) recommend that the DBSA should clarify and develop an approach to communication in its development activities. They base this on local and international case studies, including those of the United Nation's affiliated Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). FAO records the successes of a development programme in Mexico after the use of multi-media communication processes to bring about participatory planning. The project led to a 50 % increased income for 3 500 families and the evaluation of the programme showed that communication played a decisive role at every stage: planning, increasing participation, training and evaluation. The Mexican experience also showed that a DC strategy costs relatively little: it absorbed only 1,2 % of the costs of the infrastructure by the end of the first phase in 1983. FAO suggests that on large projects a communication element should absorb approximately 1 % of total project costs, and on smaller projects around 10 % (*ibid:*5).

Local case studies

Some local case studies will now be summarised to give some background to the discussion of the Tswaing case study. They were selected on the grounds of their relevancy to the DC issues under discussion here. Only a few essential features and findings will be highlighted in each case – since there are as many positive as negative sides in a development situation, it must be stressed that the quoted conclusions are those of the authors.

The Nkomazi irrigation expansion programme (Visser, 1994, Louw, 1995:57-58, Henning and Louw, 1996:2) was typical in the sense that it did not have communication as part of the original planning. When a communication component was later requested and therefore "added" by HSRC consultants it was in the form of formal "information" (information centres) rather than the form of facilitative dialogical communication (Louw, 1995:57). For this separate DC project the author felt that little account was taken of existing interpersonal communication flows and folk media in the affected communities. Communication could then not deal with the strong lobbies and power-politicking in the affected area, and the grapevine became the more important (and effective) means of communicating project information. This project also did not seem to be conceived

as a means of creating multi-directional and multi-voiced communication (Louw, 1995:58).

In contrast to the Nkomazi programme, for *the Winterveld Development Programme* (Henning and Louw, 1996:3) communication was regarded as a major issue during the planning phase. This was a R150 million agency programme to upgrade the peri-urban township. In spite of the communication planning the notion of a DC component worthy of support by the funders was not planned and budgeted for, and consequently could not be sustained. The community did make several attempts to produce local media such as newspapers, directories, a programme report, calendars and a video (Henning and Louw, 1996:4). Since Winterveld is also one of the communities involved in the Tswaing project, this programme is of particular importance as a case study. It should be noted that a consultant employed for a limited period as an advocate and a facilitator for capacity training needs was effective in strengthening the development organisation's weak points, particularly the feedback to constituencies. His role seems to coincide with that of a typical DSC facilitator.

The Masakhane information campaign (Burger, 1997 – see her article in this edition) seems to offer a more viable model for comprehensively planned and sustainable DC. The campaign model is based on the premise that the need for information can only be satisfied through intensive and sustained two-way communication, which will lead to a better understanding between the community and the local authority. Even though the project is an information campaign rather than a development project, important lessons can be learnt for local DC.

The Cape Grassroots community media projects (Louw, 1995:58-61) present important models because the various newspapers were intended to be owned and controlled by the communities they served. They demonstrated the valuable role that communication projects can play in their own right as vehicles for community building and in capacity building. However they experienced serious financial difficulties and illustrated how the grant funding of such media can lead to an unhealthy dependency on external sources (Louw, 1995:59).

Lessons learnt from the case studies

Although the managers of the Tswaing Crater development project had very little local DC literature to guide them in their planning, it is fruitful to compare their experience with the lessons learned from local case studies. These include the following important ones:

• Communication should not be taken for granted in a project and should be planned specifically for each project phase. This should be part and parcel of the initial planning.

- It is difficult to turn around initial top-down communication processes; informal communication flows should be fully recognised.

- Budgets and planning should be aimed at sustainable, longer-term DC activities, such as the continuance of a newspaper or newsletter, and regular reports to stakeholders. Reliance on continued external funding should be limited as far as possible.

- South Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity makes it vital that facilitators should relate the project to the community's socio-cultural context.

- In the volatile political situation in developing areas where power hierarchies are constantly being contested, any DC planning should take into account the recognition of local authorities, lobbying, the competition for scarce financial resources, etc.

- Generally, multi-directional and multi-voiced communication is the best method to serve the interests of democratic participation and a free flow of information. Multimedia and in particular a range of local media such as newspapers, newsletters, directories, programme reports, radio reports, calendars and videos should be explored.

- Many more local DC case studies and "best practice" guidelines are needed to supply guidance in the complex communication situations where languages, skills, knowledge, etc., are unequally distributed. In spite of the general lack of recognition of DC in this country, local academics De Beer and Swanepoel also include a DC guide for field workers (1996a) in their range of field manuals for development field workers and practitioners (1996b, 1996c). They deal mainly with basic DC concepts and processes, such as consultation and conflict resolution.

The Tswaing Crater development project

Research context

The case study of the Tswaing Project can now be discussed within the context of similar local case studies. The research formed part of the HSRC's Development Support Communication (DESCOM) programme of 1996-1997. The programme aimed to analyse, develop and test communication strategies that are used for community development and empowerment (Malan, 1996a, 1996b). Theoretical contributions and reports on case studies were presented at two international conferences in Pretoria, in 1996 and 1997 (see individual references below).

It was important for the DESCOM programme that local case studies should feed into a holistic regional and African approach towards the use of information and

communication technologies (ICTs) for development. These larger contexts were analysed by Cogburn (1996), Agunga (1996, 1997a) and Mukasa (1996. 1997). Lessons learnt in various regions are some of the most valuable contributions to the African Information Society Initiative (AISI).

Practical and cultural aspects of the DESCOM research were partly informed by the Cultural Reconstruction and Development (CURED) programme of 1994-1997 (Malan, and Grossberg. 1997, Malan, 1996c). This consisted of eight regional projects in the Western and Eastern Cape, KwaZulu/Natal and Gauteng. The cultural activities and needs of historically disadvantaged communities and cultural CBOs were the main focus of investigation and development. Needs. assessments therefore were the first phase of each subproject. Communities were assisted to initiate the cultural development projects of which they took over ownership.

As an operational definition for the CURED programme culture was approached as a way of life, incorporating the total man-made environment, material and non-material. However the focus was on the *functions* rather than the characteristics of culture: how do people live, work, farm, play, etc.? How do they make sense of and give meaning to their lives, what is needed for the subjective quality of life that makes them content? How can economic development keep pace with human development, in a way that development can enhance personal dignity and fulfilment, in accordance with personal and community values? Most of these questions also were the guiding factors in the Tswaing project.

Preliminary CURED research results suggest that some "Western"-styled cultural development processes can be introduced fairly successfully at historically disadvantaged communities in an urban environment. Although it is clear that DC and development-related information should be adapted for different communities and purposes, basic DC and information usually is needed about phases and contents such as the following (Malan and Grossberg, 1997): initial consultation and involvement of community representatives, workshops to plan a self-survey and follow-up community project, a self-analysis by the community organisations to determine their own strengths, weaknesses, skills, resources, etc., needs assessments by means of surveys, etc., impact studies and workshops to plan follow-up actions. Initial training courses to train facilitators should then have the benefit of manuals/guides for facilitators and organisations.

Historical background of the Tswaing Crater Museum[1]

Approximately 220 000 years ago a meteorite of 50 m in diameter formed a crater 50 km. north-west of Pretoria, one of two such craters in the country. It became

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[1] For background about the crater and its history, researchers relied on existing research by the NCHM (in particular De Jong, 1995, 1996). The NCHM used sources such as an investigation of the crater structure (Brandt, 1994), analyses of mineral resources (Chamber of Mines, 1936), geological surveys (Wagner, 1922), etc.

known as Tswaing (salt pan) because it contains a unique saline lake that leaves soda and salt deposits along its rim. In 1993 the National Cultural History Museum (NCHM) acquired the land on which the crater is situated and initiated the development project. Until then the Department of Agriculture mainly used the area for experimental farming. The NCHM began developing the whole site of some 2 000 hectares into an enviro-museum - a new museological concept in South Africa. Involving the local communities and other stakeholders, the development project was initiated in a holistic and participatory way.

There has been and still is a close relationship between Tswaing and the neighbouring communities. For the Tswana-speaking people, Tswaing is of significance due to the fact that as long as 800 years ago their ancestors began visiting the area to collect salt from the crater. The crater is of ritual significance for a number of local church groups and some of them regularly collect water and salt to be used for ceremonial purposes. Many local people believe the crater is to be a site with supernatural connotations, and it occupies a place in local myths and legends.

By virtue of its many historical, cultural and developmental bonds with the community, the Tswaing museum complex has the potential to become an active and strong community resource centre, generating revenue for the local communities through tourism, and providing opportunities for recreation and environmental education.

During his opening address at the international symposium "Culture, Communication, Development" held at the HSRC in Pretoria on 29 August 1996, the then Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr B.S. Ngubane (1996), publicly acknowledged the importance of the Tswaing Project. He believed that the location of the crater is of extreme importance to the rapidly developing urban areas surrounding the site and has to be seen to be planned as a future urban open space rather than a rural nature reserve. "As a site museum, Tswaing will conserve, document, research and interpret the natural and cultural heritage of the site in a holistic and integrated way. It is this kind of integrated planning, that takes the needs of the surrounding community into account, which forms the direction that cultural developments must take. It is in this way that the potential which culture has in economic regeneration can best be illustrated."

The process of creating the museum has been one of negotiation, education, assessment, rethinking and adaptation, of involving the community at all stages of planning. The Tswaing Crater and its surrounding area constitute a tangible cultural heritage resource belonging to the communities themselves. A total of twelve geographical communities have been involved in the development project: Soshanguve, Nuwe Eersterus, Kromkuil, Winterveld, Swartdam, Soutpan, Mabopane, Kromkuil, Motla, Ratjiepane, Mmakanyane and Mogogelo.

Another area of concern is the empowerment of the community to improve their quality of life. Of specific relevance are the cultural tourism and craft industries, which will provide job-creating growth for the communities. Apart from creating jobs (initially by means of wood cutting projects, the training of tourist guides and creating a market for arts and crafts products), the project has provided health care guidance, entrepreneurial skills training and environmental education, and has started waste recycling projects.

Following lengthy processes of meetings and consultations needs analyses were conducted by the NCHS, with needs being classified under the categories: conservation/environment management, recreation, education, training and research, tourism and regional community needs.

A large part of the overall success of the communication strategy should be attributed to the fact that a vision of growth and hope for the future is constantly conveyed in interactions with the community. The major project phases are the following: the establishment of a museum building next to the crater, an educational centre where environmental education will be a major part of the curriculum, and a cultural centre where crafts will be produced. These structures, all built by the communities, will hopefully lead to an influx of tourists and job creation.

Research project and methodology

The HSRC research project was aimed at describing, analysing and evaluating development communication processes at the Tswaing Project, and contributing towards local models for DC. The investigation was conducted during 1997-1998, mainly by the authors, but also with contributions by their colleagues from the Centre for Communication Research at the HSRC.

The investigation was of an interdisciplinary nature, with the emphasis on communication, development and cultural studies (Grossberg and Malan, 1998). The basic theories and practical approaches of the DSC/PC paradigm (Malan, 1996b) were taken as guidelines for the analysis and evaluation of the communication process. The participatory research model was used: it is built on the "multiplicity in one world" paradigm (Servaes, 1989) and the basic aim is to involve the people under study co-operatively in the planning and research process, with the planner or researcher as a facilitator and participant (see also Melkote, 1991:240). Community participation is also essential in development planning and project management (Ramberger, 1988) and for designing DSC messages (Mody, 1991).

In this case the researchers participated in the Forum and Planning Committee meetings; one of them also gave talks at the cultural days and helped plan a youth

development strategy. However it was decided to initially observe the communication process with limited involvement to avoid influencing the process.

The research was entirely qualitative, and the main phases were a literature study, participation in three international conferences where the relevant DC issues were discussed, observation and analyses of communication flows and processes by means of participatory research, face-to-face interviews with the major role players and eventually a comparative analysis of other local DC case studies. These were also complemented with analyses of the communication media used for the project.

The nature, origin and contexts of information flows were considered to be of central importance. A range of cultural, environmental and other contextual factors are taken into account in the communication between the change agents (the museum personnel) and the community representatives.

In order to understand how people at Tswaing perceive and define their world and to get a profile of the community, aspects of the Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal Methodology (PRCA) were used. As explained by Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi (1997), this methodology is usually used by field workers to do participatory research as a first step to prepare a communication programme. It helps field workers to understand the information and communication networks of the community.
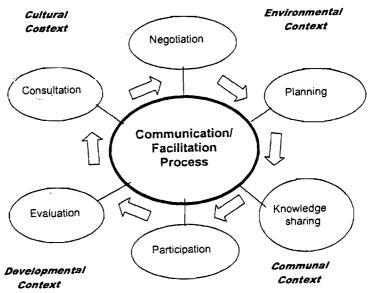

Figure 1
Communication and facilitation process

Three complementary models (presented in Figures 1 to 3) were used to highlight various aspects of communication for purposes of analysis and description. Since the origin of the development process was agency-based, typical contexts and facilitation processes of Development Support Communication applied (Figure 1). The major features of the Sender-Message-Receiver communication model also had to be analysed, with culture playing a central facilitating role (Figure 2). Within these larger contexts the information flows between the major role players were plotted (Figure 3).

The Tswaing DC process is typical of the general process of development support communication because it is agency-based and processes of facilitation, consultation and negotiation are therefore essential. A DSC/PC model of such facilitation is represented in Figure 1. Participatory and supportive communication is sensitive to all **contexts**, in particular cultural, environmental, developmental and communal contexts. The DC process will usually move through the **phases** of consultation and negotiation with the community, strategic development planning and interaction by means of knowledge sharing and participation, and an ongoing process of evaluation. If evaluation indicates problems such a sustainability, a renewed situation analysis and consultation will follow. Although the process is therefore basically circular, it will often become multi-directional and phases will overlap.
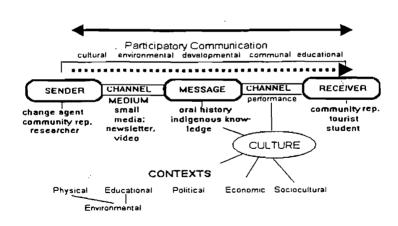

Figure 2
Central aspects of participatory communication

In addition to the holistic DSC contexts the most important **components of participatory communication** can be reduced to the well-known linear Sender-Message-Receiver communication model (Figure 2). The participatory process of communication can be of a cultural, environmental and developmental nature, depending on the interest groups involved. At the basic communication level a sender (such as the development agent) sends a message to a receiver (e.g. a community representative), as indicated by the dotted line.

In a successful participatory communication situation the sender will receive feedback immediately from the receiver who in his/her turn takes over the role of sender and involve other community representatives. Dialogue will ensue and the communication will therefore become multidirectional (arrow at the top).
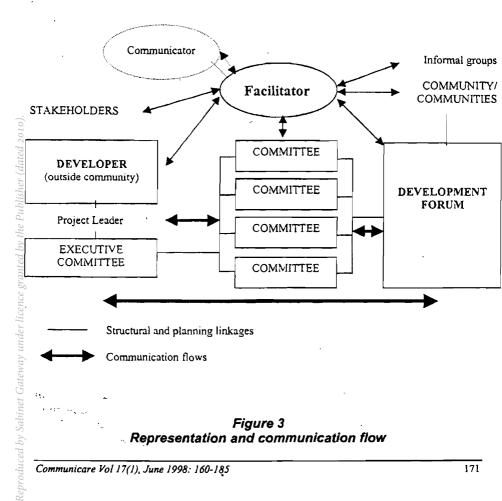

Figure 3
Representation and communication flow

The various participatory aspects can be illustrated in the case of the Tswaing Project. A range of cultural, environmental and other factors are being utilised in the communication between the change agents (the NCHM personnel) and the community representatives, public, etc. In typical DSC/PC fashion a holistic approach to the various contexts (physical, educational, political, etc.) is adopted and small media, such as a newsletter, are used for communication. The crucial mediating role of culture is fully acknowledged in the project; aspects range from recognising the important messages contained in indigenous knowledge to the use of performance to convey messages.

Essential communication aspects of the DC model were analysed: message design, media, contexts, audience composition and reception, etc. A number of typical DSC/PC actions were described.

For the DC project it was crucial to plot out the role of the various role players in the communication process and analyse the communication flow between them. For this purposes the model in Figure 3 was used. Information flows were mapped by identifying sources of the most influential information, formal and informal groups participating, the direction of information flows, etc.

Figure 3 not only portrays a fairly typical DSC/PC communication situation for smaller projects, but also to a large extent represents the situation of the Tswaing project.

- The **Developer** (in this case the Museum) will inevitably play the leading role in planning and the DC process if the planning is based outside the community. Strategic directions and a vision for the project will be the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the development agency, here the Museum Director.

- The Developer conducts its day-to-day business and planning through the **Executive and Planning Committees.** In this the **Project Leader** plays a kingpin role. Although he should have close contact with the community and other stakeholders, such as funders, it is often also expected of him to do all the communication work of the (DC) facilitator.

- Specialised planning and research is done by specific **working committees.**

- Ideally, the **Development (or Community) Forum** should be the most powerful body in the chain of decision-making and communication, with the power to decide on the general priorities of the larger development programme and new projects. Various sectors of the community (e.g. women, church and youth groups) and at least other major stakeholders are represented here. In the

case of Tswaing, the twelve surrounding communities and all committees are represented in the Forum.

- The **stakeholders** are all parties with an interest in the development project, in other words everyone listed in the figure as well as funders, suppliers, researchers connected to the project or outside of it, etc. It is essential that funders in particular be fully informed of the project's progress.

- The **facilitator** has the crucial role of facilitating between all major agents in order to keep the development process on track and translate messages, literally and figuratively, between the parties. Often this function is allocated to a consultant who cannot even speak the community's language(s). Ideally, in smaller projects the facilitator should also be the main professional communicator, responsible for a newsletter, information sheets, the use of multimedia, etc. In larger projects the facilitator should direct, or have a major involvement in, the activities of professional communicators responsible for specialised tasks. At Tswaing the facilitation and communication roles are divided between the Project Leader, the editor of the newsletter and the person who has to do the most important facilitation work, the Curator.

The main features of the model were incorporated in the structuring of the Tswaing development process. In October 1993 the Tswaing Forum was established in order to involve interested and affected parties in the planning and decision-making process. Serving on the Forum are representatives of local communities, specialists like museum scientists, botanists, zoologists, business people, geologists, educators, agricultural scientists, and representatives from various non-governmental and community-based organisations. The Forum is open to every individual and organisation interested in Tswaing.

The Forum's members also serve on four working committees, namely (1) Planning; (2) Science and Technology; (3) Tourism, Education and Training; and (4) Finance and Fundraising. The Forum has an Executive Committee, comprising the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of the Forum and the four committees. This Executive Committee co-ordinates the work of the working committees.

In the analysis the guiding questions to describe the communication processes were the following (Richardson, 1998):

- Is the dialogue centred on problem analysis and are people communicating with each other to find solutions for their problems?
- Is it bottom-up communication that raises the awareness of decision-makers to those problems?

The most important part of the description and evaluation of the communication process consisted of mapping information flows (Lawrence, 1998). This entailed

identifying the sources of the most influential information, listing formal and informal groups participating, the direction of communication, etc.

The central aim of this mapping was to plot the way communication takes place by tracing and drawing typical communication patterns in two cases:

1. Communicating major planning decisions between the community and project management. (Example: There is a need for a project aimed at selling arts and crafts.)
2. Communicating major problems experienced by the community between themselves and project management. (Example: Most participants in a particular project feel that they should be paid for their time and effort.)

Communication functions of the communicator team

Although there were no communication functions assigned to a single team member, a number of team members shared the most important communication functions between them. These functions are the following (the names of team members at the time of the investigation are mentioned at the end):

* Agency CEO
*   Actively leads the general communication activities of the communicator team.
*   Conveys vision, mission and strategic direction of the project to all stakeholders.

* Project Leader
*   Manages the day-to-day communication of the Project and takes the lead with important aspects such as capacity building.
*   Supplies information about strategic planning at most project meetings and workshops.
*   Consults all stakeholders about strategic planning, with the focus on the Forum.

* Tswaing Museum Curator
*   Represents the most important communication linkage between the Project Management and the community.
*   Does the socio-cultural "translation" of planning.
*   Interprets the community's feelings, wishes, etc. at the level of everyday operation.

* Working Committee Chairpersons
*   Guides committee according to development vision and policy, and interprets the Forum's directions for the committee.
*   Reports on committee activities at Forum meetings.

* Editor of the newsletter
*   Compiles and distributes the newsletter.

- Interprets and reports on the various phases of the project, particularly as reported at the Forum meetings.

Communication and interaction between the stakeholders

The project has the relatively unique benefit that the Chief Executive Officer of the agency, the NCHM director, is an expert on most cultural and environmental matters relevant to the project. He played a key role in formulating a vision and mission as well as a development strategy for the project. These he frequently conveys at occasions such as cultural days and during tours to the crater for some stakeholders, when he himself is the expert guide.

Not only does he speak one of the local languages, Zulu, fluently, but he relates many anecdotes about the importance of the local fauna and flora, customs, beliefs and so forth. He takes particular pride in the herd of spotted indigenous Nguni cattle on the farm, which have uniquely adapted to African circumstances and problems such as the Tsetse fly. Some of his cultural publications include a survey of the central cultural role of cattle in African culture. By way of illustration he refers to some 150 descriptions of colours for cattle in the Zulu language.

He does not believe in the Western nature/culture dichotomy. At Tswaing, he maintains, "nature is culture", and continues to list many examples of the cultural significance of natural artefacts and systems. Small wonder that he states: "A museum without walls is more important than a walled one." Although he wants to explore various forms of technology beneficial to the community, and particularly indigenous technology, he believes that rituals, beliefs, customs and the interaction between people and nature are more important than technology as such.

The CEO delegates all important project-related management and communication functions to the Project Leader, a member of the NCHM staff. He also practices "hands-on" management and knows all major stakeholders in the various communities personally. Part of his communication portfolio is to attend various events such as youth days in individual communities. It is highly appreciated that he often attends these events during weekends. He takes pains to inform and teach the Forum and other representative structures about the basics of sustainability and participation when introducing planning or reporting. He considers capacity building as the most important aspect of communication: "Every meeting with the community is a capacity building exercise," he says.

Both the CEO and the Project Leader communicate freely and easily, with effective use of humour, and both see to it that central aspects of their messages are translated, usually by the Museum Curator. When feasible, the CEO will himself switch over to Zulu. The Curator is regarded as the "on site" representative of both the NCHM and the community, She hails from the community and lives at the crater. Pains are taken that she is informed about all planning aspects and interact

with all role players involved. The Curator, the editor of the newsletter and the committee chairpersons not only attend Planning Committee and Forum meetings, but play a pivotal role in them.

Challenges to communication

During the planning phases of the project many communication problems had to be faced. The Tswaing situation exemplifies the rapid urbanisation and its many social challenges. The project had to consider the fast population growth and influx of rural migrants, the constant challenge of providing jobs and livelihoods, a lack of leisure activities in many areas, volatile group relations and other tensions that fray the social fabric. Conservation problems are much more complex at such sites because of the multiplicity of stakeholders and communities involved. Cultural and political diversity in the region, a history of conflict, and the changing social context dictate that a development of this sort must be sensitively and carefully planned. The development of Tswaing should also reflect the cultural diversity in the region.

Initially, there was no communication with the communities in informal settlements. The NCHM set about planning and implementing development activities. The process began with consultation and involvement of key stakeholders and identification of and negotiation with community leaders.

At this stage, one of the main objectives was to enter into dialogue with representatives from all sectors in the surrounding areas, and in the process to build trust within the communities. Conflict negotiations and intermediaries were at times required to bridge the gap - in one instance, the fact that the Museum Director was *au fait* with the language and customs of the people provided him with the means to be able to win over community representatives and even gain respect from them during difficult moments. (He recounted that during a meeting with the groups who felt left out, he managed to conciliate them by using a bull image in his argument, illustrating that he understood their idioms and customs and could emphathise with them).

The project was introduced to community leaders through a series of exploratory and consultative meetings. Permanent structures were then set up for consultation and meetings, namely the Tswaing Forum and the four standing committees. This strong network of committees was formed during the initial design phase, in order to set objectives and strategies for projects.

This was followed by a collaborative analysis, consultation and survey for a needs assessment. A strategy was decided on, needs articulated and results were fed back to stakeholders, and recommendations made to local authorities. Directions, priorities and responsibilities were decided in pragmatic terms.

Information and participation

Communication links between all role players had to be sought through trial and error. Measures to encourage participatory communication were a constant challenge throughout deliberations. In encouraging participation throughout the process, the developers have had to find mechanisms to build synergism of ideas of all role players, encourage participation and co-operation, test feasibility of plans and sensitise through debating issues. A main strategy was to find reliable indigenous solutions to development problems, such as creating local cultural industries, assessing resources and strengths and developing infrastructure that would effect and benefit communities.

Together with the community, committees and the developers, various plans were considered to develop infrastructure on Tswaing that could be economically beneficial and contribute to the sustainability of the project. Sustainability is a critical issue debated, as communities would be reluctant to participate in a venture that did not have long-term plans. The positive aspects of all features were not always apparent to all communities.

Communication methods

Basic planning and decision-making is repeated at every stage, and reiterated captured through minutes presented at meetings. Time and care are taken to explain the minutes and all aspects of the development of Tswaing to all members.

Meetings always have a set structured agenda, feedback through minutes and have a Chairman, etc. This gives stature and importance and meetings are taken seriously. At the meeting views and criticism are respected and taken seriously – they are always acted upon.

After attending a training course as tourist guides, trainees were asked to come up front at the Forum meeting and inform the committee how they felt about their training course, and what they had gained. They conveyed the enthusiasm generated and had developed a sense of pride. This reinforced the participatory experience and creates a sense of encouragement not only amongst the participants of the workshop, but the committee themselves. A common learning is facilitated and the potential of collaboration for solving conflict is underlined.

Community representatives constantly consult with their respective communities. This also helps local people to form and strengthen their own organisations. After lengthy consultation a development master plan was created together with specialists in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, conservation, etc. The developer in conjunction with other stakeholders oversees designed development project policies, specifications, blueprints, budgets, and technologies needed for the progress ahead.

An exhibition consisting of maps, models, drawings etc., is available in the "conference area" (a shed) of Tswaing, serving the purpose to educate and inform locals and visitors about the significance and history of Tswaing. It is also used to update people on current and future developments.

Numerous media and methods are used to disseminate information. A video was produced by a local television company to present background information about Tswaing. This is an excellent means of promoting good public relations. Brochures and exhibitions are also readily available. A Tswaing Newsletter is published quarterly to provide a means of communication with the community and stakeholders. Local people are encouraged to publish their views, and they are also kept informed about needs, decisions, plans and progress.

In addition to infrastructural projects a number of capacity building projects are planned through the Forum. Experts such as scientists, engineers, geologists, cultural practitioners, etc., communicate their knowledge to other stakeholders. They are urged to aim at a balance between technical and local expertise. The local people are encouraged to "speak for themselves" as they are the "experts" on what they want and need.

The role of culture and indigenous communication systems

As could be expected from a cultural history museum the crucial role of culture was fully acknowledged in the project. Without any specific planning endogenous DC practices were to a large extent based on existing indigenous communication systems. Environmental messages such as the preservation of nature were conveyed by means of traditional folk media of communication: storytelling, dance, performance, etc. (Baron, 1998). Frequently organised cultural days are very popular, with full participation of the community and particularly the youth of all age groups. Even though most of these cultural performances are not aimed at overt development communication, they convey a strong sense of community involvement, cohesion and commitment. Community leaders, including youth leaders, at the beginning of the cultural programme usually convey these messages.

Through trial and error the development committee of the NCHM established a *modus operandi* for participatory communication that can be regarded as a model for this particular form of development. The main communication principles that were established are the following:

Emphasis on ownership by the people. Not only was the message "This is your project" repeated to the collective community at meetings, in circulars and newsletters, etc., but more importantly it is also clearly stated: "This is your crater and your museum". The NCHM is the caretaker, but the land, the crater and the natural resources belong to the people. The salt of this "salt pan" is used as a potent symbol, because initially it was a scarce and treasured commodity, and

surrounding communities were allowed to share some of it. The benefits of involving socio-economically deprived communities in development projects of this kind are obvious. There are numerous talents and entrepreneurship potential in the communities that can be put to good use.

The process of consultation. Members of the development team like to tell the story of a lesson learnt the hard way. Although they took pains to involve all stakeholders in deliberations from the first phases of the project, it happened that the representative organisation of the "homeless people" felt that they had not been consulted. They mobilised and the previous Curator was chased off the premises with threats of "necklacing" (the gruesome practice of execution by means of a burning car tyre). It took many months of careful negotiation to repair the damage.

The process of participatory communication. The most important decision-making structure, the Tswaing Forum, is composed of, and led by, community representatives. Care is taken to inform all representatives of developments by means of minutes of meetings, the introduction of new stakeholders and development representatives, the presentation of development plans, etc.

Using culture as the basis of communication. As part of their holistic and endogenous development model, the development committee uses many forms of localised cultural practices, traditions, heritage, etc., to communicate the concept of "building our community". The cultural festivals are some of the highlights of the calendar, and it is important to note that these are usually organised by the youth committee. The various processes promote the preservation of cultural heritage amongst the younger generation, specifically amongst those people who tend to absorb urban popular culture and lose track of their roots.

Using existing indigenous knowledge and socio-cultural symbolic forms in communication. Cultural research by the NCHM is used in popularised form for the explanation of development considerations, environmental, health and other forms of guidance, and talks for tourists and other visitors. Full use is made of indigenous knowledge systems, e.g. farming practices related to the herd of indigenous Nguni cattle on the museum farm. A survey of the medicinal and other uses of plants found within the crater context has been compiled. Traditional aetiology and belief systems are taken into account in explanations of the bonds between man and the environment, e.g. regarding the healing powers of the crater water, the continuing initiation rituals, etc. Religious practices are respected and some denominations are allowed to perform their well-established rituals within the "sacred" context of the crater. The local "mythology" has been researched and is being kept alive; apparently the myth of the water snake that appears at night in the crater originated in an effort to discourage salt thieves in the era when communities took turns to fetch salt.

Using popular and ethnic culture for communication. Both an international popular culture and ethnic cultural forms are used for effective communication, specifically with the youth. During a particularly successful cultural day attended by thousands, a Coca-Cola truck complete with a collapsible stage and sound equipment provided the stage for thunderous pop and ethnic songs and dances. Both ethnic and ballroom dance groups performed, together with drum players and karate clubs. Members of the youth committee wore T-shirts with cultural mottoes that identified them as organisers. They had to accept final responsibility for all arrangements, even the preparation of food. A free feast prepared in traditional iron pots further strengthened the sense of community and sharing.

Affirming identity and using local languages. In a situation where no fewer than twelve communities are accommodated, the problems of establishing community cohesion and involvement are enormous. However for the project the recognition of all communities' identity, value and dignity was paramount. The Project Leader rightfully boasts that along the way all eleven official languages of the country are used in the project.

Main communication problems

In the interviews, the communicator team members agreed that the most important communication problems were illiteracy and a limited understanding of English. The language medium of the Project is English but the Project Leader estimated that almost 50% of the community do not understand English. Translations have to be used and he maintained that all eleven official languages are involved. He believed that people also do not have the necessary technical and other background to fully understand the project, and therefore considered it important to develop capacity building.

Creating an awareness of the issues involved is difficult as is getting processes into motion. A team member felt that for many community members a workshop is intended for personal empowerment and not participation. They want to take notes back to their communities to show what has been done and there is little input from their side.

There was general agreement that visual communication should complement the important oral communication, particularly in addition to written communication. The Research Committee Chairperson felt that the comics in the newsletter are very effective. People understand much better when they see a picture. Architect drawings and scale models were used to illustrate building projects. For training purposes the practical and concrete illustrations are essential.

Since communication within the limited scope of the Project works fairly well, it is understandable that only one team member identified communication with each of the larger communities as a basic problem. "How can only two representatives really

represent an entire community and how effective can their report-back be? Under what mandate are they there?"

This goes to the heart of a general problem with the Project, namely, that the Tswaing Crater "belongs" to so many communities. A limited involvement and sense of ownership is inevitable. Still, the situation may change considerably once the various structures on the site have been built and streams of tourists visit the area regularly.

A team member felt that stakeholder involvement should also include political representatives and local authorities, and saw it as a problem that it has not been done enough so far. Generally, linking a development project with the local political power structures is seen as an important task of a DC facilitator.

In such a vast community as the greater Tswaing the discrimination between classes presents basic communication problems. There is little interaction between informal settlers and landowners. This is another reason why political representation is important.

As a general conclusion, it is almost inevitable that the main communication flows in the Project remain top-down – in spite of the major role players' best efforts. Factors such as the vast geographical area and problems of representativity obfuscate concepts of ownership and bottom-up participation. The researchers recommended that the Forum should sometimes experimentally be "forced" into a position of ownership and responsibility. The principle is simple: to break the pattern of stimulus-response transmission of information, whereby the development agencies inform the community about a new phase and ask their responses and eventual approval. In the experiment, when community interests are paramount the Forum meeting will have no agenda and the representatives will have no choice but to decide themselves how to proceed. Representatives can easily be conditioned only to react to existing planning and not be involved in real problem-solving.

Research findings

Some important DC and development lessons can be learnt from the Tswaing experience.

- *A holistic communication approach is essential.* Most community development projects are aimed at human resource development, empowerment, the affirmation of identity, environmental protection and above all sustainability. For the Tswaing project a holistic and endogenous communication approach was selected as the only way to reach these goals.

- *Full constituency participation is imperative.* There are no "quick fixes" for getting community involvement and participation, as was painfully experienced when the curator was chased off the site.

- *A communication plan can prevent problems.* Initially there was no specific communication strategy for the project, and this may have resulted in the communication problems already mentioned.

- *Commitment and involvement takes time.* Full participation and the acceptance of ownership may take years – something which commercial developers often feel they do not have. However if this is the price for sustainability, it may well be worth paying.

- *Old development models die hard.* Central features of the well-established Western development model still persist at the Tswaing project, almost inevitably, but the strategies of the NCHM have illustrated how these can be effectively balanced by participatory practices. Of these a comprehensive and endogenously based communication strategy is one of the most vital components.

- *Top-down communication cannot always be avoided.* In spite of the project management's best efforts, the ideal situation of bottom-up, participatory communication was still not fully established at the time of the investigation. "Management" basically determined the development agenda and was instrumental in explaining decisions already taken, e.g. about major building projects. In these cases the communication flow was mainly from the developer to the community and aimed at conveying information and getting approval. Still, the community expressed no substantial problems with this state of affairs, probably because management took pains to explain the planning by means of scale models and maps, and invited comments.

- *Formal and informal communication should be balanced.* It should be noted that the community representatives themselves prefer formal, structured and even solemn forms of communication during Forum and other meetings. Development planning meetings are opened and closed by prayer in a local language, at the request of the local representatives. However informal exchanges and communication making use of pop, ethnic and folk forms and recreational activities are the life-blood of day to day communication and community cohesion.

- *Planning to benefit from information and communication technologies (ICTs) should form part of the holistic planning.* Although the need for a telecentre at the crater was expressed at one Forum meeting, the community had very little direct benefits from ICTs. The researchers recommended that the establishment of a community telecentre be investigated as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Over a five-year period communication at the Tswaing Crater Development Project has proved itself to be an exemplary model for culturally, environmentally and communally sensitive development communication. On the one hand it is remarkable that all the stakeholders could have evolved the DC system described above without the benefit of initial strategic DC planning. On the other hand the success of the endeavour proved that the basics of the DC process had a solid foundation right from the beginning.

Acknowledgements

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