BOOK REVIEWS

Participatory communication for social change

Servaes, J., Jacobson, T. & White, S. 1996. *Participatory Communication for Social Change.* New Delhi: Sage.

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The motivation behind the publication of this book lies in the observation by Jan Servaes that, despite the widespread interest in the subject, the issue of participatory communication and its related research has a relatively low profile. It is further suggested that although many authors have dealt with the issue, they have not enjoyed the publicity they deserve, thus limiting the availability of contemporary input concerning the subject. The authors hope that as the publication is being handled by a major publishing house; *Participatory Communication for Social Change* is well placed to overcome some of these problems.

The two primary objectives of the book are to present different perspectives regarding participatory communication processes, and to provide a platform for the sharing of various case studies conducted in the arena of participatory communication in development. The volume is expressly intended to target both academics specialising in related fields as well as those working in the field at a grass roots level. It is stressed that the book is not only intended for those working within the field of communication, but that the ethos and processes described should become an integral part of any development initiative. Facilitators of any project (development or other) hoping to promote self reliance and self determination, will find the ideas conceptualised in the book invaluable.

Part One of the book explores the perspectives surrounding the issue of participatory communication in development: it specifically attempts to engage in the linking of practice to theory, and in the ideological dimensions of the subject. It provides a focus on structural factors and power dynamics which have inescapable implications for the process of development communication in a variety of ways.

The second section explores methodological perspectives where participatory approaches to the research processes are examined, as are areas of participatory communication in research. An examination is made of the indigenous/ outsider interface, between researcher and community. There is a renewal of the focus on the ethical dimension of the relationship between the researcher and the researched: the position of the researcher in relation to their subjects, as well as to the community of the subjects is questioned. As we all know, the position of the researcher is essentially that of an outsider in the social, cultural and geographical sense. In addition the nature of development initiatives is to effect some kind of social change, and a neutral position is difficult to justify in the setting in which the development and participatory communication research process necessarily occurs. Njoku Awa (chapter 7) posits that the potential merging of indigenous and scientific knowledge systems could become a powerful corollary of the research process. The authors also grapple with methodological issues of how to characterise developing countries, how and why to study development communication, and the different ideas which have developed from the concept. At the root of this questioning is the relationship between researcher and theorising. In addition the reader is not allowed to forget the fact that the ideology of the participatory research process is often contradictory with respect to the ideologies of the existing power structures where this type of research and development process is needed most.

The third part of the book explores issues arising in the translation of theory in practice. Case studies are discussed in an attempt to move towards a theoretical position on the subject of communication, participation and development. It concludes by examining different perspectives in development in the search for a theory that fits the concepts of participation, development (a neat link up of the first two parts of the text). Here the book supports the notion that each piece of work must necessarily broaden the theory/practice relation, rather than allowing such issues to grow of their own accord, thereby producing a hackneyed and hybrid account of the issues which are constantly grappled with.

The sense that this was yet another edition addressing a hot topic' could not be escaped. It is clearly written for the academic notwithstanding its commitment to practice. Thus despite its good intentions it remains inaccessible to the development practitioner due to its abstract and ideological nature. This perception is increased by the idealistic nature of the content and discussion. Whilst there is no doubt that the book does "trigger your thinking and catalyze your exploration" (pg. 9) on a range of issues it seems to slither off certain points. For instance the financial implications of the participatory approach, which in our cash strapped economy is assuming more and more relevance for many involved in the development field, is not really addressed.

Despite the above I found this a very conceptually interesting, controversial and well produced book. I would strongly recommend it to anyone interested in the

development field, not only for the wealth of conceptual information involved, but also for the inescapable sense of reverence for human dignity and difference conveyed throughout the text. In addition it clearly encourages and accepts the creativity inherent in participatory and communicative approaches.

Images and realities of rural life: Wageningen perspectives on rural transformations

De Haan, H & Long, N. eds. 1997. *Images and Realities of Rural Life: Wageningen Perspectives on Rural Transformations*: Assen: Van Gorcum.

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Changes in theoretical and methodological approaches in the Social Sciences, towards participatory people centred' inquiry and analysis of the everyday social construction of reality provide new opportunities for interdisciplinary studies of social dynamics. The introduction to this book claims simply to provide a sample of recent work by staff of the Wageningen Centre for Rural Development Sociology. However for this reviewer it surpasses the parochial nature of much of rural sociology, and has a far greater value than the introduction suggests. The text has, with clarity and inspiration, drawn links at a multitude of analytical levels, between state centred development interventions of the recent past and current locality and empowerment focussed interventions.

The book covers fairly diverse subjects, from theoretical approaches to development interventions, social movements, changing values and environmental sociology. Despite this diversity there is a definite common theme, asserting the importance of local agency, identities and local agents in mediating and transforming the impact of globalization and modernity. Opposing as it does, claims of the homogenising influence of modernity, the contributions draw out the dynamic articulation and interpretation of global events, ideas and new technologies as they encounter local histories, images of reality and local culture. Several fertile areas for cultural and communications focussed research into rural areas are highlighted by the contributions. Particularly, inquiry into the impact of new communication technologies on identity and the emergence of 'virtual communities', new social constructions of value in response to the spread of Neo-liberal paradigms and the impact of images of rurality and environmental conservation in tourism on the rural landscape and society highlight fertile areas of research into rural societies. Other equally interesting contributions consider discourses as political resources constructing identities through which state authority and power is exercised and/or resisted in development interventions.

The book is divided into four parts which introduce and explore different aspects of the central theme. Part One provides a theoretical framework for the contributions which follow, introducing dominant themes of the social construction of diverse realities and mediation of global processes through local agency. Long argues in favour of an Actor Oriented Approach to understanding and analysing specific arenas and institutional domains of action, the processes of knowledge/power construction entailed in these arenas and the critical interface, or points of contradiction and discontinuities between actors and institutional domains. This approach suggests an illuminating framework through which the construction of and interaction between social representations, culture, social and politico-economic institutions and structures can be analysed with human agency as an integral and reflexive force. Discourses and locally situated cultural perceptions are negotiated and contested as they encounter diverse perceptions and experiences. The Actor Oriented Approach elaborated by this author seeks to methodologically ground analysis in detailed studies of everyday life, and address " the intricacies and dynamics of relations between differing life worlds and ... processes of cultural construction. In this way one aims to understand the production of heterogenous representational and discursive domains, thus mapping out what we might describe as a cartography of cultural difference, power and authority" (Long, 1997:4).

Themes which re-occur in following chapters, of social domains and arenas in which contestation over values and resources takes place and the construction and contestation of discourses as resources in power struggles, are introduced and elaborated with clarity, illuminating future research directions. This chapter also considers the impact of globalization and transnationalization on culture and identity, arguing that culturally constructed social fields and spaces make possible new imagined communities' detached from fixed locations.

Part One includes a retrospective view of development anthropology at the Institute, highlighting the usefulness and limitations of anthropology for practices of development intervention, and an inquiry into the discourse of the rural' in an age of globalization. In his chapter, Van der Ploeg attempts to identify characteristics of the rural', the relationship between urban and rural and the nature of rurality which this constructs. In an intensely thought provoking discussion, he highlights craft, the co-production of man' and nature', as a central feature of the rural and the basis for a reconsideration of the family farm. He argues that rather than the rural-urban continuum, what is evident is a rural urban divide, specific rural social structures and rural identities.

Part Two operationalizes the action oriented approach, focussing on governance, intervention and social movements. Contributions in this section highlight the negotiations, contestations and accommodation which occurs at a local level as development interventions take place, constructing new local identities and relationships between state and society. Nooij's contribution in this section argues

that development policy of the 1950s (what he refers to as Modern Regional Development) was typified by an exogenous, civilising' modernisation project, and based on the implicit assumption that regionality was an irrelevant parameter. This encouraged national identity and attributed increasing responsibility to the state for the welfare of its citizens. He identifies the emergence of Endogenous Rural Development' in response to the growth of conflicting interests, as new ideas and concerns emerged and the physical mobility of the population increased. While ERD is not always a paradigm reflected in policy, it is a discursive paradigm which reconstructs idealised values of the rural', re-invents local heritage as symbols of identification for local inhabitants and tourists, and elevates the capacity and necessity for local control in the face of state intervention. He explores the implication of the articulation of Modern Regional Development and Endogenous Rural Development and suggests that rurality' has become a conscious resource with which a version of modernity consistent with local conditions is constructed by rural inhabitants. Other contributions in this section consider the complex interdependencies between state, the market and civil society, the intervention ideologies which state officials apply in their localised struggles with beneficiaries, and the negotiation and multi-polar nature of discourses through which situations are defined and capacities for action assessed and constructed in social movements. In her contribution Hilhorst shows how Philipino villagers mobilise traditional and national resources and cultural repertoires, and how the discourse shifted from local conflicts around the construction of dams, to more general issues of indigenous rights and regional identity. She argues that collective action discourses emerge out of concrete experiences and that the contestation of discourses is a form of power struggle through which relations between groups or actors are shaped.

Part Three of the book draws out the significance of local actors and actor networks on mediating processes of commoditization and globalization. While actor networks may include organisational and institutional actors at a global level these contributors argue that people, in struggling to solve their own livelihood problems, give new meanings to global messages and processes. De Haan argues that the relevance of culture is not being subsumed by global homogenising forces, but rather, that

> "... local culture can be seen as a means of orientation in local and global society and as such its significance is more important than ever. It not only colours the interpretation of what happens locally, but also translates modernity' in a locally specific direction" (De Haan, 1997:160).

Working from this perspective, he suggests that global processes and phenomena originate from specific local contexts from which they escape', become decontextualised and are re-embedded elsewhere, constructing superficial similarities between localities and the impression of global origins. Chapters by Alberto Arce and Heninck, and Douwe van der Ploeg argue that global processes

must be translated by local actors in order to acquire material and social significance, and that cultural repertoires mediate farmers reactions to technological changes and the market. Long continues this theme of local mediation of global processes, by focussing on how social value is constructed through social encounters of everyday life. His chapter considers the intersection of discourses and value frames through which economic liberalisation and privatisation values, based on the power of the market and the efficiency of private enterprise, are fortified, transformed or subsumed by other values associated with notions of family solidarity, community interest or social entitlement. He explores contested foundations of value and argues that commoditization is an ongoing process that involves social and discursive struggles over livelihoods, economic values and images of the market. In this sense agency entails a complex set of social relationships or actor networks made up of present and distant individual, organisational, institutional and discursive actors in which communication technologies and the media are important influences.

Part Four of the book examines the emergence of the environment' as an integral aspect of the rural' and considers the changing conceptions of the environment and nature' and how these impact on notions of rurality and rural society. Working from the perspective that ecological systems are socially constructed and defined in permanently evolving discourses of society, Frouws and Mol argue that Ecological Modernisation Theory facilitates the analysis of the active and reflexive re-design of institutions of modernity as the ecological sphere is disembedded from the economic sphere and becomes increasingly independent. Modernisation' in this sense is analysed as a process of disembedding of social relations from local and traditional structures and contexts; society is differentiated into independent spheres as social relations are re-arranged across world wide time-space distances' (Frouws and Mol, 1997:270). These authors argue that Ecological Modernisation Theory facilitates an understanding of environmentally induced changes in Agriculture, as ecology has been lifted out of other spheres, and assumed an independence from which ecological rationality has emerged in parallel, with equal value to economic rationality. This emancipation enables a new re-embedding of ecology in modern, scientific-technological, economic and state institutions.

Van Koppen's contribution considers the social representations of nature' in nature conservation claims and considers the consequences of these representations for integrating agriculture and nature conservation. He argues that there has been a shift from the Arcadian tradition of ecology, which presented the myth of a rural idyll inherently opposed and external to human society, to nature technology. Nature technology' focuses on recreating rural idylls rather than simply documenting an already existing idyll, and involves an awareness of the natural processes of nature, even in response to human action. Van Koppen argues that this emergence, which he terms nature management' is a consequence of modern highly industrialised society and offers opportunities for agricultural craftsmanship to survive in renewed forms' (Van Koppen, 1997:287). Other

contributions in this section focus on the impact of tourist images on the countryside and the emergence of, and issues involved in the problem' of sustainable tourism.

For this reviewer this book offers not merely an idea of ongoing work at the Wageningen Centre for Rural Development Sociology, but also inspiring analysis of the impact of globalization on rural society from an action oriented perspective which highlights the potential for dynamic interdisciplinary analysis of rural society and identity.

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To be continued: Facing development communication problems of the 'Third World'

Agunga, R.A. 1997. *Developing the Third World: A Communication approach* Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

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In this wide-ranging survey of development trends and approaches in the so-called Third World, and particularly Africa, Agunga emphasises the pivotal role of communication. He moves from an introductory chapter on understanding development to a systems approach to development, then argues a case for communication in support of developmental projects, and finally proposes a communication strategy for poverty alleviation. According to the information leaflet, the study "is particularly aimed at the need of development agencies for a strategy to effectively mobilise the poor majority for participatory development". The controversial term "Third World" is specifically preferred because the developing countries are still united by their "commonwealth of poverty" (p. 3). Communication for development (or DC, as the abbreviation will be used here, although Agunga prefers to use it for referring to the "old paradigm") has emerged as a discipline and strategy for empowering communities to become the architects of their own development.

Other influential DC publications of the 'nineties (Servaes, Jacobson and White, 1996; White, Nair and Ascroft, 1994; Melkote, 1991) tend to focus on DC in relative isolation, with summaries of the "old" forms of development initiatives and the unsuccessful diffusion theories and efforts as a backdrop. This book is unique in its wide coverage of essential elements of development - development history, initiatives, statistics, theories, etc. - before the focus narrows down to the Development Support Communication (DSC) paradigm.

Agunga therefore offers students, development practitioners, policymakers and scholars comprehensive information on development experience over

the last 50 years of this century, identifying the pitfalls and suggesting ways they could be overcome. He argues that often development funds are wasted and sound policies abandoned largely due to poor implementation. Limited capability of field workers in dealing with the dynamics and complexities of the development process poses a major hindrance to sustainable development.

To a large extent the book's value lies in the grand historical and theoretical tour of theory and praxis that is offered to the reader. The lesson has long been learned that only a holistic and comprehensive approach can make sense of the much-maligned concept of "development", or "maldevelopment" (Amin, 1990). In spite of the critique of older approaches to development, in the final instance Agunga seems to accept that development in its fairly standardised form of an agency-directed process is not only a given fact, but even desirable. Although he discusses the many shortcomings of the history of development in Africa, the book takes the position that "development is possible and it offers a strategy for realizing this goal" (p. 9). He does not fully engage with the rigorous critique of development as a concept and practice controlled by outside agencies and directed at the "Thirld World" (by Escobar, 1995, Amin, 1990 and many others), and the most important critics are not included in the bibliography. This neglect still leaves him open to attack by critics such as Sonderling (1997).

The book specifically addresses the human capacity issue in developing countries, regarded as the key to successful development. Agunga believes that many of today's development concerns -empowerment, leadership, building effective teams, collaboration and managing - centre on communication and can best be addressed with a social scientific approach to communication in development.

The author therefore has a clear and well-developed agenda. At various stages he takes off his "scientist" hat and urges governmental, non-governmental and other development organisations to provide development communication skills training for their employees as the basis for enhancing their capacities so that they, in turn, can enable beneficiary participation in decision-making. When he resorts to advocacy Agunga is of course at his most vulnerable, as Sonderling's (1997) critique of DSC

shows. Sonderling frequently singles out Agunga's emphasis on agency functions in order to "unmask" DSC as a "double agent of deception".

On the other hand the author's subjective commitment and passionate arguments could have far more impact on decision-makers than the usual "subjective" listing of facts. He does not allow the reader to forget that in 1996 eight of the world's ten poorest countries were in Africa, a continent that has paid dearly for its reliance on Western development promises and short-term handouts. It is regrettable that Sonderling did not have this book available when he wrote his critique of DSC. His attack is largely based on the assumption that DSC proponents are actually collaborating with agency-driven development manipulators who need the DSC facilitator to convey messages aimed at coercion and "passive enslavement".

Agunga systematically exposes the grand schemes of hegemonic power groups who furthered their own financial and other interests in the name of development. In fact, he devotes a chapter (4) to the "blame assignment syndrome" and analyses the blame that many role players have to share - industrialised countries, donor agencies, multinational corporations, NGOs, scientists, etc. He then concludes "the key to successful development is to avoid apportioning blame and to look for ways to build development teams that achieve results" (p. 109).

Agunga certainly has the credentials needed to generalise about the development and the DSC situation in the "Third World", in relation to the developed countries. He takes the reader on a tour of his career, which is mostly informative, but also tends to become self-centred. Born in Ghana, he embarked on a career as agricultural extension officer and communication consultant in Africa before moving to the United States for further studies in 1979. Together with Joseph Ascroft he participated in pioneering DSC theories at the University of Iowa in the early '80s before becoming Associate Professor at the Ohio State University. In 1992 he, Ascroft and Stanford Mukasa were the driving forces behind the DSC for Southern Africa Project, which focused on six SADC countries surrounding (but excluding) South Africa. Since then he and Mukasa continued to play a leading role in merging "First" and "Third" World perspectives on DC in Southern Africa by contributing papers, planning documents and discussions for the region at major fora (see Agunga, 1996 and 1997).

Agunga gives numerous illustrations of the basic role of culture and indigenous knowledge systems in DSC. He stresses that the DSC professional has to know the local socio-cultural conditions and possess a high degree of creativity (p. 263). Still, very little of the attention that e.g. Warren, Likkerveer and Brokensha (1995) gives to this area can be found in the book and "culture" is not even included in the index.

It is also curious that DSC as a "discipline" (Agunga's term) is not fully defined and its features not discussed in an introductory section. Instead, the reader has to search through the book (without assistance from the index with its single page listing on DSC) for aspects such as some conceptual components (pp. 253-255), the lack of recognition of DSC (pp. 11-14), its historical roots (pp. 13, 251-253), its role in the Third World (p. 17), a southern African DSC project (pp. 289-297), etc. When a DSC model is discussed (pp. 242-245) it is not related to the systematic attention that the model receives from Melkote (1991) and Jayaweera and Amunugama (1987). In fact, in this section Agunga does not engage these sources and misses the opportunity to refine the model and theory.

Unfortunately Agunga's narrative about the DSC for Southern Africa Project (pp. 269-298) was concluded before he was in the position to discuss one of the major outcomes of the project: the establishment of the SADC Centre of Communication for Development in Harare. This centre produced some state of the art curricula and courses that have already been "imported" into South Africa. The author also could not discuss why little has resulted so far from the conceptual strategy proposed for the SADC region, i.e. establishing national DSC centres and training a new generation of DSC professionals. The end results should be further researched and documented, hopefully by Agunga himself.

It is part of the author's up-front agenda that he sees the DSC agent as a professional and DSC as a specific agency-related discipline. Crucial to his proposed strategy is the establishment of the regional and national DSC centres. Certainly the ideal of solid, curriculum-directed DSC training cannot be faulted. The main problem with this model is that it excludes (or fails to accommodate) many other forms of DSC facilitation by e.g. community workers, volunteers, ICT experts, librarians and others. The fact is that after the establishment of the SADC's excellent Centre of Communiation for Development very little has happened in terms of

satellite DSC centres. Instead, the widely accepted policy emphasis is on multipurpose community centres (MPCCs), particularly in rural areas. Agunga's model would have had much wider application value if he had allowed DSC facilitation training and expertise to be included as one of the key facilitation requirements at MPCCs.

Why has the concept of DSC centres failed to gain ground, in spite of the initial enthusiasm of governments and other stakeholders reported in the book? Some of the reasons for the lack of a truly regional endeavour could be that centralised DSC training is costly and time-consuming, and not likely to yield "quick-fix" results. This could make a range of ICT based and decentralised training and information-providing alternatives more attractive for stakeholders. Although these reasons are based on speculation at this stage, there is little doubt that the movement towards the end of the millennium is in favour of decentralisation, networking and information-sharing.

Following the lead of the information explosion as objectified by the boundless World Wide Web, the entire field of ICT dissemination has become diffused and even chaotic. There seems to be a deliberate movement away from government control and institutionalisation. Ironically, at the end of the day this is fully in line with the basic DSC/participatory communication philosophy. Communities have to become masters of their own destiny. Although agency involvement will probably be part and parcel of the development scene in Africa for a long time to come, at the very least its role should be critically deconstructed. The concept of participatory communication (often used by Agunga - see also Agunga, 1990, and Servaes, Jacobson and White, 1996) has probable become vogue precisely because it moves the focus away from agency involvement and top-down control. Every good DC facilitator should ensure that his or her role becomes redundant as soon as possible. The community should take over the communication process as an integral part of ensuring sustainability.

The book could have benefited from foresight studies about the tremendous influence of ICTs and the information explosion. In *The Sovereign Individual*, the well-known futurists Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) describe how the new information revolution will liberate individuals at the expense of the nation state. They predict that the shift from an industrial to

an information-based society will result in the collapse of the welfare state and of the capacity for big employers to supply regular jobs. Economic responsibility will be shifted to individuals who will become completely responsible for their own destinies. The individual will become more of an entrepreneur, a private contractor. Of course in Africa with its low levels of telecommunications connectivity this could take a fairly long time and the focus will remain on access to ITs for the foreseeable future. However it is vital that experts such as Agunga should keep on emphasising that the linkage of communication is vital if ICTs are to achieve their potential impact.

Where the author and many critics' ways will part, is with his belief that governments and institutions should be entrusted to drive the development process. He analyses development aid in a critical and even sceptical way, but then concludes that not only is aid necessary, but that it "should not bypass development ministries, rather, aid should enhance the effectiveness of these ministries through training and the establishment of systems of accountability" (p. 134).

Facilitators will always be needed to establish and manage the interfaces between development databases and the individuals and communities who should have access to them. This is particularly true of rural communities where a large degree of techophobia, illiteracy and the lack of access to technology will remain a major problem well into the next millennium. The global development community's attention is already focused on rural communities, and their products, such as arts and crafts, are being advertised on the Internet.

With his emphasis on the empowerment of the poor of Africa by using a comprehensive communication strategy Agunga has rendered an invaluable service to the development discourse in this continent. "The face of development aid can be changed for the better if the people take center-stage and communication has been identified as the key to putting people first in the design and implementation of development projects and programs" (p. 312). It is easy enough to point out lacunae in such a wide-ranging survey with its many proposals, but the publication will remain a tribute to a distinguished career in the service of the impoverished Africans who have benefited little from the "development syndrome".

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