

Development Communication

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Development communication refers to a process of strategic intervention toward social change, initiated and engaged by organizations and communities. Development itself encompasses participatory and intentional strategies designed to benefit the public good, whether in terms of material, political, or social needs. While the more broadly defined field of development communication incorporates mediated as well as interpersonal channels, more particular approaches of media development specifically include mediated technologies, such as television, radio, and computer systems.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

Historically, the notion of development has been accorded to the domain of developing countries, meaning those with comparatively fewer resources than the wealthier countries supporting bilateral and multilateral development institutions. More recently, the field of development has been merging into a *more broadly defined interest in social change*, applicable to any group, regardless of material base or geographical setting, actively engaged in promoting economic, political, social, or cultural progress. Social change may be occurring as a result of a variety of factors, such as long-term shifts in policies and political leadership, economic circumstances, demographic characteristics, normative conditions, and ideological values: development communication intersects with social change at the point of intentional, strategic, organized interventions.

Following World War II, development communication emerged as a *foreign aid strategy*, designed by northern, western institutions to promote → [modernization](#) among less wealthy countries. Early approaches articulated by → Daniel Lerner, → [Wilbur Schramm](#), and others advocated the promotion of media toward modernization, through individual change (such as empathy, advanced by Lerner) as well as structural change (addressed by Schramm). According to these scholars, through individual attention to mediated news as well as fiction, consumers would become more modern, meaning capitalist and democratically inclined, constituents. These early efforts were also more focused on rural development. Everett Rogers expanded upon the individual process of social change through his articulation of diffusion of innovations, charting a path across the projected rate of adoption of new practices (→ [Diffusion of Information and Innovation](#); [Rogers, Everett](#)).

These theories equating development with modernization were advanced mostly from US-based academic and development institutions. From the mid-1970s, scholars in Latin America and Asia initiated critiques, joined by others, of these models of development, for being ethnocentric, linear, acontextual, and hierarchical. These critiques were grounded in broader concerns with *cultural imperialism* and *dependency*, drawing attention toward global conditions rather than the internal national contexts highlighted in earlier models (→ [Cultural Imperialism Theories](#); [Dependency Theories](#)). The processes of development, along with media production and distribution, were then recognized as privileging those with political and economic capital to the detriment of those without these resources.

Emerging from these critiques came a profound stance advocating participation, in opposition to hierarchically and narrowly defined terms of development. Overall, participatory approaches center their

attention on the people engaged in and affected by social change interventions. Development is accorded to communities over nations, while communication is envisioned as dialogic rather than linear. Multiplicity refers to the aspect of participatory communication that recognizes diversity in approaches to development, as opposed to assuming social change occurs along one universal path. The role of the development communicator then becomes one of facilitator rather than outside expert, such that local knowledge is privileged over external advice.

THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

Conceptualizations and justifications for *participatory development* have varied greatly, encompassing recognition of the processes as well as the consequences of social change (→ [Participatory Communication](#)). Development institutions interested in creating efficient and effective projects understand participation as a necessary tool toward achieving a defined end. For example, → [social marketing](#) projects may involve extensive interviews and conversations with intended beneficiaries in project planning stages. A television advertisement would be created only after beneficiaries had been consulted in their understanding of the problem and possible solutions, and in their reactions to types of messages, sources, visuals, and other aspects of the campaign. These types of interventions utilize participation as a means toward an end, defined by the institution itself.

Other development institutions concerned with the ethical aspects of participation are more likely to conceive of participation as an end in itself, regardless of project outcomes. Community members are encouraged to define their own social problems, and to engage actively in their resolution. Some projects, for example, teach video production skills, so that local participants can create their own mediated texts, building on what came to be known as the “Fogo process” after Canadian development strategies implemented in the mid-1980s. Radio, the Internet, theater, and other venues of communication can function in dialogic capacities, contingent upon how the processes of production and distribution are organized. Participation can be built around concerns with access to the means of cultural production, as well as to the technologies of distribution. Key to this approach is centering control within communities rather than large development institutions.

Participatory goals may be constrained, however, by resistant power structures. In this view, participation may be a necessary though not sufficient condition toward social transformation. Substantive long-term change would require institutional, normative, and political-economic support. Positioning local community efforts within broader contexts of social change allows attention to the possibilities for resistance.

Moving participatory approaches toward more resistant strategies to fight oppressive conditions finds grounding in dialogic communication, inspired through Freire's and others' work in liberation theology. Building on a foundation in praxis, in which thoughtful reflection grounds political engagement, this dialogic approach sees the value of communications in illuminating oppressive conditions in order to inspire collective action. The locus of control then is situated within the collectivity of the oppressed group, determining both the reasons for problems as well as their potential resolutions. Moreover, the contribution of liberation theology to development recognizes the importance of addressing those who are suffering the most, not only in terms of lack of material resources but also in terms of human rights and dignity.

These concerns resonate with recent attention in development to the importance of social movements in the broader context of social change. *Social movements*, like development organizations, engage in strategic social change, using communications processes and texts to facilitate their goals (→ [Social Movements and Communication](#)). Their origins and compositions, however, differ from those of the more formally constituted development organizations, being created through interests and acts of collective groups and advocating potentially more resistant strategies. Although there are many different types of social movements in the development realm, they have the structural potential to advocate against groups with power, through recognizing historical conditions privileging certain groups over others.

Although the focus of development communication has changed over time from concerns with modernity, to dependency, cultural imperialism, globalization, participation, and resistance, these shifts have not evolved in a linear fashion (→ [Globalization Theories](#)). Many underlying concerns with power, whether conceived within political-economic structures or within community contexts, or whether posited as hegemonic or pluralist processes, remain.

Development communication typically addresses programs designed to communicate for the purposes of

social change, or what can be called “communicating for development.” Other terms that resonate with this approach include “development support communication” and “participatory communication.” More recent critical approaches of development concern “communicating about development,” questioning the way that social change projects articulate assumptions about problems, solutions, and communities. These are not mutually exclusive endeavors: ongoing critique and dialogue engaged through communicating about development should contribute toward improving strategies for communicating for social change.

COMMUNICATING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Communicating for development engages processes of mediated as well as → [interpersonal communication](#) designed to promote socially beneficial goals. Development problems often addressed through these projects can be found in health, agriculture, governance, population, nutrition, sustainable development, and other sectors. These projects address a variety of goals, such as facilitating economic liaisons between consumers and businesses, promoting transparent governance, asserting cultural identities and practices, and creating social spaces for interpersonal exchange and community dialogue.

Media and communication technologies might include radio, television, film, print, telecommunications, mobile phones, computers, and more. Interpersonal forms of communication might be manifest in the form of discussion groups, folk media, theater, and personal interviews, as well as other approaches. *Radio for development* projects have been quite popular in the field, particularly with rural and illiterate populations (→ [Radio for Development](#)). Evolving with the field historically, early radio projects were designed to advance the path of modernization, whereas more recent efforts are more concerned with issues of access and dialogue. *Television* has also been employed in development projects, with early efforts distributing information through satellite programming. More recently, → [telecenters](#) have been supported in order to offer public access to information provided through information and communication technologies. Many projects use other communications technologies as well, at times in concert with broadcasting modes.

Communication intervention for social change may help to mobilize support, create awareness, foster norms, encourage behavior change, influence policymakers, or even shift frames of social issues. The goals themselves vary with the underlying approach taken to development.

Communication projects focusing on media tend to employ social marketing, → [entertainment education](#), or media advocacy interventions. What unites these approaches is an intentional, organized strategy toward a specific, noncommercial goal. These types of projects differ, however, in terms of the types of groups they address and the nature of the social change process assumed. Some projects integrate more than one of these types of interventions in broader programmatic efforts. Therefore, these are not proposed as independent types of interventions, but as a variety of approaches that can be employed in the process of strategic social change.

Social marketing, for example, targets individual consumers to change their behavior, whereas media advocacy directs attention toward policymakers who have the potential to change structural conditions. Social marketing remains a frequently employed approach to communication for development, particularly in health, nutrition, and population projects. Typically, the ultimate goal of social marketing is to induce behavior change among individuals through mediated messages, through more intermediary goals, such as knowledge and attitude change. Built along the parameters of commercial models of → [advertising](#), social marketing focuses on changing behavior, as a consequence of exposure to messages and knowledge gained (→ [Communication and Social Change: Research Methods](#)).

Entertainment education programs also incorporate socially beneficial messages into mediated texts, typically, though not always, through longer narratives in comparison to the shorter segments often used in exclusively social marketing campaigns. Popular cultural formats are used, such as songs and fictional narratives, distributed through radio, television, film, theater, and other venues. Capitalizing on audience interest in the entertaining draw of these texts, producers incorporate educational messages they hope will influence audiences. Social learning theory, building on projected positive and negative role modeling of fictional characters, guides the composition of these projects. Some of the topics addressed include fertility and gender equity, as engaged by the Indian television program *Hum Log*, as well as subjects of health, sexual and reproductive health, political and civic engagement, and education. Entertainment education strategies are at times combined with social marketing efforts, integrating intervention strategies in order to promote social change.

While prominent development organizations may be more likely to fund extensive social marketing and entertainment education campaigns, *media advocacy projects* tend to be promoted more by social movement organizations engaged in social change. Media advocacy is designed to foster change at a structural rather than individual level, through attempting to influence policy and decision-makers as well as normative climates. Media advocacy strategies are more likely to employ news media than the other approaches described above, which rely more on popular culture as a vehicle toward reaching audiences.

Some development institutions also address *structural issues* through investing in media systems and facilities. Rebuilding radio and television systems in countries devastated by conflict and war focuses on the need to build media infrastructures in order to bolster economic growth, democratic governance, and civic engagement. These projects tend to be expensive in nature, and thus promoted by the larger of the bilateral and multilateral development organizations. With these projects, the immediate goal is to establish the infrastructure needed for the system to function, with the intention that long-term sustainability will follow.

Whereas many of the large-scale infrastructural projects tend to be funded through the auspices of bilateral and multilateral development organizations, other media systems are engaged at a more local level, building on participatory processes. With some participatory media projects, people are involved in the creation of the texts themselves, such as through the use of video to document critical social issues. Other participatory efforts build and foster the media systems themselves, such as community radio, in addition to the production of texts. The terms → [activist media](#), → [citizens' media](#), and → [community media](#) share a concern with participation and control over media production and distribution. Community and citizens' media assert the importance of empowerment within local venues to create cultural texts, focusing on the importance of the processes of production. Activist media identify the outcome of their strategies as a central feature, utilizing resistant strategies to oppose politically and economically privileged groups. Some of these media centers concentrate on the process of production, emphasizing participatory aspects of engagement, whereas others privilege the content produced, toward creating high quality texts designed to attract and compel particular responses. Funding structures and resources of these media centers, to the degree they rely on a concentration or multiple donors, commercial or nonprofit financing, volunteer or paid support staff, guide and constrain the possibilities for these processes and products. While their primary concern with process or outcome may diverge, these approaches connect in their interest in active participation among community members in the process of articulating problems and enacting solutions, as well as the more resistant possibilities of the strategies engaged.

Development journalism shares some of the concerns inspiring activist, citizens', and community media, attempting to offer democratic, public spaces for political engagement (→ [Development Journalism](#)). The value of development journalism lies in a need to chronicle the path of socio-economic development as well as to offer an independent critical voice. Whereas development journalism emerged through the ideas and practices of professionals in less wealthy countries, there are some critical links to a recently emerging → [media democracy movement](#) within the US. Both movements are concerned with establishing venues for critical dialogue and active engagement. The media democracy movement combines an interest with democratic engagement and a concern with corporate power in media industries, whereas the development journalism model has been more centered on political concerns.

RESEARCH METHODS AND APPROACHES

Communicating for development builds on a variety of research approaches that inform the design, implementation, and assessment of projects. Formative research contributes to decisions made in the planning of communication interventions, such as the selection of problems engaged, media employed, messages devised, and audiences approached. This type of research can be used to promote participatory practices that might contribute toward more effective or efficient interventions. Monitoring research analyzes the ongoing implementation of projects, in order to understand how the project has worked in the event of future replication in other sites. Summative evaluation research allows an assessment of the consequences of the project, in order to contribute to improving future projects. The knowledge gained from summative work can inform the future development practices (→ [Research Methods](#)).

Participatory action research (PAR) resonates with the broader evaluative concern in acquiring knowledge for the sake of social gain (→ [Participatory Action Research](#)). Research engaged in the interests of development should be considering the broader interests of society, not implemented for commercial gain or for individual accomplishment. In addition to a concern with how research is used, PAR incorporates attention to research

processes, advocating the active involvement of local constituents, rather than relying on external research experts.

Many projects focus their applied research on short-term indicators of success, such as audience exposure, knowledge gained, or behavior changed. There is a critical role, however, for more long-term consequences of social change interventions. Research of this nature serves as a valuable resource, for participants in the immediate intervention as well as others who might be interested in replicating similar projects.

In addition to assessing the degree to which projects have achieved their institutionally defined goals, research might also question the content of communication interventions, in terms of the efficacy or appropriateness of the source or message, or in terms of the relationship between the mediated representations and larger social circumstances. Relying on stereotypical images of gender roles, for example, may hasten short-term acceptance of campaign objectives in children's health or population projects, but may also curtail more progressive long-term goals toward shifting gender roles (→ [Gender: Representation in the Media](#)).

Although quite different in strategies implemented and theories engaged, these approaches are united in their attempts to build on communication processes and technologies toward social change. Sharing a profound concern with devastating conditions worldwide, critical scholars and advocates broaden the vision of development communication to encompass concerns with the development industry more broadly, in terms of what visions of social change and communities are articulated.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

A complementary approach within the broader field of development communication addresses the topic of communication about development. Critical of a development industry that appears to channel resources yet with worsening rather than improving consequences, some scholars position development as a particular → *discourse* that communicates problematic assumptions about the nature of the problems addressed, appropriate solutions, and communities at risk (→ [Development Discourse](#)).

The *ideological assumptions of development*, as an industry and as a particular institutional practice, are deconstructed and critiqued in this approach. For example, when groups are described as suffering from a particular problem, they are framed in particular ways. Women may become subject to population projects designed to lower fertility rates, in projects that reinforce the idea of contraception as a female responsibility. When women are targeted in children's health interventions, women's central role in infant care is confirmed. Similarly, characterizing Egyptian development problems as a natural result of too many people on too little arable land confirms dominant development approaches that privilege geography and demography as points for intervention, rather than raising political questions regarding social and economic inequality or the role of development institutions in influencing national policies. In addition, when development institutions partner with commercial organizations, profit-driven processes are legitimized as a central part of efforts designed for the public good. Development institutions and social movement organizations create and act on these social categorizations as definitions of problems and solutions (→ [Development Institutions](#)).

This approach to development questions the discourse of the industry, through examinations of institutional rhetoric and practice. The underlying issue questions how development communicates particular ideological assumptions, and, moreover, what the implications are in terms of *understanding power*. Power can be understood as a negotiated and fluid process through which some agencies have the economic, cultural, and other resources to dominate and advance their agendas, whereas other groups have the potential to subvert and resist. The power to situate a problem at an individual or structural level, for example, has serious long-term implications. Providing clean water, for example, could be framed as requiring individual change (such as boiling water) or structural change. Promoting automobile safety could be positioned as necessitating individual (such as wearing a seatbelt) or regulatory (such as fining people for noncompliance with seatbelt laws) acts. The group able to define these conditions and solutions is able to control the process of strategic social change.

Some development strategies explicitly take on the goal of "*empowerment*," advocating the rights and responsibilities of particular communities (→ [Communication Strategies for Empowerment](#)). Women's empowerment in some gender programs, for example, may be facilitated through promoting gender equity in governance, education, and micro-enterprise. Empowerment can be conceptualized at individual, community, or even organizational levels, as a way of establishing control over social, economic, or political conditions.

With reference to communications processes, empowerment might also refer to an ability to communicate one's own stories.

Apart from the intentional objectives of particular projects to promote empowerment, one can understand development as implicitly enacting the broader power dynamics of society, engaging state as well as commercial institutions. Focusing on structure, power refers to the ability to shape the contexts within which interventions are conceived and engaged. These projects take place either through the direct coordination or the tacit approval of the state. Moreover, some projects explicitly incorporate commercial organizations in the implementation of their programs. Partnering with corporations may enhance the overall reach of a project through shared financial, material, and human resources. This form of partnership may be critiqued, though, for narrowing a vision of social change to one that benefits particular enterprises as well as more normative capitalist values.

Critical approaches to development have raised a number of other issues as well. While historically, development primarily referred to economic prosperity and growth, recent attention to issues of cultural identity, spirituality, and political governance broadens the scope of development to include non-material components of social change (→ [Spirituality and Development](#)). Recognition of human rights, freedom of expression, reproductive rights, and other concerns contribute to a more holistic vision of development (→ [Freedom of Communication](#)). Concerns with the spiritual aspects of development are based in part on Freire's approach to liberation theology. But even with the emergence of these non-material interests within the development community, concerns with poverty and inequity remain.

Classic conceptualizations of development have divided up nations according to their relative wealth, though not in terms of disparity in income or basic needs. These divisions generally operated on a national level, classifying some as "developed" and others as "developing" countries, or aligning countries as in first, second, third, and fourth worlds. Critical approaches again contribute toward reshaping interest in social change across and within national boundaries, recognizing pockets of elite as well as poverty stricken regardless of geographical positioning. Highlighting experiences of oppression and dominance, a reframing of the *geometry of development* shifts the landscape of development from nation-states in north/south orientations toward a more fluid sense of transnational collectivities and agencies (→ [Development, Geometry of](#)).

A central concern within the genre of communication about development work is with the ideological foundations of the development industry. Attention to women, gender, and feminism helps illustrate how these issues become articulated in the course of development practice (→ [Development, Gender, and Communication](#)). Early concerns with women's role in development highlighted their previous absence in discussions of agricultural and economic projects. Offering visibility then brought women's contributions into sharper focus. Subsequent concerns with gender dynamics questioned the ideological tenets of women and development work, in that the very goals and structures of development were not questioned, but rather assumed. Instead, gender concerns recognized the ways in which gender dynamics contributed to the potential for social change. Feminist critiques further broadened the scope of ideological critique to subsume attention to the political and economic structures constraining the possibilities for material, cultural, and political gain.

Understanding development as an industry within a global context also includes recognition of social movements, particularly in terms of their potential to resist dominant global forces. Communication strategies may facilitate the process of social mobilization toward resistance, but may also serve as a target for activists attempting to increase visibility and induce sympathy for particular causes.

This vision argues for a phase of → "[postdevelopment](#)," positing social movements as radical alternatives to dominant development structures and ideologies. In this regard, social movements are seen not as a way to transform or improve development, but as a channel for resistance. The potential for social movements to engage in resistance is quite varied, given the complexity of their conditions, with varied access to powerful agencies and resonance with dominant discourse. Opening our gaze to the possibilities of more resistant strategies, though, means advocating a more inclusive understanding of development and social change. Individual projects need to be analyzed not only in terms of their defined objectives, but also as they relate to broader programmatic strategies, such as structural adjustment programs of multilateral and foreign policies of bilateral institutions.

Building on interdisciplinary theories and methods, development communication advances applied work through thoughtful reflection and critique. Development communication continues to offer an increasingly

holistic and far-reaching framework for engaging in dialogue and action toward social change.

SEE ALSO: ▶ [Activist Media](#) ▶ [Advertising](#) ▶ [Citizens' Media](#) ▶ [Communication and Social Change: Research Methods](#) ▶ [Communication Strategies for Empowerment](#) ▶ [Community Media](#) ▶ [Cultural Imperialism Theories](#) ▶ [Dependency Theories](#) ▶ [Development Communication Campaigns](#) ▶ [Development Discourse](#) ▶ [Development, Gender, and Communication](#) ▶ [Development, Geometry of](#) ▶ [Development Institutions](#) ▶ [Development Journalism](#) ▶ [Diffusion of Information and Innovation](#) ▶ [Discourse](#) ▶ [Entertainment Education](#) ▶ [Freedom of Communication](#) ▶ [Gender: Representation in the Media](#) ▶ [Globalization Theories](#) ▶ [Interpersonal Communication](#) ▶ [Lerner, Daniel](#) ▶ [Media Democracy Movement](#) ▶ [Modernization](#) ▶ [Participatory Action Research](#) ▶ [Participatory Communication](#) ▶ [Postdevelopment](#) ▶ [Radio for Development](#) ▶ [Research Methods](#) ▶ [Rogers, Everett](#) ▶ [Schramm, Wilbur](#) ▶ [Social Marketing](#) ▶ [Social Movements and Communication](#) ▶ [Spirituality and Development](#) ▶ [Telecenters](#)

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