

Nora Cruz  
Quebral



*Development  
Communication  
Primer*



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### *What is development communication?*

**A**s defined at the University of the Philippines Los Baños, it is the interaction of two social processes – development and communication – in any given environment.

In 1971 it was tentatively defined as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential.

Forty years and several other versions of the first definition later, development communication is now described as the science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic, overall growth that fosters equity and the unfolding of individual potential.



### *Why is it that the definition of development communication changes?*

**I**f development communication is a confluence of two processes, any description of it should reflect how each or both take on new meaning as a result of insightful research and practice.



*Are the two processes of development  
and communication co-equal?*

Development could be regarded as the weightier one, it being the progressive improvement of the quality of life that needs to happen. But communication is the vehicle that carries development onward.



*Does development mean  
economic development?*

Development begins with economic development. The take-off point is a certain degree of economic independence for both individuals and countries. It has to be accompanied by social, political and moral development as well.

When we speak of development today, we are mainly concerned with the majority of people in the so-called developing societies, most of whom live in the countryside. We cannot rightfully talk about national or human development unless they too are a part of it.



*Is development communication more  
of an academic discipline?*

It can be a course or a major in a curriculum, a whole curriculum or the name of an entire college. But it is also a

form of communication practice, although there is no one profession whose members are known as development communicators. Any communication practitioner who helps disadvantaged people better their lives so that they can realize their potential is a development communicator.



### *How is development communication viewed and practiced elsewhere?*

As a concept it was first used in Southeast Asian universities as a field of learning and outreach. It had been antedated by development support communication as a component of projects and programs ran by United Nations agencies, notably by the former Development Support Communication Service of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and by the United Nations Children's Fund ( UNICEF).

Today communication units in international and national development organizations refer to it as ComDev, C4D or ICT4D. Some universities in the Americas, Europe and the Asia-Pacific have similar teaching programs in communication for/and development, social change, sustainable social change or agricultural journalism. In South Africa a ComDev unit supports an intergovernmental organization of 15 states whose goal is to further socio-economic, political and security cooperation among its members.



### *What have been the changes in how development is viewed?*

From simply being economic development in the 1950s, it quickly took on the social aspect as well. Then it became “another” development, which later metamorphosed into integrated rural development to participatory development and thence to sustainable development, with several other approaches in-between. Among other qualifiers in present use are “inclusive” and “long-term”.

There is less reliance nowadays on central government as the orchestrator of development. Instead the focus is on the capacity of communities and individuals to set their goals and work towards them in a manner that does not damage the environment or destroy natural resources. The change does shift more responsibility to the nonformal educational sector of a developing country as well as to nonformal methods of building up the capacities of individuals.

The nature and scope of the development desired may vary by society. But at the core of each are universal goals.



### *What are these universal goals?*

In this century, they are summarized in the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For developing countries in the Asia-Pacific, the No. 1 goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger has a special

resonance. The other goals specify universal primary education; gender equality and the empowerment of women; reduced child mortality rates; improved maternal health; reduced incidence of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria; environmental sustainability; and a global partnership for development.



### *Do the MDGs have specific targets?*

Indeed they have. Some of them are the following:

- a. Halve by 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.
- b. Halve by 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
- c. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- d. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2025.
- e. Reduce by two-thirds, by 2015, the under-five mortality rate.
- f. Reduce by three-quarters, by 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.
- g. Have halted, by 2015, and began to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- h. Have halted, by 2015, and began to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

- i. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
- j. Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.
- k. By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 200 million slum dwellers.



*What have been the changes in the communication part of the development communication equation?*

The major change has come from remarkable innovations in the media through which communication processes happen. In many cases, the mass media have been edged out by digital media, mobile media and social media, all of which are associated with the computer, broadband and the internet.

Information and communication technology has become pocket-sized, portable, personal and affordable. It has changed the nature of mediated communication, eaten into the traditional preserves of mainstream media, and virtually segmented its users by age and income. It has made direct participation in governance possible, for one thing, exemplified by the relatively peaceful political revolutions since the last century. Its other possible normative uses for the development of the poor await further study and practice.





*What are the usual tasks that communication media can do in a developing, country?*

They can do four basic things:

- a. Circulate knowledge that will inform people of significant events, opportunities, dangers and changes in their community, the country, the region and the world;
- b. Provide a forum where issues affecting the national or community life may be discussed;
- c. Teach those ideas, skills and values that people need to achieve a better life;
- d. Create and maintain a base of consensus that is needed for the stability of a state.



*How can communication media help create and maintain consensus?*

Like a marriage, a nation is founded on a bedrock of common experiences and shared values. Conflicts among groups in a nation cannot be helped, but with a wide enough base of agreement, the answers are sought not in secession but in accommodation and compromise. It is communication through the mainstream and new media that can project this national identity to a people and that can demonstrate to them that a united nation can be fashioned out of diverse cultures.



*What are some of the skills and values that communication media can help teach?*

Livelihood skills would be paramount in poor countries. The ability to organize and cooperate as coherent groups would give people added strength. Communication skills would make them better heard. As for values, implicit in development communication are those of equality, freedom, compassion, and respect for human dignity. Other related values are honesty and peaceful resolution of conflicts.



*Corruption is said to be endemic in developing countries. Can that be prevented by values education?*

Corruption exists in any society. But it does seem more marked in developing countries. Values education is not a task of the communication media alone but also of other institutions like the schools, the family and organized religion.



*What exactly does providing a forum mean?*

Discussion through the communication media is one of the basic features of a democracy. There must be a marketplace where ideas and opinions on public issues may be heard, answered or exchanged. Out of the discussion, group opinion emerges. For this to happen, there has to be

freedom of information, expression and assembly. These are the three freedoms most related to the communication part of the development communication equation.

One problem in a developing country is how to get the majority into the dialogue. Where the old and new media are concentrated in cities, the rural populace is virtually voiceless. What is passed off as public opinion is urban opinion. How to give voice to the voiceless is a concern of the development communicator.



*Reporting of events as they happen  
is certainly not a new task for our  
communication media, is it?*

It is probably the task that our mainstream communication media are most at home with. The question is what is relevant and timely news for developing countries in the Asia-Pacific? If development is accepted as a national goal, then our media professionals should certainly cover all its angles and our national communication system must give it due priority.



*Why should the communication media  
have to take on the role of teacher?*

For a country to develop, its citizens must be exposed to progressive ideas, skills, and accompanying values. Formal education that happens in schools cannot do this yeoman

task alone. It must be supplemented and reinforced by other social institutions, not the least of which is a country's communication system. Teaching is a role that media people schooled in the old tradition may not readily accept, but given the circumstances of developing countries, it becomes a role of great import. Indications are that the new media as adjuncts to learning are already finding their way into the classroom.



*What are the circumstances in developing countries that warrant the use of old and new media for nonformal education?*

Here are some of them:

- a. In some countries in the Asia-Pacific, the formal school systems can hardly cope with rapidly increasing populations. Those who left school early and those who never went to school must look to nonformal education for the skills with which to earn a living and the knowledge to make their lives worth living.
- b. In any case, formal schooling takes a long time. For some of our youth, the alternative may be a combination of formal and nonformal schooling that will shortcut the normal educational process.
- c. Many of the people in developing countries are still in the rural areas, earning a living from farming, fishing and related occupations. Field technicians cannot do the entire job of teaching them. Some of

the slack will simply have to be taken up by the communication media, but used creatively than they have been before.



*Have the new media been useful for development communication?*

Not in the way we have defined development communication, except perhaps in the case of the mobile phones which are now used by migrants to keep in touch with family and for banking purposes. The new media have also shown a capacity to inform people quickly during emergencies and to rally them to come together initially for a social purpose. Some normative research is needed to see how the new media may be consciously used to lift communities out of poverty and isolation.



*Would not community media be more helpful?*

It would appear so. Community radio and community newspapers still seem to be the media of choice in rural areas.



*How can community media stimulate dialogue in a rural community?*

A community radio station, for instance, can strive for a more personal relationship with the community it serves. It can act as a central through which listeners can connect with

one another. For a community project on, say, multiple cropping of which the station is a part, it can invite participants to relate their experiences and problems on the air to other members of the project. This can start a dialogue out of which solutions can be worked out among the project members themselves, the field technicians and other interested listeners. The station, in effect, serves as a facilitator of interpersonal relationships in a rural community. But this presupposes that the members of the community regard the station as their station, accepted as part and parcel of their everyday lives.



*When we speak of the poor and the disadvantaged, are they still mainly in the rural areas?*

They are the families of small farmers, laborers and fishermen most of whom are still in the rural areas, although many of them have migrated to urban slums and to other countries in search of jobs and a better life. They are also the indigenous people who live apart from the main population and are economically and socially deprived.

Whether internal or external, legal or illegal, migration is a coping mechanism for the poor in developing countries. It is a way to find better jobs and, in the case of overseas migration, is a source of remittances to be sent to family back in the home country. Studies have shown that rural migrants often settle for poorly paid jobs in the cities and end up in slums or in shantytowns. Those who migrate to other countries, however, usually do not come from the

poorest sections of the population and have had better education. They bring back savings – which become capital – and additional skills.



*Is domestic migration linked to urbanization then?*

Urbanization is migration from rural to urban areas, which is again prevalent in developing countries. Cities are seen as places with better job opportunities as well as better educational, health and recreational facilities. More than half of the world's population already lives in cities. According to UN agencies, poverty is now growing faster in urban than in rural areas.



*Should development communication assist local and overseas migrants wherever they are?*

It would seem logical to do so if they are still poor and disadvantaged. This is a new challenge to development communicators.



*Besides urbanization and migration, what other socio-economic issues have been linked to the poor in this century?*

The Asian Development Bank cites the lack of quality employment especially in the agricultural sector, high

population growth, long-standing conflicts, weaknesses in social infrastructure, low domestic investments and natural disasters. Climate change could be classed with the latter. Small farmers and fisherfolk who are most affected by climate change need to know how to mitigate or adapt to it. Development strategies to address these issues are a must to reduce poverty and raise a nation's well-being. The empowerment of women is now considered a strategy not only for achieving economic development but also for advancing human rights.



*Should not development communication also be taught in communication schools as art?*

Communication has been regarded as art since the time of Aristotle. It became a science as well in the 19th century with the technological revolution and the advent of the mass media.

In Los Baños development communication began as agricultural journalism. It uses the methods of the social sciences to explain the communication process and to point the way to making it more efficient and participatory. Systematic research is one of its tools. Development communicators may not themselves do research all the time, but they should understand the methods, strengths and limitations of all types of research to be able to use their findings intelligently. It is linked to science in another way, and that is through the subject matter areas that need to be learned and taught for poverty to be overcome.



While development communication is thus associated with the physical, biological and other social sciences, it maintains its connections to the applied arts. In working towards specified development goals, the creativity of the writer, the broadcaster, the performer, the graphic artist, the director and all those associated with the art-related side of the old and new media can make the difference between pedestrian, and therefore ineffective, communication and sensitive, and therefore more meaningful communication.



*How is development communication different from communication as practiced in developed countries?*

The difference is in the character of our communication users and their environment. We must understand them well and apply the methods that are right for them. Let us not copy the technology of developed countries blindly. Let us not base our decisions on stereotypes of ourselves and of others. Above all, let us look at development from the perspective of citizens of a developing country.



*In conclusion, then, what or who is a development communicator?*

She or he is someone who –

- a. understands the process of development, the process of communication, and the environment in which the two processes interact;

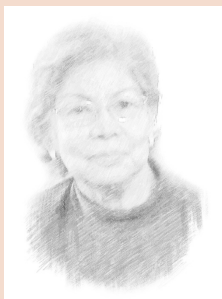
- b. is not only knowledgeable in communication skills and techniques but is also proficient in the subject matter to be communicated;
- c. has internalized the values inherent in equity and the unfolding of individual potential;
- d. has firsthand knowledge of the several kinds of end users of development communication.

But most of all, the crucial requisite for a development communicator is a sense of commitment, the acceptance of individual responsibility for advancing human development.





## About the author



**NORA CRUZ QUEBRAL** is a pioneer of development communication. She founded Asia's first faculty for the field whose alumni would in turn play pivotal roles in founding national programmes within universities across the region.

She is professor emeritus of development communication at the College of Development Communication, University of the Philippines Los Baños; former independent consultant in development communication; and founding president of the Nora C. Quebral Development Communication Center, Inc.

She has a PhD in communications from the University of Illinois, an MS in agricultural journalism from the University of Wisconsin and a BA in English, *magna cum laude*, from University of the Philippines Diliman. She started work at the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture in Los Baños as copy editor of its technical journal and was periodically officer-in-charge and chair of the Department of Agricultural/Development Communication through its various metamorphoses into a college.

She has worked or consulted mainly with FAO, UNICEF, IDRC, UNDP, US Academy of Educational Development, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Ryerson International Development Centre, Southeast Asian Regional Center for Agriculture, Nutrition Center of the Philippines, and Philippine Department of Agriculture.

Some of her awards are from the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, St. Scholastica's College, Philippine Council for Agricultural Resources Research and Development, and Philippine Association of Communication Educators Foundation, Inc.

The London School of Economics and Political Science awarded her a Honorary Doctorate for her pioneering and continued contribution to the field of development communication in December 2011.