

EDITORIAL

Communication for Social Change (CSC) is a field shaped by a variety of theories drawn from different intellectual disciplines and aimed at leveraging communication, media and information in the pursuit of social change. The role of CSC to prioritise change from a people-centred perspective is the basis of its popularity among governments, global development agencies, international and local NGOs and foundations.

However, in recent years, increasing challenges at the level of local communication and development, transformations in communication and media environments, the re-emergence of new forms of civil mobilisation, problems of freedom of speech in the world of religious pluralism, and the challenges of privacy and security have had profound effects on how CSC is theorised and practised.

In addition, there seems to be a lacuna between the noble aspirations of CSC and those of the domain of [communication rights](#) – the latter having stagnated somewhat since the heady days

of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS):

“CSC today is primarily communication for development and while its language includes frequent homage to the power of empowerment and participation, for the most part these words have been adapted to contexts that are not supportive of people-based, meaningful long-term change[] Communication rights, on the other hand, is clearly based on the belief that CSC practices should advance the right of people to have their Voices heard and to use communication in the pursuit of goals and objectives that they have been involved in articulating.”¹

This issue of *Media Development* seeks to provide new thinking on how the CSC discipline can be better shaped by – and aligned with – these challenges. Specifically, the issue encompasses critical questions about the theories and practices of CSC beyond its traditional

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boundaries in order to bring to light new ways that communication, media and information can contribute to creating a better world.

Recently, one expert in the field stated that “communications and development theory consists in the main of principles that become the basis for pathways to practice.” He identified five distinct levels:

- * A theory of knowledge – an epistemological understanding of why and how a communications intervention will result in the required change.
- * A specific understanding of process that feeds into practice – based on an epistemology of process.
- * A knowledge of structures – meaning the institutions and power flows that play a role in the structuring processes, interventions and access to resources.
- * A specific understanding of context – meaning the environment and community that is the location for the intervention, especially the complexities inherent in any locality: traditions, hierarchies, culture, norms, divisions, power flows, and politics.
- * A grappling with the flows of power, including the influence of a variety of different stake-holders.²

In this respect, communication for social change can be seen as standing on the bedrock of communication rights, which set out to challenge the political, economic, and cultural structures that obstruct greater equality – meaning (in Cees Hamelink’s plausible definition) “equal entitlement to the social conditions that are essential to emancipation and self-development.”³ Here, communication rights underlie any initiative aimed at creating an enabling environment in which people can improve their lives and livelihoods.

The trick, then, is to harness communication rights – defined as enabling people to express themselves individually and collectively by all means of communication – to achieving genuinely sustainable development. But, as with any theory of change, there tend to be gaps between the various building blocks intended

to bring about a particular long-term goal: as with particle physics, the two fields lack a grand unified theory that adequately expresses the single force implicit in communication for social change.

The Global Information Society Watch 2013 Special Report posits a people-centred information and knowledge environment as crucial to policy gains, despite the fact that such gains do not necessarily translate into real-world results.⁴

Alarmingly, however, the report says that in the context of the fragmentation of the communications rights movement, “people-centred” change has become difficult, especially when the information and communications technology industries tend to be in cahoots with government.

One task for proponents of communication for social change is to theorise and provide evidence of how communication rights are inextricably linked to genuine development. Rather than leaving the debate to communication activists and practitioners, it is for development specialists to make the running and to bring communication rights in from the cold. ■

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Notes

1. “Communication Rights and Social Change” in *Interrogating the Theory and Practice of CSC: The Basis for a Renewal* by Pradip Ninan Thomas and Elske van de Fliert. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 146.
2. “Communication for Social Change, Making Theory Count” by Pradip Ninan Thomas. In *Beyond the Impasse: Exploring new thinking in communication for social change*. Nordicom Review Vol. 36, Special Issue, April 2015, pp. 74-75.
3. “Human Rights and Communication: Reflections on a Challenging Relationship” by Cees J. Hamelink. In *Communication Theories in a Multicultural World*, ed. by Clifford Christians and Kaarle Nordenstreng. Peter Lang, 2014, p. 235.
4. *Communication rights ten years after the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS): Civil society perceptions*. April 2013. Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos). <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/communication-rights-ten-years-after-world-summit>

Institutionalising social mobilisation as a social change process

Steven Sam

The emergence of new social mobilisations in developing countries has generated a new opportunity for deliberating and reconceptualising the institutionalisation of Communication and Social Change (CSC) processes in large development organisations. This paper argues the new social mobilisation offers valuable opportunity to better inform the streamlining of institutionalised CSC process in development policies and practices.

In the past decades, the theory of communication for social change has undergone a shift from an era of top-down flows of communication to a new era where horizontal, citizen-led participatory communication process has become the basis for leveraging social change. The underlining conceptualisation of this new era of communication process embraces social change as a dialogical process that involves engaging, listening and amplifying the voices of stakeholders into their own change agenda.

For many years now large development organisations such as the UN agencies and World Bank etc. have embraced and institutionalised CSC into their development policies. But the practices of these organisations around CSC have come under serious academic scrutiny in recent years. For example, in their recent book, Thomas and van de Fliert (2015: 2) raise critical concern that the neoliberal logic within these organisations has subjected CSC theories and practices to mere

“behavioural communication and instrumentalist leveraging of information and communication.”

Crucial to this understanding is that the principles guiding CSC practices undertaken by these institutions are largely driven by an “invited system-driven space” for communication (Tufte, 2013). In this space citizens are invited to engage in some kind of participatory process, often described in participatory communication literature as “lip service” (Van de Fliert, 2010). Arguably, the problem with the invited system-driven space is that the very core concepts that characterise CSC such as “participation”, “giving voice” and distribution of “power” are often wrongly interpreted and practiced. As a result, it has been argued that the current practices of CSC in vast development agenda and the arrangement of social order in developing countries have led to less significant empowerment of the stakeholders (Thomas & van de Fliert, 2015).

The evidence of this has partly been manifested in the emergence of neo-Marxist revolutionists across developing nations with their own new bottom-up CSC practices in the form of a new social mobilisation; the popular example being the Arab Spring movements. The new social mobilisation is based on the creation of an informal and non-institutional space propagated largely by digital media technology against the backdrop of challenging power inequity to leverage political and socio-economic opportunities.

It has been argued that the communication principles and practices driving the new social mobilisation are not “primarily connected to CSC field, neither taught in academia nor situated within the logic of development agencies’ institutionalised participatory communication process that is often tied to project or programme cycles” (Tufte, 2013: 20).

This disconnection opens new opportunity for not only deliberating on the underlying conceptual argument(s) that drives the communication process in the new social mobilisation, but also further interrogating whether such new forms of CSC practices create an opportunity or challenge the institutionalisation of genuine citizen-led CSC process in large development organisations.



Conceptualising social mobilisation as a social change practice

Social mobilisation is not a new phenomenon. It has existed since the 19th century under the broad nomenclature of “civil rights moments” in the USA, Latin America and some African countries. The fundamental tenets of these movements were aimed at claiming a space and articulating voice and citizens’ role in the development of their societies (Tufte, 2012). Since the late 20th century, we have witnessed the resurgence of similar movements under new nomenclature, “digital activism”.

As the name implies, the new digital media are key drivers for the new social mobilisation, because they offer a “new communication model that is not linear, one-way or top-down. It is dynamic, interactive and multidirectional, and it opens multiple forms of citizen engagement” (Tufte, 2013: 25). Arguably this form of engagement manifests citizens as claimants of development rather than passive receivers of strategic communication-based interventions often instituted by large development organisations.

Unlike the strategic communication interven-

Social mobilisation in Senegal. Photo: Tostan.

tion that is often organisation-driven, the new social moment is a genuine bottom-up process. It is a process where citizens identify their problems, mobilise and collectively advocate for change through self-created spaces located outside the structured institutional domain. Castells refers to the communicative principles of this new social movement as a “mass-self communication” process that allows citizens to enter public spaces using multiple communication sources (Castells, 2009).

He argues that this mass-self communication process through new digital media “increases the chances of enacting social and political change” (Ibid, 2009: 302). One would strongly argue that such change is fundamental for reclaiming the space for active listening and amplifying citizen voice within the neoliberal culture of development processes, as articulated in Couldry’s (2010) work on voice and Quarry and Ramirez’s (2009) work on listening.

As it stands, the communication principles that drive the new social movements are critical

for adapting inclusive and genuine participatory CSC practices into development policies and programmes at the institutional level. But the lack of theorisation to connect these principles to institutionalised communication practices precludes the visibility of its development potential. Thanks to Kavada (2011) and (Tufte, 2013) for their initial attempts to link social mobilisation to communication theory and CSC respectively and also to Thomas and van de Fliert (2015) for drawing attention to social mobilisation as a crucial element for theorising CSC.

However, given the centrality of the new digital media in articulating social mobilisation, another salient way of making this connection in theory and in practice, as argued by Tufte, is by drawing on Couldry's concept of the technology of voice discussed in his book *Why Voice Matters*. While critiquing the current neoliberal social order, Couldry argues for the role of new digital media in creating new spaces for "articulating strong voice against the socially and politically excluding forces of the current development processes" (Tufte, 2013, p. 27). In doing so, he outlines five possible ways that the new digital technologies are enabling these processes and creating citizen-government relationship.

Firstly, Couldry notes that the proliferation of digital and personal communication media has increased *new voices in public spaces for a vastly increased range of people*. Indeed, large numbers of people are now able to mobilise and convey their concerns, stories and messages to public spaces that were hitherto inaccessible to them. For example, from slums in Africa to cities in the Arab world and from cities in Europe to occupy Wall Street in New York, citizens have converged around digital media to mobilise and convey their voices against politics, social and economic inequality in public places.

Conversely, in the recent uproar in Burundi where President Pierre Nkurunziza was attempting to defy the constitutional order, digital media have played a key role in amplifying multiple voices in public spaces, leading to the banning of radio stations and shutting down of mobile phone services. Messaging services including Facebook,

Whatsapp, Twitter and Tango were cut off in Burundi amid protests over the president seeking a third term.¹

Couldry's second point is that *a greatly increased mutual awareness of these new voices has emerged*. This suggests that those days have gone where citizens are cajoled with well-orchestrated political messages and isolated by limited possibilities to re-circulate the messages among themselves. In the new emerging technologies of voice, citizens are more connected and mutually aware of their problems. As a result, they are likely to easily share information, materials and stories about their problems that may provoke collective action.

This leads to the Couldry's third point that easy circulation of digital content has enabled the emergence of *new scales of organised political action* against dictators, corporations and elected governments. Well-known examples are the Arab spring movements, the anti-austerity movement in Spain and the occupy movements across many countries and the recent Burundi protests mentioned above.

The fourth point is that *our understanding of what spaces are for political organisation is now changed*. Indeed, rather than fixed or restricted political spaces that we know, the world has witnessed over the past years multiple political spaces emerging from both online and offline platforms. Citizens form networks of communication partners with known and unknown individuals to converge around common problems and make their voices heard. A good example was noticed in my six months ethnographic study in Sierra Leone where the convergence of mobile phone and radio has created a new digital space for political and socio-economic discourses.

Since the end of decade-long conflict in Sierra Leone in 2002, several citizen-centred radio programmes have sprung up to amplify citizens' voices and hold government institutions accountable. A popular example is a *monologue programme* aired by a citizen radio station. Together with the radios and the proliferation of mobile phones, these programmes have created citizen empowerment platforms to deliberate on political and socio-economic issues that affect them.



Star Radio, Sierra Leone, broadcasts In-Sight, produced and directed by editor Alex Terena (pictured above). Photo: Star Radio.

To participate, citizens use their personal mobile phone to call on the programmes and share their concerns with the expectation of spurring government officials into listening and taking appropriate action. As one radio produce noted:

“For some people in authority no sooner do they get any information through this medium they immediately come to the radio station and make a clarification or react immediately by issuing a press release based upon the issues deliberated here – so I believe that is one of the reasons why we established this program” (Bangura, male, 32, radio producer).

This ties in well with Couldry’s fifth point, the generation of *new intensities of listening*. With the proliferation of mass-self communication, listening to vastly increased public voices has become an imperative for public and government authorities. Governments who fail to listen to their citizens’ voices risk losing their powers. For example, in 2001 we witnessed a momentous change in the political atmosphere in the Philippines through what Howard Rheingold (2002) calls “smart mob technologies”. Rheingold notes that through SMS, President Joseph Estrada lost power to digital civil activists (see Rheingold, 2002). A similar histor-

ical moment was noticed in the 2011 Arab Spring revolution when three dictators were toppled by power from below.

Is social mobilisation a challenge or an opportunity?

The frequency and popularity of social mobilisation across developing countries suggests the need for change in how development and social change policies are organised and delivered. Therefore, the question is not whether the communicative principles of social mobilisation challenge institutional structures, but rather how do development institutions embrace these principles and incorporate them into development communication practices to engender what one might call a “new development communication order”.

Some scholars have already begun exploring key characteristics of how this new order should be shaped to maximise better development output. For example, Couldry’s five points highlighted above emphasise the value of voice in social arrangement – a voice that interrupts and challenges the neoliberal doctrine in the organisation of development policies and practices. Tufte deliberated on the move towards polyphonic networked communication formats as a key premise for new communication practices.

Conversely, the intensities of listening discussed both by Couldry (2010) and Quarry and Ramirez (2009) also characterise the new order. In all communication remains essential for engaging with

citizens, listening to them, addressing their expectations and promoting transparency and accountability. The question, however, is how can these communication mechanisms be best conveyed to engender the amplification of voices and participation in development agendas that affect human lives.

On this note, considering the fact that large development organisations have always been and still are key drivers for the development of most policy agendas in developing countries, particularly Africa, it is imperative for these organisations to capitalise on this relationship to leverage policies that embrace the new social mobilisation communication principles and practices. Such policies should aim at fostering a culture of listening and citizen/government dialogue in developing countries. In doing so, major institutional changes would need to be instigated at the levels of mission formulation, mandates and basic operations of these large development organisations (Van de Fliert, 2010).

In addition, the core process of participation in CSC projects is often carried out in fixed spaces under the facilitation of an expert. However, in the new communication order of social mobilisation, we have witnessed the emergence of multiple spaces and new forms of participation and deliberation outside this traditional framework of CSC practices. The experience from this new social mobilisation, as articulated in Couldry's five points, shows that citizens are aware of the problems that affect them and they are capable of organising themselves, engaging and sharing their problems without any facilitation from an external actor.

Therefore, the important question is how can these practices be explored and interpreted into development policies and programmes to build trust and bring about social change. Arguably, one way of doing this is by adopting a social constructivist approach as a core component for streamlining development programmes and practices. The new social mobilisations have re-emphasised the need to recognise citizens' voices and their participation in their own development agenda (Tufte, 2013).

The articulation of these voices into existing

CSC projects has been largely constrained by strategic communication and project objectives designed prior to the deployment of the projects. On the contrary, social constructivist approach provides a valuable way for capturing and articulating these voices in development practices from the bottom-up. In essence, the social constructivist approach enables government and development institutions to listen and engage with stakeholders in their socio-cultural milieus, to identify their problems, and to develop projects to address these problems.

Finally, the discussion in this paper suggests that the new social mobilisation offers valuable opportunities to better inform the streamlining of institutionalised CSC processes in development policies and practices. ■

Note

1. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32512668>

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Making agricultural research for development work in remote Vietnam

Huu Nhuan Nguyen

Agricultural research for development (AR4D) that uses participatory communication strategies targeting the immediate use of research outputs for development purposes could make a change in people's lives in culturally diverse regions.

Participatory communication is an interactive or two-way communication approach in which various participatory techniques and tools are employed to maximise the engagement of stakeholders in a decision-making process, empower those stakeholders and minimise risks, all in pursuit of positive change. According to Mefalopulos (2008: 25), participatory communication is a two-way communication model that aims to achieve “mutual understanding, building trust, and uncovering and generating knowledge, leading to better results”.

Van de Fliert (2010: 98) says that facilitating participation is not about “making others participate” in the development process. Rather, it is about “engaging stakeholders in dialogue”. She argues that the facilitation of participatory communication processes, therefore, involves “‘enhancing voice’, hence power, to all parties involved” in development activities.

While participatory communication aims to support the active involvement of people in a development process, in reality, different levels of participation are achieved. Various efforts have been made to classify those levels of participation, those most commonly defined are passive participation, consultation, collaboration and empower-

ment (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009: 6).

Shifting to a “people centred” model, recent AR4D initiatives have changed from using a top-down approach to using a bottom-up approach, and from defined project outputs to a livelihoods focus. Both the sustainable livelihoods and participatory communication approaches have been critically discussed by development actors in the context of efforts to facilitate AR4D interventions to achieve both short-term outputs and long-term multiple impacts.

The sustainable livelihood approach is utilised as a visualisation tool that provides an analytical structure for a broad and systematic understanding of the wide range of impacts that AR4D projects could have on people's lives. In contrast, participatory communication is seen as a core factor in the facilitation of the research process.

Participatory communication is believed to enhance the participation of local people in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of AR4D, leading to changes in people's knowledge, skills and behaviours. These changes facilitate the better use of research outputs towards achieving livelihood impacts such as human, social, economic, physical and natural impacts.

Using participatory communication not only requires suitable methods but also requires good facilitation capabilities and appropriate attitudes among the facilitators who are working with local communities, especially ethnic minority people. The contribution of the participatory communication strategies underpinning AR4D towards social change and development in target communities is illustrated in Figure 1.

Top-down agricultural research in Vietnam's Northwest Highlands

The Northwest Highlands of Vietnam are not only characterised by high ethnic diversity and typical topographic conditions, but also by a high rate of poverty. Since the late 1990s, various agricultural research projects including AR4D projects have been conducted by both national research institutions and international development agencies for the economic development of the region.

Participatory communication strategies aiming

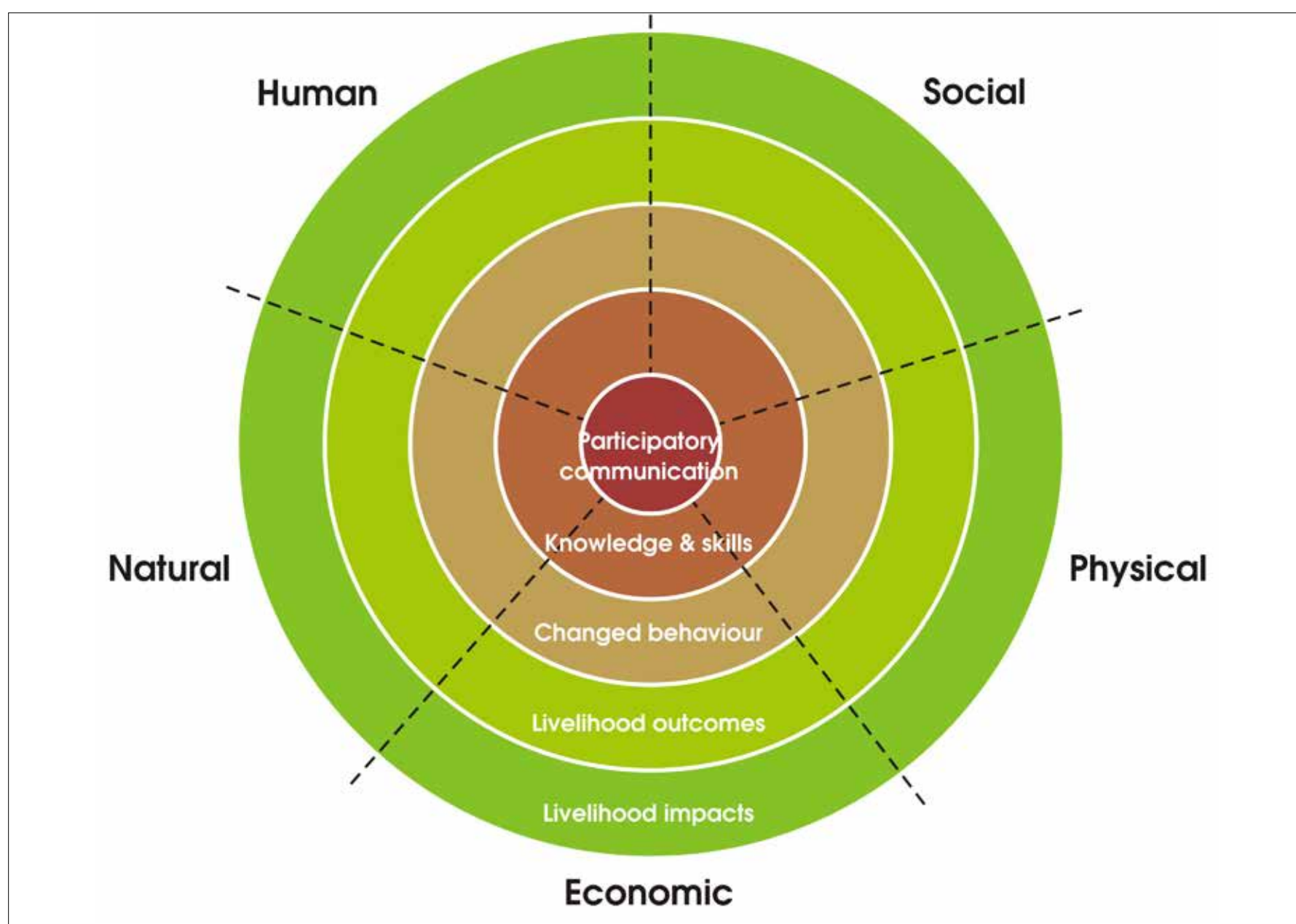


Figure 1: Participatory communication and sustainable livelihood development (adapted from Van de Fliert et al. 2010).

at the immediate use of research outputs for development purposes have been adopted by several AR4D initiatives since the late 2000s. However, the use of top-down communication with poor feedback mechanisms still seems dominant in most agricultural research in the highlands, leading to low levels of empowerment of local communities and limited potential to scale-out the research outputs (Nguyen et al., 2015).

Most agricultural research projects in the highlands are externally designed and implemented by research institutes and universities. Local stakeholders are passive in the identification of research problems and research project implementation as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of research activities. Farmers are involved in most agricultural research projects as labour, farm providers and information givers rather than as co-researchers. Local extension staff participates

in some activities in the planning and evaluation phases; however, decisions are mainly made by external researchers.

The impact assessment results of agricultural research projects are often not shared with local stakeholders when the project is completed. Consequently, local farmers, extension staff and researchers all have limited understanding about the impacts of agricultural research as well as low capacity to sustain the impacts for development. In addition, the communication strategies currently utilised in agricultural research give little consideration to the problem of overcoming language barriers when working with ethnic minorities.

For example, training handouts, and research results are often written in the Vietnamese language, which a large number of local ethnic minority people cannot read. As a result, they don't benefit as much from extension activities as the

majority whose first language is Vietnamese. The use of visual extension materials by local extension networks is very limited. These issues lead to inefficient dissemination and use of technological information and innovations.

Participatory communication in AR4D in remote and culturally diverse regions

Several agricultural research projects claim to apply a participatory approach. However, top-down planning and implementation approaches are used in most research projects (especially in government-funded projects), leading to low levels of empowerment of local communities. Agricultural researchers and local stakeholders also have different understandings about the meaning of participation in research processes and in the impact assessment of AR4D projects.

Why and how would AR4D projects benefit from participatory communication within a socio-economic context like the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam? To answer this question, attention should be paid not only to how participatory communication could help AR4D to achieve objectives but also to how it could help empower people towards sustainable livelihoods development. There are several major reasons for utilising participatory communication strategies for AR4D projects in this diverse region.

At the design stage, participatory communication helps to assess the real needs of local communities. The isolated region is home to many ethnic groups such as Dao, H'Mong and Thai people, so the implementation of AR4D projects faces problems such as language barriers, low education of local people and limited livelihood resources. Using participatory communication techniques could help to facilitate the active involvement of local people in defining research priorities.

For example, in the recent ACIAR Northwest Project,¹ various participatory techniques such as focus group discussion, participatory mapping, transect walk, participatory photo stories and seasonal calendar were conducted with communities at local village level in participatory diagnostic studies in the early phase of the research. Local village leaders and extension staff also par-

ticipated in the diagnostic studies. This not only helped to gain in-depth understanding of the local socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions, constraints and research opportunities for the target communities but also helped to build partnerships between the researchers and local stakeholders, especially farmers.

In the technology development and extension phase, participatory communication can be utilised to involve farmers as co-researchers and to involve local extension staff as research partners in a research process. Regular on-farm meetings and participatory planning and implementation of field trials help to create the enabling environments for farmers and researchers to discuss the research progress, identify emerging issues and make adjustments to the research activities.

A participatory monitoring and evaluation system, which is adaptable to the specific social economic contexts of target communities, can make AR4D interventions more applicable to complex local social conditions. Comprehensive participatory monitoring and evaluation schemes could help research interventions to fill gaps in languages and culture as well as in local people's perceptions and knowledge about their existing problems.

Farmers in the ACIAR Northwest Project, for instance, reported that the researchers worked together with them in the planning and implementation of plum and maize trials. The researchers frequently visited trial farms and met with farmers, establishing close collaboration between the researchers, local farmers and extension staff in carrying out, monitoring and evaluating the research activities and extension pilots. As a result, the capacity of farmers and local extension staff had been strengthened. The active involvement of local extension staff and authorities in the evaluation of research trials, technology pilot sites and in the final evaluation of the project helped to develop capacity for local partners and facilitate the scaling-up of the application of the research outputs.

In regard to the impact assessment of AR4D projects, the use of participatory communication strategies such as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with key informants, direct ob-

servation and semi-structured interviews helps to gather valuable qualitative and quantitative data about the impacts of the project. These participatory methods with the aid of various participatory techniques such as participatory resource mapping, seasonal calendars, rankings, Venn diagrams and participatory photo stories for data collection and analysis not only help to gain reliable information but also to empower local stakeholders in the impact assessment processes.

The collaboration among stakeholders such as farmers, extension staff and researchers is also strengthened. In addition, the effective communication of impact assessment findings cannot be achieved without the active involvement of local stakeholders in the impact assessment. By involving local people in impact assessment, the co-creation of knowledge about the impact can be achieved. This will lead to a shift from “outsiders’ making an announcement on the impact findings” to “all the stakeholders sharing and learning from the impact findings”. Therefore, the expectations of both the funding agencies and the local stakeholders and beneficiaries are met.

However, there is no standard participatory communication strategy for all impact assessments. Using participatory communication techniques for impact assessment requires researchers to pay careful attention to both the local social complexity and the available resources in order to develop the most applicable impact assessment strategies. The use of simple and understandable languages should also be carefully considered when communicating impact findings in line with the level of education or relevant skills of the key stakeholders. The dissemination of visual products, such as participatory videos, photo stories and posters in international conferences and seminars, agricultural extension training courses and online databases, can help to sustain impacts effectively.

Challenges for using participatory communication in AR4D

The use of participatory communication could enable AR4D to achieve better social, economic and environmental outcomes and impacts in target

communities. However, the application of participatory communication in highly diverse and complex regions, such as the Northwest Highlands in Vietnam, is challenged by the existence of a conventional top-down extension system and limited engagement capabilities of both farmers and development workers.

It should be pointed out that no standard sets of participatory communication techniques could be developed to fit different communities and locations. Constraints on time, funding and human resource allocation for each activity should be carefully considered when utilising participatory communication strategies to make AR4D work for social change and development. ■

Note

1. “Improved market engagement for sustainable upland production systems in the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam” funded by ACIAR

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Participatory video for citizen mobilisation in South Africa

Tamara Plush

In March 2015, in a shipping container that serves as part of a health care compound in the township of Gugulethu in South Africa,¹ nine people are making movies with mobile phones in participatory video (PV) workshop. The two researchers/PV practitioners and seven community mobilisers involved are not only making films, but exploring a methodology for story-driven PV that can harness the transformative power of personal stories into the collective group storytelling process. This article shares their journey from a facilitator's perspective.

In *Change is Possible*, one of two films created in the PV workshop, Thulani asks himself: "I want to change. But, will I still be a man?" The scene is a key moment in the film as he decides if he will ignore social pressures and be a more supportive and positive parent; a choice that can be difficult when living in a context of gender inequality and violence.

In storytelling, the "key moment" is a critical shift or momentous juncture that propels a story into a new course of action. For example, Thulani's answer "yes" to the question "Will I still be a man?" leads him to join a peer support group for positive parenting and strengthen his relationship with his wife.

The key moment in this film also serves a more valuable and strategic purpose than an element of good storytelling. As part of a wider participatory video process, it aims to invite viewers into a con-

versation as they emotionally relate to the character's internal struggle. This film raises the complex and often difficult-to-discuss issues of gender violence and inequality; identity and fatherhood; stigma and fear.

The resulting dialogue is critical for the Sonke Gender Justice² community mobilisers as they will use the PV process in their work on health, refugee rights, domestic and sexual violence, and gendered inequalities in the city's informal settlement and township contexts.

Getting emotional

As the researchers/PV practitioners³ facilitating the Gugulethu workshop, we defined participatory video as a collective storytelling process that uses filmmaking as a means to positive and transformative social change. We had observed that PV processes are often designed and facilitated through a journalistic approach to storytelling. This is where community members interrogate, document and share their problems and solutions on a particular concern.

This approach to PV, however, caused us to pause. While we knew a documentary-style of filmmaking could amplify community voice to better address local concerns, we also recognised that the process itself can sometimes miss the emotional dimensions of storytelling experienced through methodologies that focus on individual self-reflection.

Through processes like Digital Story telling,⁴ we had seen the significance of personal storytelling.⁵ Firstly, there is a transformative potential for the storyteller as s/he emotionally connects to the topic. This can be therapeutic and particularly valuable for people dealing with painful issues of violence, inequality, stigma and fear. Secondly, personal stories have the potential to connect emotionally with the listener as s/he empathically relates to the teller's experiences.

This can prompt a deeply meaningful dialogue with others that might otherwise have been silent. To enable such a response, it begs a question: How can the participatory video process better incorporate the personal into its collective storytelling approach? We partnered with the Sonke Gender



Justice community mobilisers in Cape Town to explore this question.

Facilitating the personal

To begin the participatory video process, we held two visioning sessions with Sonke staff to determine how they wanted to use PV for community mobilisation. By starting from a place of listening, we hoped the resulting PV methodology from the workshop could fit their cultural and institutional context and be more sustainable long-term. It was during these sessions that the group decided to use mobile technologies for PV, and use drama as the storytelling style to best incorporate the personal. Drama could allow groups to explore complex and difficult issues in safe ways.

In addition to making their own films, we would be training the community mobilisers as participatory video practitioners. We knew this would be extremely challenging in a short-term workshop as participants often fluctuate between being overwhelmed by the technical aspect of film-making and elated by the creation of their own films. In such an environment, the intentionality of each activity in the facilitated PV process can easily be missed.

To help make this clearer for the participants as future PV practitioners, we selected four critical areas as foundational cornerstones for our story-driven PV approach using mobile technologies: group development and relationship building; personal and collective storytelling; appropriate technology; and dialogue and listening. (See the facilitation guide at www.transformativestory.org/story-driven-pv). What follows are our reflections about how each area aimed to connect with the more personal side of storytelling.

Group development and relationship building focuses on activities that create and strengthen group identity, build individual confidence, and engage the group in wider mobilisation efforts. When designing the PV methodology, we knew that most PV learning activities enhance de-

Photos: Thulani in Change is Possible (top). Precilia storyboards a scene showing Sonke's PV vision (middle). Nomazizi learns mobile filmmaking with Thulani and Saint-Expedite (bottom).

velopment and group cohesion – from collaborative script development to technical filmmaking. However, we also needed specific processes that would allow people to feel safe while sharing their personal experiences in a group. Drawing from Digital Storytelling, we incorporated facilitated story circles where each person could share their own stories for feedback and discussion in an informal, supportive setting.

As an example in practice, to determine the themes for the collective films, we introduced a prompt question that would help participants tell personal stories. In this case, we asked each person to share a story explaining their connection to the One Man Can wellness clinic, a Sonke Gender Justice and City of Cape Town clinic that provides information, education, advice and clinical services to men who may otherwise not seek support regarding health issues.

In a story circle, each person shared while the others actively listened. In the ensuing discussion, they identified themes they heard in the individual stories, and decided together the top two that would guide their films. They split into groups to make the films *Change is Possible* and *Journey of Hope*, a film on sexually transmitted infections. The process itself allowed individual voice and personal experience to play a strong role in what films would be made through the collective process.

Personal and collective storytelling focuses on activities that harness the transformative power of creativity and storytelling. In the PV process, we hoped that individual storytelling would also help participants personally connect to the dramatic underpinnings of their films. We saw this occur during a story circle session on the film *Journey of Hope*. To begin the session, we asked each person to link their personal emotions to the collective story the group had started developing earlier in the day.

Suleiman shared his story: “When I go into the clinic with my wife and children for their care, I sometimes feel uncomfortable and out of place because there are so few men there. This doesn’t make sense because I work in the area of health. If I am uncomfortable just being at a clinic with my

family, imagine how much harder it must be for the men we work with to go in on their own and talk about STIs.”

As part of collective storytelling, Suleiman’s personal experience helped the group connect more deeply to the importance of addressing fears and stigma in their film; which had been absent in its first draft. The original story showed a Sonke staff member delivering condoms and a brochure on



Photos: Malwande in Journey of Hope (above). Foundational elements example (bottom).



sexually transmitted infections to a man’s house who asks for more information.

After sharing their personal stories and responsive feelings, the group decided to dramatise the immediate fears a man faces after discovering he has an STI. Once the group shifted to the emotional storyline, they could more easily see the possibilities of sparking conversations about barriers men must overcome in seeking information on and treatment for STIs. The film, they said, now more meaningfully shared the fears and stigma the community members they work with are experiencing in their everyday lives.

Appropriate technology prioritises incorporating the most accessible, affordable and fitting technology for the context into the PV process. As facilitators, we were initially reluctant to use mobile filmmaking for the PV process due to quality issues and its individualistic nature. Yet, given the proliferation of mobile technologies in South Africa, we agreed to explore its possibilities together. One challenge we faced early in the workshop was keeping a focus on participatory video as a facilitated process for social change, rather than a technical lesson in mobile filmmaking.

However, as the participants actively engaged in group and story development processes, PV's transformative intention became clearer. As an example, Sonke staff members initially hoped to edit their films on their phones. However, after discussing potential impacts on group development (such as more technically savvy people dominating the process on the small screen), the participants agreed that computer editing would better serve the collective, relational aspects of the methodology.

Dialogue and listening supports activities that ensure the films can both create opportunities for active listening and spark the dialogue the participants want to have. Knowing that dialogue and listening are key factors for social and political change processes, we worked to prioritise them throughout the entire PV activity. To illustrate, we used visuals to prompt strategic discussions on the foundational elements of the participants' films: who should listen, what they wanted them to see, what they hoped they would think and feel, and what dialogue they aimed to create.

In the case of *Change is Possible*, the group focused on a story of change, where positive care giving and partner equality were relational decisions for Thulani, the film's main character. The group also wanted the story to connect emotionally with feelings of hope, responsibility, respect and cooperation. These elements came out in the ending narration of the film:

Nomazizi: "I'm your wife. I'm here to support you. I want this change."

Thulani: "So we both believe that change is possible?"

Nomazizi: "Definitely. Yes, of course."

The visual approach clearly captured the key issues, emotions and discussion points the groups wanted their films to catalyse. As such, the foundational elements were also used to plan dialogue through a facilitation guide of questions to ask viewers when showing the films. The aim was for more meaningful and responsive connections to emerge through dialogue and listening within wider processes of transformative social change.

The story concludes

Practitioners who facilitate participatory video activities know that personal stories can be transformative for both the storyteller and the listener. However, linking to a more emotional core in a story is a challenging proposal for collective storytelling practices like PV. The film, *Change is Possible*, offers inspiration. As the film concludes, Thulani and his wife Nomazizi are affectionately holding hands. The image shows the support and connection they now feel for each other within Thulani's journey towards change. The image poignantly represents the potential for the personal to elicit a more empathic, relational response to dramatic storytelling.

However, reaching this emotional resolution in a participatory video process – both in the story's telling and its reception – takes considered facilitation. One possibility is a story-driven approach to participatory video that focuses on group development and relationship building; personal and collective storytelling; appropriate technology; and dialogue and listening.

With these four cornerstones, we suggest, dramatic storytelling with participatory video has the potential to better see, hear, think, feel, listen, connect and transform. ■

Notes

1. One Man Can Men's Wellness Centre, 15km from Cape Town
2. www.genderjustice.org.za
3. Workshop co-designed and facilitated by Tamara Plush, a PhD candidate at the Centre for Communication and Social Change, University of Queensland; and Thea Shahrokh, a

Research Officer with the Institute of Development Studies (who also peer reviewed this article). Joanna Wheeler, through the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, played an important role as an advisor.

4. www.transformativestory.org/what-are-the-methods-for-transformative-storytelling/personal-storytelling-digital-storytelling
5. Example: http://interactions.eldis.org/sites/interactions.eldis.org/files/attachments/sa_gbv_case_study_slfsonke_0.doc

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The CSC dilemma in development: A possible solution

Grady Walker and Julie Arrighi

Given the challenges of measuring outcomes in Communication for Social Change, the use of proxy indicators can broadly support diverse initiatives. An example from Nepal illustrates an educational approach to social change whose intangible outcomes could be assessed using proxy indicators.

Asking a panel of experts on Communication for Social Change (CSC) to reach consensus on a definition of the term is like asking a kitchen full of chefs to agree on the ingredients in soup. Just as there are innumerable combinations of ingredients and recipes that can be used to prepare soup, there are countless practices and approaches that can be called CSC. In both cases one is left with something not quite solid, yet identifiable. Broadly speaking, the most common mechanisms for developing and delivering CSC projects are those belonging to international development, and this article will limit its discussion to that sphere.

The popularity of CSC reflects trends in international development that recognize the benefit of locally-driven communication processes directed towards changing society from the bottom up, rather than the instrumental large-scale top-down initiatives of classic development. Development, as an enterprise, remains constrained by its structural realities, which include reliance on the vagaries of funding priorities, and an economic rationale that demands every dollar spent be accountable to an audit, by accountant and conscience alike.

The reasons for this are clear, and commendable to be fair, but the paradox with CSC is that it is tricky to measure and quantify. After all, how

does one plan a social change project and affix a dollar value to the outcome? Often, a balance has to be struck: CSC developers embed their projects as discrete components within a greater development cycle.

This article addresses two questions: First, is there an ideal way to practice CSC? Because of the tendency to seek a middle ground within the existing logical framework of development, CSC initiatives are in a perpetual mode of compromise. If, however, CSC is positioned within critical education, where the emphasis is on generative themes, it can be realigned to the way its early pioneers initially conceived it.

Second, how does a realigned practice then reposition itself within the existing logical framework of development? Rather than try to change that framework to one more conducive to supporting CSC, which has been the approach taken at the policy level with little success, CSC practitioners can adopt an approach that uses proxy indicators. This approach allows them to implement their initiatives while ticking all the correct boxes.

Critical education

An educational approach to CSC seems like a no-brainer, yet rarely do we see the necessary time and patience invested. In order to make the case for this approach, we must start by questioning the assumptions that form the scaffolding of CSC. When discussing social change, for whom are we speaking, and what changes are being spoken about? The attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, the achievement of which has driven the *modus operandi* of development for many years, is an aspirational and praiseworthy endeavour; yet it presumes keeping intact the current structural composition of society. Does the elimination of poverty, in fact, constitute social change, or must we change the system that perpetuates it?

Likewise, CSC approaches that simply leverage media and voice in order to engender social change beg the question: whose vision of change is being pursued? It is too easy for the voices of participants in CSC to be gathered up and directed

towards a vision of the future that they themselves did not articulate (regardless of how utopian that vision may be). It takes time to gain a critical understanding of the world to the extent required to articulate a vision of change. This is the reason early CSC pioneers like Paulo Freire focused their work on a critical education process and removing the barriers that prevented oppressed people from articulating their own vision of the future, or *unblocking subjectivities*.

The starting point of an educational approach is somewhere in that grey area: there is a need for transformative social change, and communication is the *sine qua non* of the transformation; however, those at the bottom must direct that transformation. This differs from the notion that social change can be enacted within the logic of the current global order by using grassroots communication in an organized and instrumental way.

Insider Windows

An example from the field of an education-based CSC initiative is the *Insider Windows* research project, a University of Queensland study recently undertaken by one of the authors in two districts in Nepal in 2014. In this project, participants made short films to investigate learning themes that were generated through consultation within the group. The movies they produced with their groups presented their analysis of the theme, often a social or environmental issue, and were used as a medium for communication.

By articulating an insider understanding of these issues, the educators and participants not only shared social and environmental messages horizontally and vertically in their communities, but also analyzed their own messages to achieve a deeper understanding of taken-for-granted norms in their societies. Following the conclusion of the project, participants continued their movie-making initiatives and engaged the community at large in innovative ways.

The continuation of the activities after the conclusion of the project and funding (which was negligible anyway: a stipend for the educator and a budget for snacks) exemplified the type of grassroots sustainability that would make a develop-

ment project officer swoon.

The project sought to create the conditions for social change through *conscientization*, a term introduced by Freire that is defined in its simplest form as “the process by which students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them” (Darder et al., 2009: 14).

Conscientization is achieved through *praxis*, which is the action element of critical education, and what Freire called “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (1970: 79). These concepts are not as radical today as they were in Freire’s native Brazil in the 1960s. For advancing them he was handed a stint in prison by the military dictatorship that ruled the country at the time. Freire’s vision of subject-driven social change remains central to communication for social change.

Conscientization through praxis might be problematic for a development organization – even the kind with a dedicated interest in CSC, but that does not mean there are no measurable outcomes. For example, Insider Windows project participants developed a critical awareness of environmental degradation in their communities. A seventeen-year-old project participant named Namuna had always taken pollution in her village for granted. After making a film she said:

“If society is polluted, we also get sick and we should take care of our village ourselves – we made a movie about this. So because of this, now when I walk around I pick up the garbage on the road and put it in the dustbin.”

The challenge with these types of outcomes, from the perspective of a development organization, is that they *emerge* from praxis; they are not predetermined. Namuna could have just as easily made a film about caste discrimination at the local water pump, which is indeed what some other project participants did. This is why their chosen themes are called *generative*. It is difficult to get approval and funding for a project that does not have clear outcomes or an indication of what thematic direction it will take.

Consider education for a moment, there is no debate about the intrinsic value it has for learners, regardless of outcome. This is especially true for creative practices. Students who learn to play instruments are not expected to become professional musicians, but the benefits are acknowledged despite being unquantifiable. Likewise the praxis from *Insider Windows* is designed primarily to benefit the participants themselves, not necessarily to result in a tangible outcome. The tacit understanding is that effective praxis will then follow Freire's vision: to reflect on your world in order to change it.

The question then becomes: How does an educational approach to social change fit within the logical framework of international development, where the support and networks are in place and have a deep penetration into many societies? The use of proxy indicators is a method suggested by

the authors for consideration.

Community resilience and proxy indicators

Within the international development sphere the increasing focus on community resilience creates an interesting opportunity for exploring a critical education approach to communication for social change. A recent study titled *Characteristics of a Safe and Resilient Community*, conducted by Arup International Development for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, identified six key characteristics that lead to safety and resilience at a community level.

Among them was "individual knowledge and awareness as central to the ability of households individually and collectively to be able to prepare, prevent, respond to and recover from shocks and stresses." Other key characteristics included, among others, how *organized* the community is to

This page and next: Insider Windows project participants prepare to shoot a scene. (Authors' photos).



identify problems, establish priorities and act and how connected a community is to external actors who provide a wider supportive environment (2012: iv).

In the years since this study was published, a focus has been placed within the Red Cross on designing and implementing resilience projects that aim to strengthen the six characteristics. The strength of the community group, and wider community, in these areas is far more important to sustaining increased resilience than any of the other tangible actions and outputs that may be completed in a three-or four-year project. Yet, a focus is often placed on reporting tangible outputs, in part because of the difficulty in measuring the more important but less tangible goals associated with strengthening non-measurable characteristics.

To overcome the challenge of measurements, there are ongoing efforts to develop indicators to ensure that these key characteristics are strengthened. For example, under the characteristic of

“connectedness”, tracking the number of meetings a community group has with local officials or other stakeholders per month becomes a proxy for the strength of the communities’ connectedness to an external network that can be relied on in times of need.

Similarly, under the theme of “organized”, tracking items such as the number of times internally-organized and resilience-focused community groups meet independently, as well as with the wider community, can be used to measure the increasing level of internal organization within a community. Even though these indicators cannot speak to the content or quality of interactions, or overall leadership abilities of the risk reduction group, they are effective as proxies.

An area of measurement within community resilience that needs much further exploration is the area of “knowledge”. Specifically, how can we move beyond merely tracking the number of



people attending training sessions and their pre- and post-test results to also tracking proxy indicators that measure the level of critical reflection and knowledge creation within a group or community? From this perspective, the number of people participating in a critical education program can be a way to measure the existence of, and participation in, a process, and this can become a proxy for the intangible value and experiences gained during that process.

Moving forward

Given the lack of consensus among experts as to what constitutes CSC, it is the authors' belief that the use of proxy indicators can broadly support diverse initiatives. With an expanding focus on community resilience in the international development sector, there are increasing examples of finding proxy indicators to track the more intangible elements that lead to social change. This provides a valuable opportunity to the CSC community for further integrating their approaches into the international development sphere, especially when focusing on an educational approach to CSC.

Although the Nepal example of CSC, inspired by critical education, is provided as a realignment of practice, it is not the only approach that can benefit from the use of proxy indicators. At the very least, practitioners are encouraged to be innovative when making the case for CSC within their organization by conceiving ways in which intangible outcomes can be measured within the existing logical framework of development. ■

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Co-creative processes in the Big Stories Small Towns film project

Samantha Ryan

Big Stories Small Towns is a multi-platform process-driven documentary project that works with communities to create micro documentaries, photography and digital stories. At the heart of Big Stories is a question - can you have both community ownership through process and a high-quality media product at the same time? In communication for social change literature, the discourse of participation has in many ways remained rigid while practice continues to evolve to meet audience and participant expectations.¹ As process-driven media projects reach broadcast scale and quality, a more intimate and nuanced understanding of the co-creative process is needed.

Big Stories Small Towns was a community based film project that took place between June and December 2014 in Beaudesert, a town one hour south of Brisbane, Australia. I was the Producer of the project, working with a filmmaker in residence and facilitating community participation as well as seeking to understand the project as an ethnographic researcher.

Big Stories is a project that has a high level of innate complexity that attempts to produce community ownership as well as high aesthetic aims. These aspects make it an excellent case study for researching process versus product driven practice and aspirations in the field.

Where other online participatory media liter-

ature has broadly considered voice and participation² this study seeks to make a unique contribution by giving an insider's perspective on process-driven community practice and different expectations and aspirations of people involved in such a project.

Big Stories, Small Towns began in 2008 with a three month residency in Port Augusta in South Australia and the website www.bigstories.com.au was launched in February 2009. The program ran in Raukkan and Murray Bridge in South Australia, and in Banlung Cambodia in 2010 and in Strathewen in 2012. It is now in its third iteration with funding from Screen Australia for platform and audience development, and has run filmmaker in residence projects in Cowra, New South Wales, Beaudesert, Queensland and Queenstown, Tasmania in 2014. It has also branched into the Asia Pacific, with Big Stories Small Towns projects in Raja Ampat, West Papua, Flores, Indonesia and Bongkud, Malaysia.

As the creative team we were tasked with producing web documentaries, vertical films, photo essays and text with the community. The resultant stories were screened and exhibited in the community at the end of the project as well as a screening and filmmaking forum in Brisbane and published on the Big Stories Small Towns website. The main interface of the Big Stories, Small Towns website is a grid of 24 squares, as illustrated in Figure 1. Each square represents a piece of video, photo essay or text content.

Community-driven aims and goals

Big Stories Small Towns Beaudesert came about through connections with the Beaudesert community that I made in 2013 leading up to the "This Is Our Story" event, which commemorated 150 years since the first Australian South Sea Islanders arrived in Australia at the cotton plantation of Robert Towns. It led to many different groups in the community working together in an unprecedented way.

After the commemoration, the community expressed a strong desire to keep using the arts to weave people's stories together, and I suggested Big Stories as a potential opportunity. This gained

cerns and issues that people had for the future of their community (see Figure 2). All of the written responses were gathered and collated by one of the community members.

Following the community café, the creative team brainstormed the ideas that had arisen, and interviewed key people in the community, such as the Community Engagement team at Council and local historians. This gave a broader context to the storytelling project.

Through community consultation, relationship building and research, we were able to create 13 films with varying levels of involvement with the community over a four-month residency. These ranged from profiles of local community members and a local young men's group, which were made by the filmmaker. We also had more co-creative projects that we worked on, depending on what the interest and skills of the participants were.

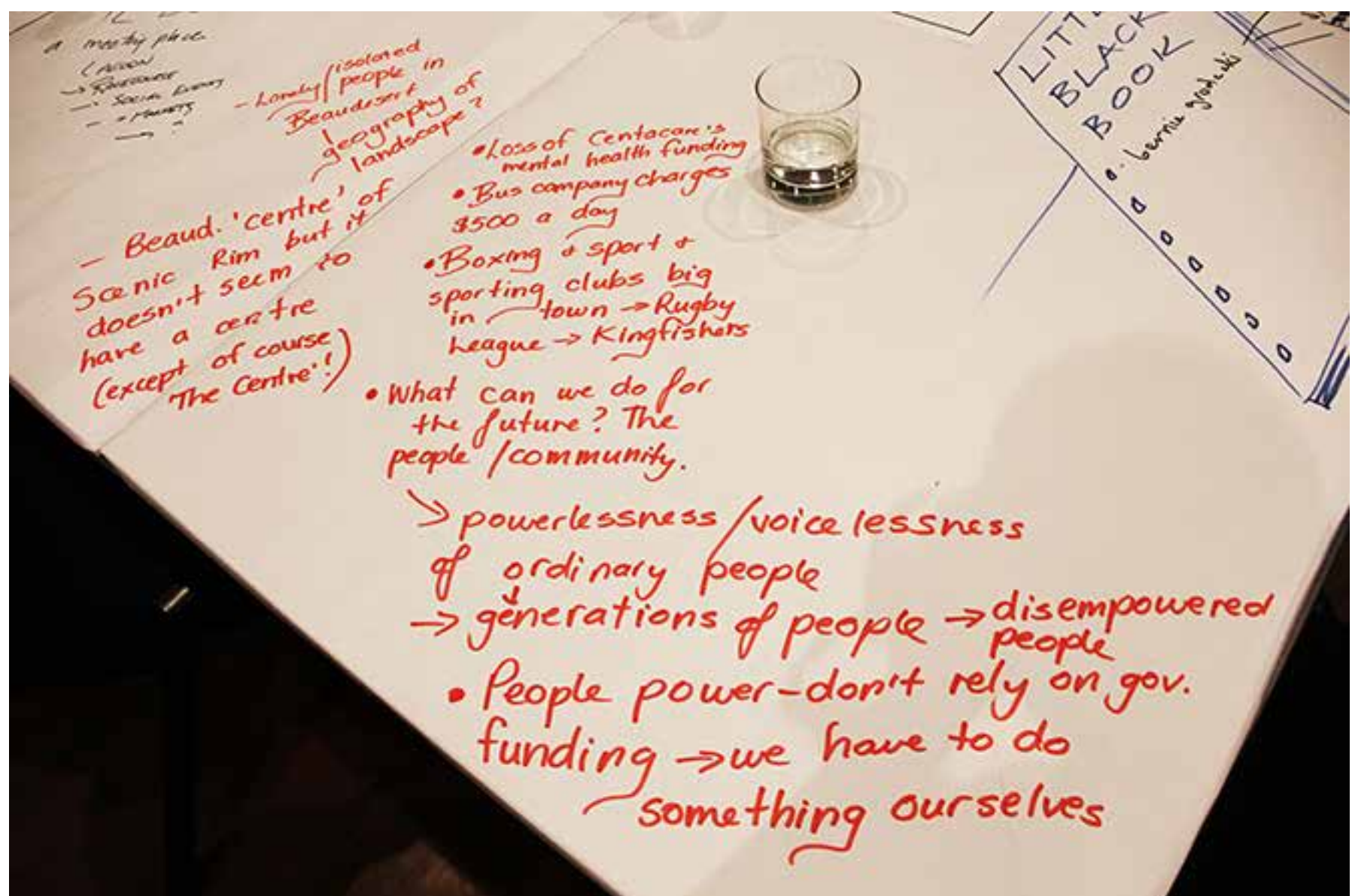
A young emerging filmmaker was engaged as a Local Content Producer and mentored by the

filmmaker and production team to create two films about the Australian South Sea Islander history of the region.

The Beaudesert Historical Society was paired with the two local primary schools that were covering local history in their Year 3 and 4 curriculum. The two groups were able to interact through a storytelling session at the local Historical Museum, filmed by the filmmaker, as well as artworks that the students created afterwards and used to reflect on their interpretations of what they'd learnt.

Young Mununjali students from the local high school were engaged in participatory theatre workshops to create and shoot their own drama. They helped with the filming process and a "Making of" film was created and shown at the community screening. This group of high school kids was the most deeply engaged of all the groups. Such a film which tried to incorporate a participatory process as well as to document it as a pro-

Figure 2. Community responses to the question, "What are some of Beaudesert's Big Stories?"



fessional film had not been done in a Big Stories project before.

Another participatory aspect of the project was the Skippy Deluxe storytelling booth. This was designed as an arts intervention to involve the biggest cross-section of the community in the project. A caravan was parked at the Beaudesert Show, the biggest community event of the year, allowing for people to come in and record a message with the filmmaker about what Beaudesert means to them and what they would like to see happen in their community in the future. These responses were edited into a short film and screened inside the caravan at the community screening.

In the Beaudesert project we also had the involvement of Participatory Media Production students, which has added a layer of richness and complexity. They created digital stories with community members over a period of time, plus interactive elements such as multimedia postcards and a “mapping Main Street” text map that collated Main Street shop owners feelings and concerns about the present and future of their town.

At the screening and exhibition community groups to show their photography and art works that tied in with the stories that we’d created. One of the stories was about a local dairy farmer overcoming depression and starting the region’s first robotic dairy. A series of his photographs, which had helped him as therapy during his depression, were exhibited in the foyer space. The painted works of local Mununjali artists complemented their digital stories about their connection to community and country.

Participation and co-creativity: a more nuanced perspective

I’ve outlined here the different ways in which we’ve worked with the community in order to show how complex and diverse the work can be. It must be noted that only in the drama project did community members participate in the traditional sense of participatory media, with the participants holding the cameras and writing the script.³

However, all participants who had films made about them had the chance to watch the films before they were finalised and screened, and to have a

say about the way in which they were represented. This dialogue and the engagement with the community to gain their consent is a key element of the process and integral to maintaining the trust of the community. It is also a sign of respect and partnership with the people that you are working with.

There were only a few changes made to the films as final pieces – one piece was taken out where a young girl talked about giving other kids a bloody nose, another was taken out where a young boy talked about his family, another small part was taken out where an older local had referred incorrectly to the landscape. This raises questions about the expectations and desires of community participants in these projects, and highlights ideas of process that are rich for further exploration.

It still remains common practice for participatory video and other aspects of practice such as digital storytelling that they are only created for a small audience with the aim of presenting selves and eliciting dialogue. However, when these media are created for a wider audiences and these audiences are part of the expectations of participants, the need for aesthetic beauty and for the work to communicate and evoke an emotional response must be balanced against the need for voice and ethical process to be equally respected. This balance can cause conflict and friction within these projects, particularly when participants come from different approaches and have tight deadlines competing with high expectations.

Project outcomes

Overall I believe that the project achieved what it set out to do, and feedback from the community has been predominantly positive. One participant and audience member said:

“What a wonderful gift you gave to the community last Friday evening. It was just another jewel in the crown of how the arts, culture and heritage are slowly being valued in this district. I have had such fun since, talking to others who were there and comparing which segments we each liked best, which brings different responses according to our

own interests. Your photography, production skills and communication were evident to us all”.

Some of the films raised awareness in the community of their diverse history. One audience member and participants said of the Australian South Sea Islander films:

“Not a lot of people know my heritage from my father’s side, and I am still learning more and more as I get older myself. My great, great grandfather was a victim of Blackbirding, being lured on to European ships with lollies and chocolate in Vanuatu as a young boy along with his twin brother, not knowing the ship would sail away never to return. Once they arrived in Australia, all the family was separated and sent to work for different wealthy men but my grandfather and his twin brother, they were sent to Tweed Heads to work on banana plantations. The story touched me deep within my soul, questioning, creating tears, emotions and curiosity. This story has changed me from within and now I finally see!”

This feedback is anecdotal and it must be noted that one of the things that holds back understanding of these projects as well as the field as a whole, is the lack of resources and time given for proper evaluation.

Conclusions

Audience and ethnographic studies of online participatory media are a nascent field, where there is much work to do. Further insight is needed into what constitutes participation and co-creation in a project like this which has multiple aims in terms of both product and process.

As practitioners we must ask ourselves, how can practitioners balance these competing agendas and desires? What is it that participants and audiences of such projects actually want? Often texts dealing with this field can frame themselves in quite idealistic, black and white terms around ideas of participation and power, without a more nuanced and complex depiction of what this ac-

tually looks like in practice.

As projects like this get larger and larger they are confronted by pressures to find a market and sustainability models for the work moving forward. This is an exciting area for practice and research that needs to be better understood. ■

Notes

1. Carpentier 2014, Nash 2014.
2. Carpentier, Schroder and Hallett (2014), Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) and Markham, Livingstone and Couldry (2010), among others.
3. Lunch and Lunch (2006), Milne, Mitchell and de Lange (2012).

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Folk media and their use in HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns

Hagos Nigussie

This article examines the use of folk media in Irob district, in rural Ethiopia. The main feature of folk media is that they are credible sources of information. Neglecting folk media channels combined with a low level of community participation, results in significantly less effective district-level intervention programs.

Folk media as traditional forms of communication include songs, theatre, drama, oral poetry, and proverbs among others. These communication channels represent the values and lifestyles of people and are embedded in their cultural, social, and psychological thinking. The main feature of folk media is that they are credible sources of information. They promote local knowledge and remain an integral part of the socio-cultural, religious, and political views of communities.

Unlike mass media, the origins of folk media are in traditional social spaces supported by social networks. Social networks are described in such terms as the density of ties, boundedness, and homogeneity of a particular society (Ackerson & Viswanath, 2009). In addition, rural life is dominated by kinship and various socio-cultural and religious views. Communities have a lot in common and value their social context promoting the cohesion and mutual trust. In this light, social networks contribute significantly to strengthening acceptance of folk media forms among the rural communities.

Although we are in an era of advanced communication technologies, folk media forms play an essential role in the daily lives of rural com-

munities like the *Irob* people. However, these communication channels are little recognized, remain unwritten, and are transmitted orally to the next generation. Therefore, the responsibility to share folk media falls upon the community elders. This has confined folk media forms to the specific context where they have existed for centuries. Historically, the *Irob* people have used a variety of folk media forms. Some of these channels are:

Warsim is a cultural information exchange technique among members of the *Irob* people. The term literally means *to ask and/or inform someone about what is happening or going to happen*. Through *Warsim*, every community member conveys what he or she has seen and heard. Messages disseminated by *Warsim* circulate widely in a very short period of time. Information ranging from market news, weather, and security issues for people living in border areas is broadly communicated.

A visitor, for instance, may be asked: '*ba'ado nagaa*', which means: *is it safe around you?* Another example is: *rob litinni?* which literally means: *is it raining in your area?* The issue of rain remains a priority in these areas because the inhabitants depend on seasonal rains to feed themselves and their animals.

The prevalence of *Warsim* among the *Irob* people is not only based on history, but also because it is remarkably convenient. Information disseminated through *Warsim* is more accessible to locals because essentially they trust it. Access to modern communication devices like radio and mobile phones is not uncommon in *Irob* these days, but the elders describe these channels as *diraa'ble*, meaning *liar*. This is because information obtained from these sources cannot be verified and they remain doubtful about it.

Aa'dar is an elaborate oral poetry tradition used to appraise, emphasize, or criticize someone or something. It addresses the socio-cultural, political, and religious aspects of both ancient and contemporary events. *Aa'darens*, or poets, make *Aa'dar* based on what they know of the past and relate it to the present. The issues raised in *Aa'dar* might range from individual household concerns to different social, religious, and political issues.

As a performance intended to articulate ideas



Two Irob boys in Alitena, the traditional centre. The Irob people are an ethnic group who occupy a predominantly high-land, mountainous area by the same name in northeastern Tigray Region, Ethiopia. They speak the Saho language, are Christians and mainly agriculturalists. Photo: Wikipedia.

with accuracy, it requires the *Aa'darens* to become well-versed in the details of a specific experience and context. Regardless of their levels of education, *Aa'darens* are expected to be historians, politicians, and scholars of religion, in addition to recognizing the culture and norms of the people they are addressing. These are the minimum criteria required to be a respected *Aa'daren*.

If there is inaccuracy in the *Aa'dar*, it is an affront to the history and realities of the people. Among the *Irob*, *Aa'dar* is the most respected and trusted way of expressing emotions and thoughts. The content of *Aa'dar* remains in the minds of the audience for long periods of time. The unique skill set of *Aa'dar* is something that only a few individuals possess.

Goila is a cultural form of singing and dancing that occurs mainly at weddings and other cultural and religious festivities. Songs are performed in

public gatherings, often involving hundreds of people, which convey different messages ranging from love to socio-political issues. During the Ethiopian rainy season usually from July to August, lots of religious and cultural festivities take place. Such occasions serve as gatherings for rural people where individuals compose different songs and share them with fellow participants in *Goila*.

The themes of traditional songs may be dominated by current socio-cultural and political events. Once a song is performed in one area, it is widely circulated to every corner and information gets disseminated among rural people. The songs, therefore, are not only for entertainment but are also a means to share different socio-cultural and political views. The songs inform and educate people who are unaware of certain events around them.

To the *Irob* people in general, folk media forms

remain the central focus in their communication of socio-cultural, religious, and political views. Likewise, they trust these channels as potential conduits to address any development initiatives in their district. Integrating these media forms as rural development communication strategies, however, remains lamentably underutilized.

Debates continue about whether or not all development strategies should exclusively rely on local expertise and local knowledge. However, combining local knowledge and resources with modern scientific understanding can bring development endeavours forward. The remainder of this article focuses on the question: What is the significance of folk media in HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns in *Irob* district? Can using folk media help to connect rural people to the epidemic prevention campaigns?

The HIV/AIDS prevention campaign

With an estimated 1.1 million people living with HIV, Ethiopia has one of the largest populations of HIV-infected people worldwide. Though the epidemic appears to be declining in urban centres, the same cannot be said for rural areas. Different studies also point out that nationwide intervention programs have focused primarily on individual behaviour change initiatives. The prevailing belief is that effective teaching of individuals would change the risky behaviour of the majority. In the Ethiopian context however, communities abide by collective norms and targeting individual behaviour changes may not be sufficient in terms of creating the conditions for change.

On the other hand, unlike other development communication strategies, HIV/AIDS communication is characterized by an immense silence from the target population. This may result from a social context that may prohibit effective communication among the population. In some rural areas, for instance, talking about HIV/AIDS has been a taboo. There are also those who relate the epidemic to retribution from God. Therefore, any HIV/AIDS intervention strategy should focus on the specific context promoting holistic epidemic communication rather than targeting individuals.

HIV/AIDS messages should also include local

communication forms to promote community awareness and enhance their participation. In this view, emphasizing the need for local communication in development initiatives, Servaes et al (1996: 89) argue that “the value of indigenous communication has been underestimated and undervalued in most development programs.” Thus, unless epidemic intervention programs consider the social context of communities, the HIV/AIDS prevention campaign could not easily be achieved.

In general, HIV/AIDS prevention communication tools should remain specific to the socio-cultural perspectives of the target population. However, district level communication tools in *Irob* such as posters, leaflets, newspapers, and magazines are less contextualized to the diverse socio-economic aspects of society. As a result, these methods fail to engage community participation.

Barriers to mutual understanding

Epidemic communication in Ethiopia succeeded in raising awareness among different groups, but most significantly among the literate. Despite this, the one-size-fits-all approach of epidemic prevention has proven less successful in rural Ethiopia. Hence, it is the specific context that determines the nature of the epidemic prevention campaign rather than applying similar approaches across regions.

The value of culture-based epidemic prevention campaign strategies remains more relevant to rural areas like the *Irob* district. Therefore, tackling HIV/AIDS requires a holistic approach toward treatment, prevention, care and support. In response to the nature of epidemic communication strategies in *Irob* district, one interviewee raised the following concern:

“Basically, I believe that the HIV/AIDS prevention campaign programs could be effective if they are able to include our ways of communication like *Aa'dar*. It is mostly rehearsed in areas where people are gathered like weddings and other societal festivities. The *Irob* people have been using it for a long time. As a result, we accept it as the most preferable means to convey our feelings and

emotions. When it comes to HIV/AIDS prevention, if messages could have been used through these channels, more people would have been interested in them. But unfortunately, there are no chances to use them so far.”

This idea shows that local people know which media forms would be effective in addressing the HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. Folk media messages can reach the majority at a time and positively influence their behaviour. Besides, messages through these communication channels reduce the language barrier which is becoming a major obstacle to mutual understanding between the people and health professionals.

In this view, UNFPA (2002: 25), for instance, notes that “messages adapted to the people’s own language, intellectual systems and ways of life, as well as their teaching and learning and communication methods, can communicate information and influence behaviour change.” However, this is the missing link in most rural HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns in Ethiopia.

The *Irob* people are predominantly illiterate or semi-literate, and their main occupations are farming and animal husbandry. Thus, most of the existing health communication strategies are alien to them. Conversely, employing folk media is inclusive because it embodies many of the activities, beliefs, and customs shared by members of the community.

The culture of *Irob* society is largely based on oral histories and traditions, much of which remains unwritten. As a result, non-indigenous HIV/AIDS prevention interventions, and the tools employed to communicate them, are guilty of misunderstanding the context. Current intervention programs have limited the participation of societies in responding to epidemics they face.

The *Irob* experience indicates that communities are not able to access dominant media. They prefer to use folk media such as songs, spoken word, and Warsim to verify knowledge and express themselves. Nevertheless, HIV/AIDS intervention communication strategies in the region fail to employ these folk media channels, despite the fact

that most practitioners are aware of them. The types of communication used in interventions remain incompatible with the cultural context of the people. There are also low literacy levels and language barriers.

In addition, most intervention programs are carried out using *Tigrigna*, the dominant regional language, which a number of the *Irob* communities do not understand. Consequently, the study finds that neglecting folk media channels combined with a low level of community participation, results in significantly less effective district-level intervention programs.

The primary recommendation is to incorporate communication forms that are sensitive to cultural contexts, and address the needs and expectations of these communities. ■

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Media representation of Muslim youth in Australia

Laya Matindoost

There is great contradiction between what a multicultural Australia promises its citizens – an egalitarian country that gives everyone a “fair go” irrespective of their race, religion and colour – and what the minorities and specifically Muslims face in the form of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and hostility which is prevalent both at the social and institutional level. This article provides a glimpse of marginalized “youth” who have never been heard of and provides insight into the challenges they have faced and are facing due to being a minority.

The frequent depiction of “Muslim Youth” by the media as individuals who pose a threat to the national security of Australia by being radicalized and ready to join “ISIS” is another step in marginalizing and excluding this minority group. The political discourse surrounding “Muslims” is associated and proliferated with terms such as “terrorism”, “honour-killing”, “oppression of women”, “anti-western”, and “anti-modernity”. All of this exacerbates their vilification and further magnifies and jeopardizes not only their religious identity but their personal and social identity.

However, the reason behind the disintegration of Muslim youth has never been questioned. There is great contradiction between what multicultural Australia promises its citizens as an egalitarian country that gives everyone a “fair go” irrespective of their race, religion and colour and what the minorities and specifically Muslims face

in the form of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and hostility which is prevalent both at the social and institutional level in Australia and has been evident in “race riots”, “reclaim Australia riots” and the so-called famous “Cronulla Riots”.¹

The radicalization and marginalization of “youth” who still have strong ties with their country of descent is an indication of the fact that they might not have any sense of “belonging” to this “land of opportunities”. More insight is needed into the challenges they face due to being a minority and what motivates them to take extreme measures to be heard.

Islamophobia in Australia

Multiculturalism was brought into Australia to erode “open racism” and encourage cultural diversity and equality (Jupp, 2002). Although this diversity has seen equal rights for minority religions, attitudes towards Islam and most importantly its depiction reflect great contradictions in how acceptance and equality are demonstrated and enacted.

Integration of minority groups as “close co-operation with the agreement to differ” (Jupp, 2011: 143) has been accentuated by different governments in Australia. However, this peaceful co-existence of different religious groups has not always been observed or achieved. With the occurrence of major incidents around the world in the name of Islam and what is viewed as home grown terrorism, Islam is viewed as a threat to the national security of Western countries and Australia is not exempt.

Without a doubt the main culprit in the development of Islamophobic sentiments in Australia has been the media. This is due to portrayal of Muslims as extremists who want to “wipe out” the West. The rhetoric surrounding Islam as the religion supporting war and violence and opposing peace and justice proliferates. Islam has never been cast as a religion of peace in the West. It has rather been depicted as a religion that legitimizes violence and war. It is further believed that there is great incompatibility of values and norms in the “West” with “Islam” and that there is no harmonious relationship between the two.

There has always been a profound sense of fear of Islam which has been evident in an attempt to “Reclaim Australia”. Muslims are viewed as a group that has failed to integrate and “fit in” to Australian society. In addition, the predominant discourse surrounding immigration and the current anti-immigration political climate in Australia have evoked strong negative sentiments towards the minorities, especially towards Muslims who are viewed as an “other” whose values are markedly incompatible with the values and norms in the West. These great misconceptions about Islam and Muslims are the result of intolerance and ignorance of this religion to the extent that Senator Jackie Lambie, who vocally expressed that there is no place for *Sharia Law* in Australia, could not even delineate the word *Sharia Law*.

The prevalence of Islamophobia, unfair portrayal of Muslims in the media in general and youth in particular as well as anti-Muslim bigotry are all associated with media representation. These overt and latent vocal attacks are premised on ideas which are often put forth by Islamophobics who claim that it is the action of Muslims that is causing fear of Islam. These attacks are not only targeted at those who are involved in “terrorism” attacks directly but those who are vilified by it.

As clashes between the “West” and “Islam” intensify, Muslims are scrutinized more and greater salience is given to their religious identity disregarding the diversity of their backgrounds. This is a generalization that has impacted Muslims of different sociocultural backgrounds among which “youth” have been the major targets and victims. Conflating all Muslims with terrorism and Jihadists has brought a great sense of insecurity and fear to this group. Furthermore, the sensationalist headlines that have depicted a sinister picture of Islam and the discourse predominating the media in the aftermath of events such as 9/11 have demonized and devalued Islam and marginalized Muslims.

Stigmatizing, stereotyping and associating Muslims with backwardness, gender segregation and discrimination, child marriage, anti-Semitism, and *Burqas* is prevalent in the media and as such in the West. Muslim women have specifically been

depicted as women who endure great inequality. Great resentment and hostility towards Muslims has arisen as a consequence, which is evident in racial attacks, attacks on mosques and campaigns against building mosques.

In contrast, attacks carried out by non-Muslims such as the Oslo massacre, the plane crash caused by the pilot of Germanwings, and the US cinema shooting in Colorado, to name just a few, are justified by depicting these people as having psychological problems and being mentally ill. This is a great reflection of double standards.

The rise of Islamophobia has been exacerbated by the current extreme actions of ISIS and the growing number of people from both East and West joining this terrorist group. The current manifestations of Islam and ISIS and the whole narrative constructed around them have led to a growing number of young people both from Australia and around the world joining this group or converting to Islam.

The fact that many Muslims themselves resent the acts carried out by ISIS is evident in their condemnations of this group. In addition, the struggle against ISIS by Peshmerga and Guerrilla Kurdish women fighters who go to the frontline and risk their lives to protect their countries and their people is further proof of not condoning the actions of ISIS.

“Land of Opportunities”

Construction of identities during adolescence years is a key factor (Erikson, 1968). For Muslim youth this is made possible through the creation of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) so as to keep their emotional ties with their own or their parents’ country of origin. A great sense of loyalty to the country of their descent has compelled them to prove their identity and has prompted an urge to fight for freedom of the people in those countries.

Therefore the fact that they are never fully accepted and are excluded in their country of birth, in this case Australia, makes their identification with their ethnicity stronger and as such their loyalty to it. Most Muslim youth have no choice but to be confined to the ethnic enclaves that give

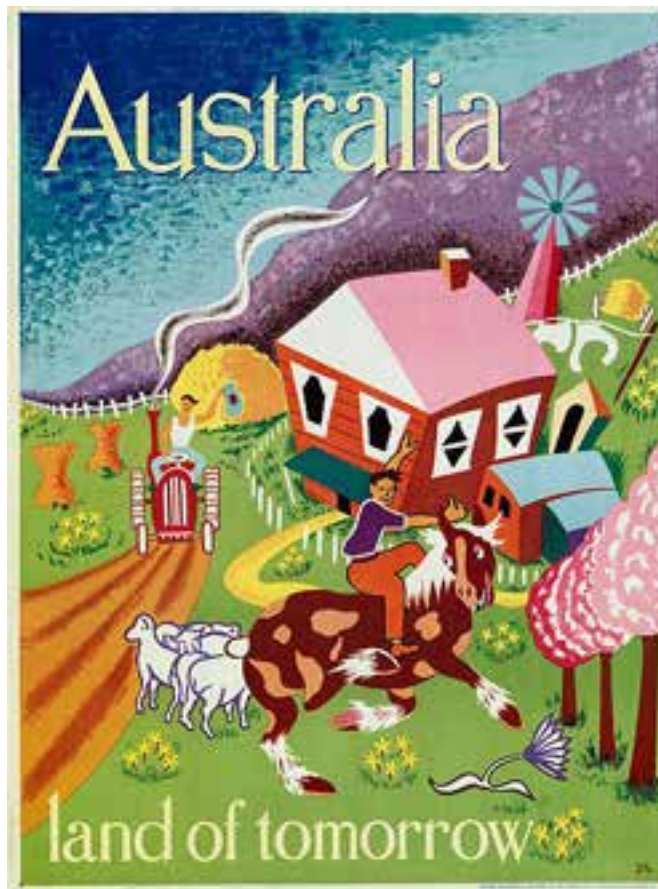
them a sense of belonging which is absent in this “land of opportunities”.

Further, the security umbrella of Western countries is used to justify military interventions against the so-called “war on terror” in order to protect their countries from terrorist attacks. These military and liberal or humanitarian interventions in places like, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria in the name of bringing freedom and peace to these countries has long been justified by deployment of the army to these areas which has led to enormous destruction and loss of human life. No moral duty has been attached on the part of the West.

There is a great paradox between how democracy and its values are expressed and how they are manifested on the ground. The escalation of war in the Middle East has happened in the name of democracy, liberty and freedom of speech, which has only led to the deterioration of the situation in the Arab nations. The self-interest of Western countries in carrying out military operations has always been concealed. Few alternatives to the war such as political alternatives or making use of social movements have been tried. Such alternatives have always been undermined. The so-called social and revolutionary movement of the “Arab Spring” was rapidly replaced by the war movement of the West.

These suggest that Muslim youth actions are politically rather than religiously instigated. Detachment and disintegration of Muslim youth is a reflection of many issues that these young people are faced with, including structural inequalities, discrimination, stigmatization, bigotry, being viewed as a second-class citizens and the “other” who does not belong and is inferior.

One wonders, therefore, whether multicultur-



Australian Government poster, "Australia: land of Tomorrow".

This poster was displayed between 1949 and 1951 in reception rooms and dining halls at various migrant reception centers in Australia. It was placed to introduce and entice newcomers to Australia.

The creator of this colourful and light-hearted poster, Joe Greenberg, was told later by a Czech migrant that it had been displayed in all the migrant camps in Europe, and had influenced him to come to Australia.

alism is only a catchphrase adopted by Australia. If there is a claim on the part of the government that minorities have been beneficial to the growth and development of the country and have added to its prosperity, then the question is why such a strong anti-migration climate and stringent laws surrounding it are present in the country? These anti-migration sentiments are targeted especially at those who are “visibly different” and more strongly towards Muslims.

Although the “White Australia” policy has been abolished, intolerance of visibly different migrants is apparent. Migrants are classified hierarchically with some “more ‘alien’ than others” but none equal to the natives” (Roosens, 1989: 130) and “in most cases, assigning them to the lower decks of societal ships” (Kazemipur & Nakhaie, 2014: 611).

Need to address social failings

Generalizing, devaluing and stereotyping based on what is done in a few cases by extremists and not seeking out the voices of moderate Muslims have marginalized Muslim youth. Without a doubt extremists have been empowered by those who depict Islam as a religion of extremism. Yet the issues that cause people to turn to violence in order to achieve political objectives remain to be addressed: Lack of social support, lack of support from school and teachers, higher rates of un-

employment, absence of engagement and interaction with the wider society have strengthened the feeling of being unwanted.

Australia as a “land of opportunities” should bring equal opportunities for people of all creeds. It is possible “to sing the praises of the ‘multiethnic community of tolerance’ to point to the ‘richness’ of the ‘cultural mosaic’ within a city or state – and most national leaders of multiethnic countries do so regularly” (Roosens, 1989: 18). Eradication of racism and bigotry is only made possible by embracing differences. ■

Note

1. A series of sectarian clashes and mob violence in Australia, originating in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla, New South Wales, and spreading over the next few nights into other suburbs. On 4 December 2005, a group of volunteer surf lifesavers were assaulted by a group of young men of Arab appearance, with several other violent assaults occurring over the next week. These incidents were widely commented on in the Sydney media and are considered to be a key factor in a racially motivated confrontation the following weekend.

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The good society and building a culture of hope

Mohammad Sahid Ullah

Worldwide, people are living in a culture of fear. They see the horror of brutality through conventional media or in virtual communication every day that create a mindset of fear. But, people should not bear this legacy further when all of us envision a good and peaceful society for ourselves as well as for the next generation. How communication will play a role in eradicating fear from mind, life and society is the key point of this article.

The quality of human life is seriously at stake in the early 21st century due to the fearful mindset of people all over the world. Every moment human beings are exposing various types of fear related to natural calamities, terrorism, epidemics, food toxins, global climate change, nuclear disaster, third party interference in virtual communication platforms, a crisis of trust, and ubiquitous surveillance by law-enforcement agencies. We perceive the world as a dangerous place to live and survive.

The present world is characterized by the spread of risks and worldwide we can observe a growing “culture of fear” (Hamelink, 2012: 222). This fear is the key drawback to a culture of hope and, of course, dreams of living in a good society. This is not, perhaps, anything new. But the nature of fear has changed over the centuries. The invention of new technologies of information and communication has brought new tensions and new fears, while offering some measure of hope for change.

Some critics believe that fear is an outcome of neoliberalism in this century. With the rise of neoliberalism, Khan (2015) asserts that a corpor-

ate-dominated, state-assisted, deregulated growth strategy has yielded significant economic gains for many but has also entailed inexorable social, moral and environmental adversities. In this article, I suggest how communication will help eradicate or uproot the fear of mind, life and society and what strategies will bring a culture of hope to achieve the ultimate goal of well being.

Culture of fear: Extinction of human lives

Fear is inherent to the human condition. Ontologically, humans live in the permanent buffer zone of tension between being and non-being, between life and death, between love and abandonment, between success and failure, between being and having. In this fearful world, we are all aware of uncertainties and of threats that are not necessarily connected with objective events. More or less we all are conscious of gaps between expectation and reality.

Despite this consciousness, a section of people, who are in general considered power-rich, do not take the threat of our survival seriously. Dutta (2011: 3) accuses mainstream communicative processes of “maintaining the interests of power elites, and continuing to reinforce the increasing class difference within the neoliberal framework.” This existential basic layer finds expression in emotions connected to concrete experiences like illness, unemployment, divorce or bankruptcy – stigma, anger, humiliation, shame, and grief.

Much of human fear is in fact related to the perceived dangers of future conditions –survival with human dignity. Such perceptions are socially mediated. In social mediation processes, media (entertainment and news media, and both conventional and new media) have become central institutions. The political use of media and communication spaces by power-elites offers day after day a discourse of fear.

In the age of neoliberalism, it has been found that fear is an outcome of the systematic exploitation and humiliation of the less powerful by the more powerful. And humiliation is the key cause of human suffering. The psychological pain caused by humiliation can have consequences that reach far beyond the experience of physical pain, deny-

ing the value and significance of victims.

Hamelink (2012: 226) trusts that through persuasive forms of public communication the powerful “manage to make majorities believe that their world order will benefit all.” This understanding, in other words, is a process of avoiding the key causes – access, control and command over the consumption of the world’s natural and material resources being in the clutches of few power-rich people.

Many scholars (e.g. Khan, 2015; Piketty 2014; Thorsen and Lie, 2014) opine that there is a correlation between neoliberalism, acts of noticeable consumption especially by the rich and the privileged, and the rise in the incidence of crime and injustice worldwide. Khan argues that the act of consumption and the display of opulence drive home the reality of social and economic inequality within a community, which contributes to crime, corruption, drug abuse, social exclusion and erosion of virtues of empathy, leading to tensions and fracturing of societies

To avoid the risk, we need to create a good society in which peace and harmony will be the prime movers behind all human activities. This society would be a fearless society where any systematic exploitation of power-poor by power-rich will not exist.

Good society: Utopia and reality

Good societies are those that “nurture and thrive on values of equity, empathy, social justice and environmental sustainability” (Khan, 2015). The formation of a good society embeds qualities of equity in its fabric, as well as justice and environmental sustainability, as both end goals and guiding principles. It has seemed that the world’s religious and ethical systems are powerful motivations to limit human suffering and to establish good societies.

The urge to avoid giving harm to others and to diminish people’s suffering is a key concern in all religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As such, the expectation of a good and harmonious society is not a utopian desire, it is integral to human life.

The guiding principles of a good society in all re-

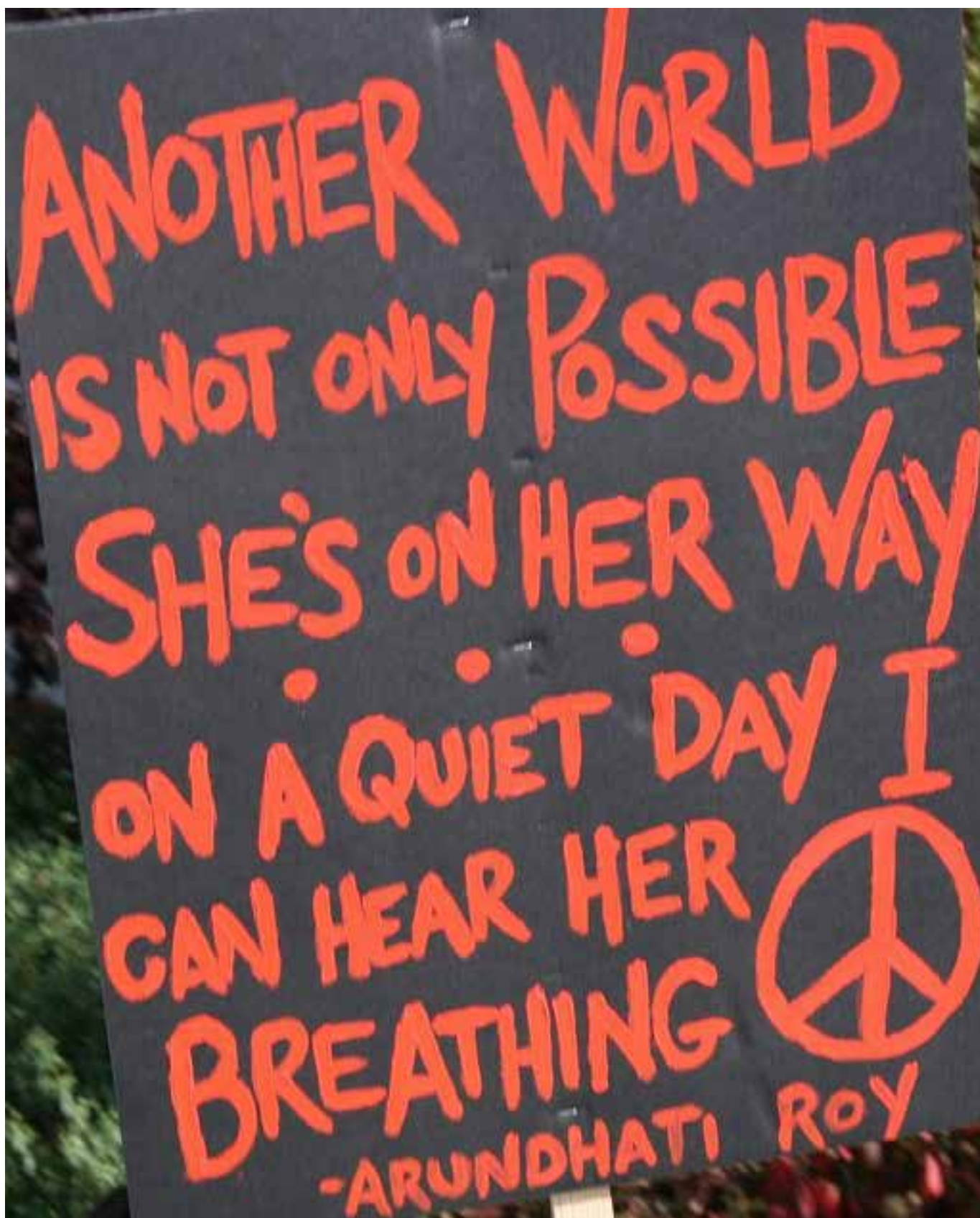
ligions advocate common betterment and equity, not only for those with power. This society must not rely on the power at the ruler’s disposal, rather it must rest on laws that have been made in such a way that the ruled have agreed to them and have had a part in their making. The laws must be just and must apply equally to all. This is similar to the Aristotelian’s view of a “happy society” that must devise rules, regulations and governance arrangements that are participatory, inclusive and accountable, which balance economic growth with social, moral and environmental norms.

The second important issue is that our planners must not allow economics and overconsumption to take primacy over people and society. This strategy ranks Bhutan, the world’s poorest nation as the happiest society in the “gross national happiness” (GNH) index. Bhutan has replaced gross domestic product (GDP) as its measure of progress with the concept of GNH, depending on four basic pillars: (i) fair socio-economic development (better education and health), (ii) conservation and promotion of a vibrant culture, (iii) environmental protection and (iv) good governance. With these pillars, Bhutan draws the world’s attention to creating a good society.

Following this line, the international community, particularly the UN, has started to make efforts to put “happiness” ahead of economic growth. For example, the UN General Assembly has argued that “happiness is a fundamental human goal and universal aspiration; that GDP by its nature does not reflect that goal; that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption impede sustainable development; and also that a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach is needed to promote sustainability, eradicate poverty, and enhance wellbeing and happiness” (UN, A/RES/65/309 -2012).

Culture of hope: Survival of humanity

The notion of a culture of hope is the sharing of action alternatives that concretely demonstrate how people are capable of deeds of solidarity, compassion, acceptance of differences and mutual respect. Hamelink (2012: 219) argues “communication should be mobilized to rescue the planet’s



future” and this can be achieved through global networks of those urban movements that increasingly move beyond their local political environments.

Like many others, Hamelink perhaps senses that this century might soon become a globalised metropolitan society. But the reality is that the city would be more discriminatory than now. For instance, the rise of Mumbai, the Indian megacity, like many cities creates indiscriminate difference between poor and rich in every sphere of life. Being deprived of rights and opportunities and the

insecurity of people’s lives have threatened not only the poor but also the rich.

Poor people are always in fear of their survival as human beings and the rich are in fear of crime – extortion, ransom, kidnapping, mugging and killings and so on. But this is not an expected lifestyle for human beings when they dream of a good society. Arguably, requires the development of new forms of discursive power that can shift from a culture of fear to a culture of hope.

Needless to say that we, the people on this planet, have wasted our time in pondering what society can do for the economy. But the time has come for us to turn this theory on its head and put society ahead of the economy, and ask ourselves what the economy can do for society, and more

precisely what we should do, both nationally and internationally, to achieve the parameters of a good society which are economically uplifting and yet socially just, morally nourishing and environmentally conserving.

Khan (2015) asks for a change at the conceptual level of understanding in peoples’ mindsets and establishes the end goal of humankind. For him, “Given the colossal harm that the neoliberal economic system has caused to societies, we must turn our vision on its head and focus on society and not growth and/or ‘development’.”

He also argues, “we must reform the global economic system that has promoted and entangled societies in the throes of neoliberalism and its growth trap that has inflicted such predatory social, moral, behavioural and environmental consequences.” Khan’s notion can contribute towards turning fear into hope step by step. New media can lead the transition by projecting alternative voices among the world’s youth.

Finally, it can be argued that fear is the central concern. Throughout history, communication has been an essential adaptive response to the challenge of human survival. Communication scholars thus need to identify strategies aimed at bringing our world back into harmony with itself. ■

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La tecnología ¿define la estructura de la sociedad?

Carlos A. Valle

El filósofo francés Jaques Ellul, en la década del 1950, hablaba de La technique como la mentalidad moderna cuyo elemento determinante es la búsqueda permanente de la eficiencia en todas las actividades humanas, incluida el proceso tecnológico. “Technique es la totalidad de métodos racionalmente logrados y que tengan absoluta eficiencia (...) en todos los campos de la actividad humana.”

Para Ellul se trata de fuerzas deshumanizantes que controlan no sólo la industria y los negocios, sino también la política, la educación, la iglesia, los medios masivos de comunicación y las relaciones internacionales. “En el mundo moderno, la más peligrosa forma de determinismo es el fenómeno tecnológico.”

En ese sentido, el progreso tecnológico tiene un desarrollo con tal grado de autonomía que, frente a él, no caben más que dos posibilidades: adaptarse o permanecer al margen y quedar desfasado. Para Ellul, la tecnología ha avanzado tanto sobre la sociedad que la define, convirtiéndose en parte esencial de su estructura.

En nuestra búsqueda por comprender qué significa la comunicación en el mundo actual la concluyente posición de Ellul lleva a preguntar: ¿Es esta una descripción cabal del mundo moderno? ¿Es la tecnología una amenaza tan feroz y determinante del mundo actual? ¿Cómo afecta el desarrollo tecnológico la dignidad humana y sus formas y contenidos de comunicación? ¿Será necesario rechazar la tecnología?

Para entender qué significa la comunicación

mundial será conveniente, dada la complejidad del mundo tecnológico, comenzar por establecer un encuadre que permita poner en evidencia los paradójicos desafíos que se ciernen sobre el futuro de la humanidad y la preservación de la dignidad de las personas.

El factor tecnológico: una variable instrumental

El profesor Alejandro Piscitelli ha estado estudiando en forma creativa y crítica el desarrollo de los medios tecnológicos en la sociedad moderna. Repetidamente ha llamado la atención sobre la necesidad de considerar esta nueva realidad como un desafío que se debe analizar en toda su dimensión. Fue muy estimulante el proceso que usó en la preparación de uno de sus libros.

Publicó en la red los varios capítulos de su obra a la espera del comentario de los cibernautas. Mostraba así su apertura académica y su interés pedagógico por incorporar participantes de esos nuevos medios. Esta apertura no era una postura ingenua, por eso llega a alertar:

“La historia del impacto social de la tecnología muestra la conexión existente entre un tipo determinado de tecnología y una forma específica de sociedad. Ni toda tecnología sirve a cualquier sociedad, ni toda sociedad puede absorber cualquier tipo de tecnología. En tanto el factor tecnológico es la variable instrumental, y dado que las máquinas son incapaces, aún, de dictar los ideales sociales, cabe exclusivamente al cuerpo social determinar los modelos de convivencia que se desean alcanzar.”

Es importante aquí hacer una referencia a lo que propone Manuel Castells en su importante obra “La era de la Información”. Para entender la complejidad del mundo actual, entiende Castells, debemos comenzar por entender la revolución de la tecnología de la información, debido a su capacidad de penetración en todo el ámbito de la actividad humana.

Diciendo esto Castells no infiere que “las nuevas formas y procesos sociales surjan como con-

secuencia del cambio tecnológico". Así afirma categóricamente que "la tecnología no determina la sociedad", pero "tampoco la sociedad dicta el curso del cambio tecnológico". En otras palabras: "La tecnología no determina la sociedad: la plasma. Pero la sociedad tampoco determina la innovación tecnológica: la utiliza".

No obstante los cuestionamientos que podrían hacerse a esta posición no puede obviarse el hecho de que la dialéctica entre sociedad y tecnología es una relación altamente significativa para comprender el mundo presente. Porque, si bien hay un componente de manipulación ideológica y una buena fundada preocupación por sus efectos, no debemos descuidar su real importancia.

La revolución tecnológica y sus efectos en la sociedad de la información deben ser considerados tan importantes como lo fue la revolución industrial. Castells mismo considera que siempre que se ha dado una revolución tecnológica "todas se caracterizan por su capacidad de penetración en todos los dominios de la actividad humana no como una fuente exógena de impacto, sino como el paño con el que está tejida esa actividad."

Las tecnologías de la información hoy se pueden comparar con el motor a vapor o la energía nuclear, fundamentales como lo fueron en su momento para dar vida a la revolución industrial. Castells insiste en que "lo que caracteriza a la revolución tecnológica actual no es el carácter central del conocimiento y la información, sino la aplicación de ese conocimiento e información a aparatos de generación de conocimiento y procesamiento de la información /comunicación, en un círculo de



retroalimentación acumulativo entre la innovación y su uso."

Hay, además, un rasgo de la revolución tecnológica actual que tiene una característica propia comparada con otras anteriores, porque esos cambios se dieron en el marco de un reducido número de sociedades y se difundieron en un área geográfica limitada. Por ejemplo: los europeos tomaron algunos de los descubrimientos ocurridos en China y, por su parte China y Japón adoptaron la tecnología europea en forma muy limitada. La revolución industrial se extendió en varias partes en un largo periodo de unos dos siglos y en Gran Bretaña misma no se había afectado a la totalidad de la sociedad a mediados del siglo XIX.

Para Castells "la innovación tecnológica no es un acontecimiento aislado". Refleja:

- * Un estado determinado de conocimiento
- * Un entorno institucional e industrial particular
- * Una cierta disponibilidad de aptitudes para definir un problema técnico y resolverlo
- * Una mentalidad económica para hacer que esa aplicación sea rentable

- * Una red de productores y usuarios que puedan comunicar sus experiencias de forma acumulativas
- * Aprendiendo al utilizar y crear: “las elites aprenden creando, con lo que modifican las aplicaciones de la tecnología, mientras que la mayoría de la gente aprende utilizando, con lo que permanece dentro de las limitaciones de los formatos de la tecnología.”

La tecnología no está sola

Esta descripción del mundo tecnológico no puede comprenderse como un hecho aislado porque está inmerso en las profundas aguas de un complejo mar de fuerzas económicas, políticas y sociales que determinan muchas de las corrientes que arrastran su evolución y que afectan las posibilidades del desarrollo de la vida humana y su dignidad. Por ese motivo, es imposible aislar el significado de la tecnología del contexto en que se desarrolla. Por el contrario, hay una cierta retroalimentación entre los procesos económicos, políticos y sociales y el desarrollo de ciertas áreas de la tecnología.

A lo largo de la historia de la industrialización puede observarse que toda nueva invención técnica ha venido acompañada de promesas de mayor bienestar, felicidad y mejor relación y comprensión entre los pueblos. Algunos teóricos insisten en que la responsabilidad sobre el desarrollo tecnológico reside en los seres humanos y que, por lo tanto, es inaceptable representar a la tecnología como un monstruo que amenaza la vida humana.

Desde este punto de vista, la tecnología se define como neutral y pasiva. “La tecnología abre puertas, pero no nos compele a entrar” o “es un pobre artesano quien le echa la culpa a sus herramientas”, son afirmaciones que reflejan esta posición. Un reflejo del optimismo reinante en el siglo XIX cuando se soñaba que la tecnología crearía el paraíso en la Tierra, aunque sin aclarar en qué territorios habría de instalarse.

Frente al optimismo del siglo XIX, el siglo XX asistió a una progresiva naturalización de la presencia tecnológica, acrecentando la presunción de que la tecnología, tal cual la conocemos, siempre ha estado entre nosotros. El siglo XX asistió a los mayores cambios tecnológicos: la aparición y de-

sarrollo del cine, la radio, la televisión, la computación, los satélites, la aviación, son algunos de los ejemplos más significativos. Todos estos elementos son parte de la vida cotidiana de las personas y han generado cambios culturales acelerados. La presencia de la tecnología genera una dinámica dentro de la sociedad cuyos alcances no son fáciles de predecir.

La omnipresencia de la tecnología requiere reiterar las objeciones a lo que todavía algunos insisten en reclamar su total neutralidad. Se basan en la idea de que a los objetos no pueden atribuírseles las consecuencias que puede producir su uso porque no son autónomos. De cualquier manera no es conveniente sacar leyes universales ni por su neutralidad ni para atribuirle toda la responsabilidad. Los objetos son creación humana y responden a los fines para los cuales han sido creados.

También debe admitirse que están, a su vez, condicionados por la dinámica propia de la naturaleza y la utilización de la tecnología. Les caben los mismos principios que a cualquier acción humana. Una vez que se ha puesto en funcionamiento la tecnología, hay ciertos procesos que escapan al control de quien les dio origen, y se pueden producir efectos totalmente inesperados.

El desarrollo tecnológico constituye una caja de Pandora, de cuyo interior no sabemos finalmente qué aflorará y si será posible controlarlo. El aprendiz de brujo, que Disney retrató en la figura de Mickey en su célebre “Fantasía”, puede servir como inquietante metáfora de muchos aspectos del desarrollo tecnológico y, no menos, de quienes lo controlan en el mundo moderno. ■

Carlos A. Valle fue Secretario General de la WACC 1986-2001. Ex Presidente del organismo evangélico del filme, INTERFILM, y autor de *Comunicación es evento* (1988), *Comunicación: modelo para armar* (1990), y *Communication and Mission: In the Labyrinth of Globalisation* (2002). Actualmente colabora con ISEDET, Buenos Aires, enseñando cursos de comunicación y escribiendo artículos para diversas publicaciones.

On the screen...

Nyon (Switzerland) 2015

At Visions Réel 2015 – the 46th international film festival held in Nyon (17-25 April 2015) – the Interreligious Jury awarded its Prize, to the film *Mothers of the Gods* (Madres de los dioses) directed by Pablo Agüero, Argentina, France (2015). The prize is endowed with 5000.▫ CHF contributed by the Swiss Catholic Church and Médias▫pro, the communication department of the Reformed Churches in French speaking Switzerland.

Mothers of the Gods sheds an exemplary light on the impressive spiritual search of five women trying to come to terms with the hardships of their lives while trying to share their newly gained strength with others. This film is artistically utterly convincing and tells its story in a very subtle way. Mothers of the Gods focuses rather on search than on closure which is, as we think, essential for a dialogue between different belief systems.

Synopsis: Five women who have not been spared by life, but who draw some of their strength from spirituality. They do not worship the same gods, but that does not matter: together they have decided to build an ecumenical temple in Patagonia.

In addition, the Interreligious Jury awarded a Commendation to *Homeland* (Iraq Year Zero) directed Abbas Fahdel, Iraq/France (2015). *Homeland* looks carefully and respectfully at the very challenging situation a family in Baghdad finds itself in shortly before and after the second Iraq War. The film penetrates the viewer's consciousness and brings them close to the protagonists of Homeland. Visually they become part of their lives. The filmmaker took great risks in making the film and also saw himself confronted by a personal tragedy.

Synopsis: Two years in the life of an Iraqi family, before and after the American intervention. This powerful collective novel gives life to a saga that

flows as slowly as the river that crosses Baghdad.

The members of the Interreligious Jury in 2015 were Mirela Vasadi Blasius (Romania); Aida Schläpfer al Hassani (Switzerland); Marc Wehrlin (Switzerland); Daniel Wildmann (Great Britain).

Oberhausen (Germany) 2015

At the 61st International Short Film Days held in Oberhausen (April 30 – May 5, 2015), the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize of €1500.- donated by the Evangelical Church in Oberhausen and the Catholic Film Work in Germany, to a film in the International Competition to *La pasión de Judas* directed by David Pantaleón (Spain, 2014).

The film takes up the local Spanish tradition of carrying an effigy of Judas through the streets at Easter and burning it. A group of disabled persons re-enact this event. The director stages the film in a way that creates a critical perspective on religious customs and inspires the audience to think about the ideological foundation of this holiday.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Certificate for a film in the International Competition for Children's and Youth Films to *Ti▫ina Mujo* (Quiet Mujo) directed by Ursula Meier (France, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Switzerland, 2014).

Ten-year old Mujo misplays a penalty kick, the ball lands on the neighbouring cemetery where he meets a woman with whom he strikes up a conversation about the people both have lost in their lives. The director manages with astonishing ease to link the past and present of contemporary Sarajevo, religions and generations with their contradictions.

The members of the jury were Franz Indra, Germany (President); Theresia Merz, Austria; Théo Peporté, Luxembourg; Eberhard Strier, Germany.



Still from *Mia Madre* directed by Nanni Moretti, Italy (2015).

Cannes (France) 2015

The 2015 Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize to *Mia Madre* directed by Nanni Moretti Italy. A well-crafted, fine film suffused with humour that elegantly explores the human journey through loss to new beginnings.

The Jury also awarded two Commendations: to *La Loi du marché* directed by Stéphane Brizé (France) for its prophetic stance on the world of work and its sharp reflection on our tacit complicity in the inhumane logics of merchandising.

And to *Taklub* directed by Brillante Mendoza (Philippines) for the sensitive portrayal of individuals and communities working for life in the midst of suffering and death in the shadow of natural catastrophes in the Philippines.

The 2015 Jury consisted of Barbara Lorey de Lacharrière (France) President; Marie-Nicole Courboulès (France); Chiara Fortuna (Italy); Jolyon Mitchell (United Kingdom); Pastor Andrew Johnston (Canada); and Jonathan Guilbault (Canada).

Zlin (Czech Republic) 2015

At the 5th International Film Festival for Children and Youth Zlín (May 29 – June 4, 2015) the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to the film *Behaviour* (Conducta) directed by Ernesto Daranas (Cuba, 2014).

A bitter look at the harsh reality of growing up in contemporary Havana, this is a multi-layered and well-constructed story that shows how one person's love, strength, and conviction can conquer the cold reality of an uncaring system determined to tear an 11-year old boy from the only way of life that he knows. This is a generous story of the human spirit and its ability to maintain dignity and hope while transcending the forceful truths of a modern society in flux.

Synopsis: Eleven-year-old Chala lives with his addict mother Sonia. School provides a stabilizing force in Chala's life, thanks to his close relationship with his spirited sixty-something teacher, Carmela. When the boy is sent off to live in



Still from Behaviour (Conducta) directed by Ernesto Daranas (Cuba, 2014).

a “re-education facility” and Carmela mounts a campaign to have him released, she becomes the target of a witch hunt. But the idealistic, strong-willed woman remains defiant.

The Jury also gave a Commendation to *Mina Walking* directed by Yosef Baraki, (Afghanistan/Canada, 2015). Set amid the chaos of modern Kabul, this documentary-style tale highlights in dramatic fashion the incredible strength and resilience of one young girl and her resolve to care for her family at the expense of her own education, innocence, and youth. Her desperate journey is saddened as she chooses to become one of society’s faceless.

Young Mina needs to work in order to feed her Alzheimer’s stricken grandfather and her heroin addicted father. Her father forbids her to attend school, but she secretly attends classes, setting in motion a chain of events that change her life.

The Jury consisted of Douglas Fahleson, President (Ireland); Stanislav Zeman (Czech Republic); Ingrid Stapf (Germany).

INTERFILM

is the international network for dialogue between church and film. It participates in festivals through ecumenical, interreligious or solely Protestant juries which award prizes to outstanding films.

Besides Berlin, Cannes, Montreal, Locarno and Venice, INTERFILM is represented at numerous other festivals where church film juries award prizes to films which:

- are of high artistic quality
- lend expression to a human viewpoint corresponding with the message of the Gospels, or stimulate debate with the Biblical tradition
- make audiences sensitive to spiritual, social and ethical values.