



Short Article

Key Issues in Research Communication

Communication is a crucial aspect of development. For everyone involved in combating poverty and improving the well-being of poor people, communication is of fundamental importance. But just how effective and efficient is our communication?

The recently launched report on the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD, 2007) provides a salient reminder that communication is integral to development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and that it should be embedded in all poverty reduction strategies at all levels.

Research underpins the practice of international development, and is after all, the basis upon which most policy decisions are made. But research will not bring about change in the lives of poor people unless it is communicated in an appropriate and effective way. Studies suggest that the better the communication of research, the better the uptake and use of research outputs (DIFD, 2007). Given the power of communication as a development strategy, it is imperative that researchers and policymakers continually reflect on and improve their communication activities.

In the field of food security, rural development and livelihood strategies, the WCCD report points to some key communication issues worthy of reflection. For example: communication is a two-way process not a uni-linear one; partnerships and the links between key players are very important; communication needs to be relevant and accessible; and communication should be built into all sustainable development initiatives from the start.

Communication is two-way. In her "Communication Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organizations", Ingie Hovland (2005) stresses that we don't necessarily need more communication, we need better communication. She encourages researchers to ask the question, 'Why communicate?' Clearly, the answer is to inform and inspire development policy and practice. But this is not the only reason. Communication is a process that should benefit both the recipient and the sender. It is not just 'teaching others'. Rather than linear and vertical, it is a horizontal dialogue in which listening is a key factor. It is through this interactive process that field input to research projects can be established. This in turn leads to local involvement and ownership, and improves the likelihood that research outcomes will be taken up by end users.

Forging links, partnerships and coalitions between the main players in the development sphere is a key way to strengthen this horizontal communication. In essence this sphere is a network or a web with many interlinked nodes. Researchers and policymakers are just two

such nodes; others include donors, extensionists, end users, knowledge intermediaries, and local governments. Effective communication for better development results requires all of the links in this network to be strategically stimulated and strengthened.

Part of this process involves making communication relevant and accessible. Researchers want their research results to be taken up and used in a way that benefits poor people. So, thought needs to be given to making communication – both messages and means – as appropriate and well tailored as possible. For example, the burgeoning opportunities for e-mail, e-learning, e-news, etc. are worthy, inexpensive alternative communication tools; but it is also important to consider the 'e-divide'. It is a sobering reminder that only 17 per cent of the world's people are Internet users (ITU, 2007).

At a national and local level, many rural development plans have very little in the way of communication components (FAO, 2006). Yet it makes good sense that communication should be built into all development activities from the outset. This applies equally to large international initiatives and small local projects. Research projects are no exception. At the very least, each research project and programme should have a communication plan. Who will you communicate with? Why? When? How? The UK's Department for International Development regards communication so highly that it insists 10 per cent of its allocated research funds is spent on communication activities (DFID, 2007). For other organizations the figure is higher.

How thorough is communication in your projects? Questions we ask at CAPSA include: does the project have (a) a communications strategy and a statement of communication objectives; (b) clarity about the target audiences; (c) an understanding of the communication channels your target audiences might use; (d) a brainstormed list of relevant communication activities; (e) time and money budgets for your communication activities; and (f) an evaluation system to check whether you have met your communication objectives?

In the pursuit of poverty alleviation and improving rural livelihoods, it is important to make sure all the tools at one's disposal are optimally employed. In this rapidly changing world, the importance of communication cannot be underscored too heavily.

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(References available upon request)

Flash **BREAKING****Bangladesh: Rising Sea Levels Threaten Agriculture**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change anticipates that globally, Bangladesh will lose the largest area of cultivated land to rising sea levels. A 1 metre rise in sea levels would inundate 20 per cent of the country's landmass. Already rising sea levels are encroaching on vast areas of agricultural land in the southern districts, resulting in increased soil salinity. A survey carried out by six government agencies, including the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), found higher-than-acceptable soil salinity in 72 per cent of all arable land in the Magura district, about 200 km from the sea. According to a soil scientist from the BRRI, higher soil salinity reduces soil fertility and hinders the cultivation of rape seed, pulses, and coconut.

IRIN, 2007. Bangladesh: Rising Sea Levels Threaten Agriculture, <http://www.irinnews.org/> (1 November 2007).

Paying Farmers to Protect the Planet is Future – UN

The FAO said paying farmers to protect the environment rather than just for their produce will be an important way to link two of humanity's greatest challenges: beating poverty and safeguarding the environment. The payments do not have to be linked to stopping farming, but could be offered as an incentive to make it less damaging. Farming has the potential to degrade the land, water, atmosphere and biological resources or to enhance them, depending on the decisions made by more than 2 billion people whose livelihoods depend on crops, livestock, fisheries or forests. The impact of payment schemes is dependent on who holds the rights to use resources; such schemes might benefit wealthy landowners more often than the poor who own nothing.

WBCSD, 2007. Paying Farmers to Protect the Planet is Future – UN, <http://www.wbcsd.org/> (15 November 2007).

Legumes Step into the Limelight in the Tropics

A project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, will enhance the productivity of selected legumes leading to improved food security and reduced poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The project follows a value-chain approach from planting the highest quality seeds and improving farm management practices, to bringing crops to market. To this end, socio-economic studies will be conducted to better target the development of new legume varieties. The impact of tropical legumes is not just about science and institutions but about balanced diets and higher incomes. Given their high returns on investment, legumes deserve a second look and a leap in faith.

ICRISAT, 2007. Legumes Step into the Limelight in the Tropics, <http://www.icrisat.org/> (16 October 2007).

Indian Farmers to Get Nutrient-based Fertilizers

After decades of promoting urea to increase soil fertility, the Indian Government has begun to acknowledge that it has achieved quite the opposite. Excessive and imbalanced use of fertilizers has caused a deterioration of soil fertility in many parts of the country. At present, the government subsidizes particular fertilizers, irrespective of their nutrient content and combination. As a result farmers end up mostly using urea. The fertilizers currently being used do not supply all required nutrients, and their prolonged use leaves the soil deficient in other minerals. To address this problem, the government is planning to modify the fertilizer subsidy, taking into account soil ecology. They are debating a switch to a nutrient-based subsidy from the current product-based subsidy.

One World South Asia, 2007. Indian Farmers to Get Nutrient Based Fertilisers, <http://southasia.oneworld.net/> (26 October 2007).

Globalization, Agriculture and the Least Developed Countries

It may be a common understanding that globalization has the potential to give opportunities for economic growth all over the world, however, the reality is that many developing countries, especially LDCs, do not enjoy the fruits of globalization. Instead, their economies, especially in agricultural sectors, are negatively affected. The Issues Paper, "Globalization, Agriculture, and the Least Developed Countries", prepared by Suffyan Koroma, FAO, points to several key elements required to assist the LDCs exploit their agricultural potential in order to benefit from globalization. It suggests the situation facing the LDCs and their farmers today may be more difficult than that of developing countries that have achieved sustained agricultural growth in the last three decades. The new and emerging challenges confronting them can be identified under three broad categories: overcoming marginalization resulting from integration of markets due to globalization and liberalization; adapting to technological change; and coping with new institutional environments. Against all these difficulties, there are also some new opportunities for agriculture in the LDCs. New technologies are bringing down the cost of communications dramatically, which should benefit remote, more sparsely populated areas with poor roads. Globalized markets and the implementation of trade agreements should bring benefits to LDCs exporters if they can be assisted to overcome their supply and competitiveness constraints. Policymakers may be swinging back to a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the importance of agriculture and of the potential roles (and pitfalls) of state support. ■

Based on Koroma, S., 2007. Globalization, Agriculture and the Least Developed Countries. Paper prepared for Ministerial Conference "Making Globalization Work for the LDCs", <http://www.unohrls.org/> (July 2007).

The World's Poorest People not being Reached

A study conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), "The World's Most Deprived: Characteristics and Causes of Extreme Poverty and Hunger", reveals that 162 million of the world's poorest people – the 'ultra poor' – survive on less than 50 cents a day. The report looks below the dollar-a-day poverty line and examines who the poorest people are, where they live, and how they have fared over time. Three categories of poverty are examined in the study: subjacent poor (those living on between \$0.75 and \$1 a day), medial poor (those living on between \$0.50 and \$0.75 a day), and ultra poor (those living on less than \$0.50 a day). Other important findings are: that Sub-Saharan Africa, is currently home to three quarters of the world's poorest people where ultra poor poverty rates have fallen only minimally; and that the ultra poor are nearly four times more likely to live in rural areas than in urban areas. The poorest people typically belong to socially excluded groups such as ethnic minorities and disadvantaged castes, live in remote rural areas with little access to roads, markets, education and health services, and have few assets. The ultra poor can over time fall into poverty traps due to three common causes: the inability of poor families to invest in the education of their children; limited access to credit for those with few assets; and reduced productivity due to malnutrition. The report offers several recommendations for policymakers to reduce poverty, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. ■

Based on IFPRI, 2007. The World's Poorest People not being Reached, <http://www.ifpri.org/> (6 November 2007).

Participatory Value Chain Analysis

Since 1996, new experiences and approaches to the implementation of agricultural development projects and programmes have been tested. The emphasis has shifted from analytical studies to more participatory types of approaches. The value chain concept has proven particularly useful for strategies to improve agricultural and rural development. A value chain is the full range of activities required to bring a product or service from conception, through the different phases of production, transformation and delivery to final consumers, and to final disposal after use. This concept traces product flows, shows value additions at different stages, identifies key actors and their relationships in the chain. It provides a framework for sector-specific action, and identifies relevant stakeholders and strategies to improve the food situation and earning opportunities. Farmers and governments have often identified the lack of markets for agricultural products as a key problem in agricultural development. A significant barrier to any prospective agribusiness development is the lack of trust, understanding and community engagement between members of the value chain. Many initiatives failed in the past partly because they focused only on a single commodity. The focus should be on the farming system and the diversity of the product range. An alternative approach is the value chain. The key to value chain development is to reinforce linkages and partnerships along the chain. Value chain programmes improve business services to small farmers and processors, and help them improve quality, efficiency and expand operations. ■

Based on Bammann, H., 2007. Participatory Value Chain Analysis for Improved Farmer Incomes, Employment Opportunities and Food Security. Pacific Economic Bulletin 22(3), <http://peb.anu.edu/> (3 October 2007).

Ensuring the Success of Agroforestry in Developing Countries

Agroforestry systems are one way of making sustainable agricultural production consistent with respect for the environment. Reduced soil erosion, preserved water resources, biodiversity conservation and creation, and carbon sequestration are just some of the major effects agroforestry systems have on the environment. Multistrata agroforestry has existed for a long time in many tropical countries, but since the 1960s, with the advent of intensive agriculture, many farmers have abandoned the practice. More recently, products of agroforestry systems have come into vogue due to serious adverse environmental effects of intensive agriculture and the increase in consumer awareness of eco-friendly products. The main obstacle to the large-scale adoption of such systems has been maintaining farmers' incomes. The environmental services rendered by agroforestry systems are now recognized, but shaded cropping can produce lower yields than intensive monocultures. Suggestions for maintaining incomes are: (i) to pay farmers for the environmental services rendered by their crops through eco-labels or direct payment; and (ii) to diversify the crops grown and domesticate woody species, and at the same time improve wood product marketing channels. The impacts of the agroforestry outcomes that relate to biodiversity and economic sustainability have yet to be determined. Future research topics related to agroforestry development are the relationship between crop yields and shading, and the impact of climate change on the functions of and the services rendered by the ecosystem. Lastly, certification is a strategy that could be integrated into the very heart of development programmes. ■

Based on CIRAD, 2007. How to Ensure the Success of Agroforestry Systems in Developing Countries, <http://www.cirad.fr/> (29 October 2007).

Flash EVENTS



International Symposium on Poverty

1- 3 February 2008

Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract Deadline: 21 September 2007

Info:

<http://www.yoksulluk.org/en>

Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS) 2008: Sustainable Development and Climate Change

7 - 9 February 2008

New Delhi, India

Info:

<http://www.teriin.org/dsds/2008>

International Symposium on Interdependencies between Upland and Lowland Agriculture and Resource Management

1 - 4 April 2008

Stuttgart, Germany

Abstract Deadline: 1 December 2007.

Info:

<https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/uplands2008/>

Global Agro-Industries Forum: Improving Competitiveness and Development Impact

8 - 11 April 2008

New Delhi, India

Info:

<http://www.gaif08.org/>

Paper Review

Inclusive Growth toward a Prosperous Asia: Policy Implications

Ifzal Ali and Juzhong Zhuang, ERD Working Paper No. 97, Asian Development Bank, Manila, Philippines, 2007, ISSN 1655-5252.

The rapid economic growth of developing Asia during the last two decades has led to a dramatic reduction in the level of extreme poverty on the basis of the \$1-a-day poverty line. However, using the \$2-a-day poverty line, the level of poverty only declined from 75 per cent to 51.9 per cent between 1990 and 2005. This suggests that more than half of developing Asia still lives in very poor conditions, is vulnerable to shocks, and may easily slip into extreme poverty. To address this risk, the authors of the paper propose that development agendas need to adopt an inclusive growth strategy that includes not only the eradication of extreme poverty, but also the improvement of living standards of a much larger group who feel disadvantaged by rising inequalities in opportunities.

According to the authors, since inclusive growth means growth with equal opportunities, it therefore focuses on both creating opportunities and making the opportunities accessible to all. Their concept differentiates between inequalities due to individual circumstances, and inequalities due to individual efforts (Roemer, 2006). This differentiation leads to an important distinction between 'inequalities of outcomes' and 'inequalities of opportunities' (World Bank, 2006). If policy interventions succeed in ensuring full equality of access to opportunities, inequalities in outcomes would then only reflect differences in efforts, hence they could be viewed as 'good inequalities' (Chaudhuri and Ravallion, 2007). On the other hand, if all individuals exert the same level of effort while policy interventions do not fully compensate for the disadvantages of circumstances, the resulting inequalities in outcomes are 'bad inequalities'.

Given that inclusive growth focuses on both creating economic opportunities and ensuring equal access to them, the paper highlights that an effective inclusive growth strategy should have two anchors: (i) high and sustainable growth to create productive and decent employment opportunities; and (ii) social inclusion to ensure equal access to opportunities by all.

High and sustainable growth is the key to creating productive and decent employment opportunities. A central trait of the Asian growth experience has been that economies that successfully sustain growth do so by continuously adapting and changing their structure. The authors have observed that all economies in developing Asia that sustained fast growth and economic catch-up have also successfully industrialized. One reason for this is that industry has presented opportunities for productivity growth. While services have played an important role in mopping up surplus

labour from agriculture, this has often meant employment in low-productivity, informal activity (ADB, 2007a).

The authors observe that international experience suggests that these countries would need to tackle three important transitions: (i) transition from diversification and production of a broader array of goods, to specialization and a focus on those goods for which a country has a global comparative advantage; (ii) transition from accumulation or investment that simply requires more savings and more buildings, to innovation that requires the ability to do things differently; and (iii) transition from basic skills or education to advanced skills or tertiary education, or to an educational system that delivers a much broader array of skills required for the labour force (World Bank, 2007).

In promoting social inclusion, the authors believe that public intervention in three areas is required: (i) investing in education, health, and other social services to expand human capacities, especially of the disadvantaged; (ii) promoting good policy and sound institutions to advance social and economic justice and level playing fields; and (iii) forming social safety nets to prevent extreme deprivation. While (i) and (ii) are essential to equalize opportunities, (iii) is needed to cater to the special needs of people who cannot participate in and benefit from the opportunities created by growth, for reasons beyond their control, and to alleviate transitory livelihood shocks.

The paper is worth reading since it first presents the reasons why developing Asia embraces inclusive growth, then explains the meaning of inclusive growth, and finally elaborates policy ingredients for it. In real life, however, many policy interventions to improve equal access to opportunity are constrained by very limited resources. For example, providing equal access to formal credit services, including for those who have no collateral, might not be possible since it is too risky or costly. In this case, the resulting inequalities in outcomes are 'bad inequalities'. A general question in implementing any concept of growth is how to fine-tune priorities in a country having extremely limited financial resources. Nevertheless, the authors present a useful analysis and interesting perspectives – time invested in reading this paper would be time well spent. ■

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