Chapter 4

Five key ideas: coincidences and challenges in development communication

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The field of development communication has come a long way since its beginnings in the 1950s. Back then, it was mainly associated with a systems model of communication, functioning as 'a science to produce effective messages' as an add-on to agricultural extension programs, and was conceived primarily as a tool of top-down development programs. These days, however, it is more theoretically diversified and strategically nuanced. It has become an umbrella term for a wide range of communication programs and research (Waisbord, 2000).

Evidence of this diversity is the alphabet soup of approaches and interventions that commonly fall under 'development communication', such as communication for development, communication for social change, information, education and communication, behavior change communication, social mobilization, media advocacy, strategic communication, social marketing, participatory communication, strategic participatory communication, and so on. Given this conceptual cacophony, no wonder there is maddening confusion and persistent questions about similarities and differences. The proliferation of labels, approaches and theories is grounded in several factors: the aspirations of donors and agencies to have signature projects; the efforts of NGOs and agencies to strengthen expertise in specific approaches; academic trends and debates; the diversity of disciplinary traditions and professional backgrounds among practitioners and scholars; and the ambivalent attitude vis-à-vis Western theories and strategies around the world.

There have been many attempts to clarify this persistent confusion and sort out the differences and similarities among theories and approaches (see

Galway, 2002; Melkote and Steeves, 2001). This is a useful exercise of interest primarily to academics rather than to practitioners. At the field level, distinctions among approaches are less significant and pragmatic concerns more important. Disregarding theoretical lineages, different strategies and tools are blended and used simultaneously.

My goal in this paper is to argue that, lost in the linguistic labyrinth, there are important agreements on programmatic and strategic issues. To continue to discuss 'what theory and approach is better' is valuable as an exercise in the sociology of knowledge, and in examining unsolved epistemological contradictions in theories that inform practices. The problem is the tendency to relapse into tired polemics that prevent us from understanding that debates over 'best theories' fundamentally deal with different questions than the field as a whole is trying to tackle. It is worth attempting to solve the conceptual complexity that is inherent to the field, but it remains unclear what benefits this will bring to communication practice.

Five key ideas

While well-entrenched and seemingly irreconcilable differences characterized the field in the past, there is a budding consensus around a handful of key ideas. Such consensus cannot be understood as a paradigm shift: the old paradigm may have passed, as Everett Rogers famously stated back in the mid-1970s, but no single paradigm has replaced it.

There is growing consensus around five ideas in thinking and practicing development communication: the centrality of power, the integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches, the need to use a communication 'tool-kit' approach, the articulation of interpersonal and mass communication, and the incorporation of personal and contextual factors.

First, the centrality of power. While in early work power was absent or only tangentially addressed, particularly in programs based on informational and diffusion premises, current thinking is that power should be at the forefront. Power is present in the idea that community empowerment should be the main goal of interventions. Individuals and communities become empowered by gaining knowledge about specific issues, communicating about issues of common concern, making decisions for themselves, and negotiating power relations.

Such thinking reflects the influence of participatory communication thinking that emerged in response to the failure of traditional development approaches in the 1970s. Since then, participatory theories have successfully changed the terms of the debate and become part of the vernacular in the development field. The agenda of major donors and agencies, from the World Bank to many private foundations, shows that community participation is the watchword of the day. We could argue about whether the presence of participatory language in the programs of development institutions is mere pro-forma or a genuine commitment to community empowerment. However, it is hardly disputed that, what-

ever the issue at stake, the purpose of development initiatives is to contribute to processes by which communities gain more control over their lives. There is less agreement, however, on how empowerment is defined and measured or which strategies need to be implemented. Often, 'empowerment' is used loosely, without considering that it is not an issue in which 'everybody wins', but rather, a political struggle through which communities and individuals negotiate and wrestle power away from others.

A second key idea is that 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches need to be integrated. Having been dominant during the 1950s decolonization era, the top-down model that puts governments and a network of Western experts at the helm of development programs has been discredited. There has been a widely shared sentiment that this model was responsible for the disastrous record of the 'first wave' of development. A 'bottom-up' approach gained support in different quarters as a way to remedy, if not all, at least some of the key problems of 'top-down' development. It was concluded that Northern concerns and policies drove development initiatives, and that Southern expectations and needs were relegated.

After the pendulum swung from government-led to community-based approaches in the development community in the 1970s and '80s, there has been a growing realization that top-down and bottom-up communication strategies are necessary to tackle a host of problems successfully. Ideas about community mobilization and participation provided a much-needed antidote to a mentality that approached development as a matter for governments and international donor agencies. Moreover, the increasing support for decentralization (in areas such as health, environment, and education) in developing countries made community-based approaches necessary.

However, the focus on community empowerment should not lead us to underestimate the role of governments. Whether a government decides that a given issue is a priority substantially affects the prospects of development work, a point forcefully demonstrated in recent programs on infectious diseases. One lesson is that the earlier a government gives priority to HIV/AIDS, the more likely it is that communication interventions will be successful. By contrast, the lack of interest among governments in putting tuberculosis at the top of their agenda accounts for why the disease still ravages over big swaths of the developing world (WHO, 1999). The different positions and actions that governments took vis-à-vis polio eradication have proven to be tremendously important in achieving results (USAID, 2000). What we learn from these experiences is that commitment from central and local governments to specific development issues has proven to be indispensable, particularly for scaling-up successful projects at the national level (Borgdorff, Floyd and Broekmans, 2002).

Recent communication scholarship has not examined this issue carefully enough. Arguably, this is the result of a position that flatly rejected government actions and paid almost exclusive attention to the role of civil society at

both the national and global levels. It is unquestionably important to recognize the importance of civic institutions in addressing and tackling development problems, especially given the persistent shortcomings of states and the private sector, coupled with the consolidation of global forms of participation. We cannot underestimate, however, the fact that governments continue to play a big part in development programs, basically because their action (and inaction) affects the lives of millions of people, particularly marginalized and poor populations. For better or worse, the presence of the state can be beneficial or detrimental. States carried considerable responsibility for the many catastrophes in development aid projects from the 1950s onwards. Let us not forget, however, that they were not the only culprits. In the context of Cold-War *realpolitik*, an entire system of international aid that supported corrupt and tyrannical states in the developing world, despite their obvious transgressions and failures, was equally to blame for the many disastrous results.

To conclude that governments are inherently antithetical to development, as some of the literature on global civil society suggests, leads dangerously to a downplaying of the reality of world governance in which states still matter (Morris and Waisbord, 2001). Curiously, such anti-state conclusions offered by progressive and liberal analysts fall into a sort of neo-conservative position that demonizes states without offering proposals for democratizing and strengthening them in ways that would serve development goals. Alternatives to help improve governments' contributions are equally necessary. From facilitating and coordinating actions, or putting obstacles to and undermining developing programs, governments have an important presence. Such presence is contingent on multiple factors, such as the political and personal interests of current administrations and officials, the past record of governments in local communities and so on. States still matter in development for a number of reasons: official health and educational systems reach a large percentage of the population in many developing countries (such as in the majority of Latin American countries), national governments are important linchpins in international agreements and programs, official positions set the tone and the stage for development initiatives, international aid projects that leapfrog domestic authorities often run into all kinds of political and logistical difficulties, etc.

A third key idea is the need to have a 'tool-kit' approach to communication (see FAO, 2002). Practitioners have recognized the need for a multiplicity of communication strategies to improve the quality of life in communities. Different techniques in different contexts might be necessary to deal with specific problems and priorities. For example, conventional educational and media interventions might be recommended in critical situations such as epidemics, when a large number of people need to be reached in a short period of time. Social marketing has proven useful in addressing certain issues (for example, to raise immunization rates), but may not be adequate to promote community participation and underlying, long-term problems. Social mobilization of a vast array

of organizations offers a way to deal with the multiple dimensions of certain issues such as education, sanitation, nutrition, family planning, respiratory problems, AIDS, and child survival. Media advocacy is advisable in certain contexts where a significant proportion of the population gets information from a variety of media programming. Popular media (drama, community radio, singing groups) have proven to be effective in generating dialogue in small communities.

A fourth key idea is the need to combine interpersonal communication and multimedia activities. A number of successful interventions suggest that media channels and interpersonal communication should be integrated (see Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 1998). The media are extremely important in raising awareness and knowledge about a given problem. They are able to expose large numbers of people to messages and generate conversation among audiences and others who were not exposed. Because social learning and decision-making are not limited to the consideration of media messages but also involve listening and exchanging opinions with a number of different sources, interventions cannot solely resort to the mass media. Although television, radio and other media are important in disseminating messages, social networks are responsible for the diffusion of new ideas (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981; Valente et al, 1994). Entertainment-education programming is one way, for example, of activating social networks and peer communication in the diffusion of information. Nothing replaces community involvement and education in the effective dissemination of information. Media-centered models are insufficient to achieve behavior change. The most successful strategies in family planning, HIV/AIDS, nutritional and diarrhea programs have involved multiple channels, including strong, community-based programming, networks, peer counseling, and government and NGO field workers (McKee, 1994). Similar conclusions are found in the recent UNAIDS (1999) communications framework, which recommends the integration of multimedia and interpersonal communication. The media have powerful effects only indirectly, by stimulating peer communication and making it possible for messages to enter social networks and become part of everyday interactions. Interpersonal communication is fundamental in persuading people about specific beliefs and practices such as mothers' decisions to vaccinate their children, adopt hygiene practices, and keep communities clean.

The fifth key idea is the incorporation of approaches that focus on individual and environmental factors in understanding the role of behavior change communication (see HealthCom, 1992). Changes in behavior and social conditions cannot be addressed only by targeting personal or contextual factors but, rather, need to be sensitive to both in order to understand problems and design solutions (Hornik, 1990; Smith and Elder, 1998; Soul City, 2000). This idea has been particularly relevant in behavior change programs which have gradually moved away from individual-centered approaches to a multi-prong approach that considers environmental factors that are affecting individual behavior (Hornik, 2002). Because environmental factors affect behavior (in terms of both initiation and maintenance),

they need to be addressed. What constitute environmental/contextual factors is debatable. It is not obvious which factors are 'external' and which 'internal' to individuals' action. For example, behavioral scientists typically assume that gender and culture are contextual; by contrast, anthropologists and sociologists approach them as constitutive of individual identity. Consider the cases in which Muslim mothers refuse to allow all-male non-Muslim teams to vaccinate their children (because they are prohibited from talking to men other than their husbands), or Quechua-speaking mothers are reluctant to give birth at official health posts in Peru (because health workers are disrespectful of their child-birthing traditions). Are gender and culture contextual or constitutive of individual behavior? This point reflects larger epistemological and disciplinary differences concerning the main unit of analysis in development work.

Further examination of the relations between individual behavior and contextual factors (such as policy, law, systems) is necessary. On the one hand, the presence of contextual factors does influence behavior. Water systems, vaccination distribution systems, and garbage removal systems, are important determinants of specific behaviors (hand-washing, vaccination rates, and garbage disposal, respectively). On the other hand, the availability of institutional and contextual conditions that are, in principle, conducive to specific behaviors, does not always result in the desired social and healthy behavior. 'Build systems and they will come' does not always work. The existence of health posts in rural areas does not guarantee that mothers will choose institutional childbirth. Easier access to condoms does not necessarily lead to any increase in condom use with different partners across age groups. The availability of mosquito nets in malaria-stricken regions does not automatically mean that people will use them. Interdisciplinary dialogue and work on these issues between behavioral and social scientists is crucial in producing studies that adequately consider the multiple levels that affect individual and social behavior.

Why consensus?

Considering that bitter polemic has characterized the field, the emerging consensus on five ideas is remarkable. Certainly, old disputes and preferences for specific strategies have not disappeared. Identifying the existence of a growing consensus does not mean that donors, governments, non-government organizations and other stakeholders have amicably resolved all their differences. There are still different communication agendas and priorities. Differences in ideological and theoretical sympathies, in the expertise of cooperating agencies and NGOs in approaches decided on, and in donors' goals and expectations continue to shape communication strategies. Considering the diversity and the richness of interests and interdisciplinary backgrounds in the field of development communication, it would be unrealistic to expect complete agreement. However, there has been a tendency to move away from 'one-model-fits-all' solutions to the belief that inclusive approaches and openness to a diversity of programmatic insights and strategies is required.

It is important to emphasize that the consensus around those five ideas forms at the practical more than at the theoretical level. Pragmatic needs have encouraged the integration of concepts that theoretically remain separated. It is not unusual for community mobilization and peer network activities to be part of the same program, yet few efforts have been made to explore where participatory theory and social network theory meet (or if they meet at all). Behavior change interventions are increasingly more sensitive to the need to integrate policies and individual decisions that affect specific behaviors (e.g. smoking, institutional childbirth, vaccination), but communication policy and interpersonal communication theories still remain strangers to each other.

Particularly in the light of the gap between theory and practice, it is worth discussing the factors responsible for the convergence. First, there is an increasing interest in finding solutions to specific problems. This shift suggests an encouraging trend in the field: the propensity to engage in love affairs with specific ideas is giving way to a more eclectic and open disposition, less attached to theoretical orthodoxies and more interested in blending approaches. The evolution of the thinking about information-diffusion approaches, new technologies, and participatory models expresses this shift, namely, the move from uncritical support to a growing skepticism about reductionist positions.

The excitement about the possibilities of the information-diffusion approaches which dominated the field in its early days has receded. Because the diagnosis stated that lack of information and traditional norms prevented development, as the modernization tradition concluded, communication was assigned the role of disseminating 'the right knowledge' to facilitate cultural change. These days, however, the notion that communication equals information, or that development problems are reduced to citizens' 'lack of information', have been discredited. Some critics pointed out that its simplistic model of information-transmission, largely derived from systems theory and mathematical and engineering models, was inadequate for understanding the complexities of communication. Sometimes communication, not information, is the issue at stake. Others argued that 'diffusionism' failed to make a nuanced distinction between knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Influenced by 'powerful media effects' theories, it ignored the fact that the path from information to attitude to practice does not run straight.

Likewise, the enthusiasm for 'new information technologies' has receded in favor of more nuanced recommendations. Almost inevitably, at any critical juncture of 'the rise of new technologies', the field has experienced techno-hype about the prospects for the latest gizmos in development work. Transistor radio, television, cable television, satellite television, portable tape recorders, video, personal computers, the Internet, wind-up and solar radio have all been hailed as revolutionary, indispensable tools for redressing socio-economic and political conditions, promoting dialogue and participation, reaching all populations, etc. It would be silly to dismiss the relevance of information technologies in development efforts. They are potentially helpful in creating opportu-

nities for debate, exchange of ideas, and participation, but they need to be analyzed within specific institutional contexts and political-economic conditions (Chetney, 2001).

There has also been considerable enthusiasm about participatory approaches. It is indisputable that the issue of participatory citizenship is and should be central to development efforts. In insisting on this point, participatory approaches offer an important critique of top-down interventions (Thomas, 1994). They correctly charge government-centered, donor-led, and expert-designed models of development with neither consulting communities nor putting them at the center. The poor record of development interventions is rooted in the fact that communities did not become empowered as a result of massive investments. The reason was that communities were understood as passive actors, the presumed 'beneficiaries' of the actions of governments and donors rather than the central actors in development.

Having successfully challenged old conventions, participatory approaches have not devoted sufficient time to the consideration of several questions. Under what conditions is participation possible? What happens when participatory ideals run counter to community norms or are rejected by local authoritarian practices? How is participation possible at different stages of development programs (e.g. funding, planning, instrumentation, evaluation, sustainability)? How is community empowerment and participation measured? (Chetley, 2002) Important efforts are being made to address these questions in a critical manner, but much remains to be done (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Estrella, 2000; Heeks, 1999; Oakley and Clayton, 2000).

Another reason for growing consensus is the growing interest in 'what works' rather than in 'what we believe'. Donors seem more inclined to know the results of their investments and, as recent programs in immunization and HIV/AIDS suggest, to cooperate with other donors in finding common approaches. This need is particularly tangible among government donors, which need to demonstrate results to their policymakers. In turn, this need is passed on to NGOs and other organizations that implement programs. In the competitive world of development aid and funding, showing positive results has become increasingly more important in demonstrating expertise and capacity vis-à-vis various audiences (Edwards, Hulme and Wallace, 2000; Roche, 2000). This 'strategic thinking' attests to a renewed urgency in finding practical solutions, whether to promote grassroots participation or achieve behavior change.

A third reason for convergence is that recent experiences show that integrated, multiple strategies work. Consider the cases of Uganda, Thailand and Brazil, countries whose efforts in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic have been generally applauded. In those countries, a combination of different actions is widely seen as responsible for important successes (Hogle, Green, Nantulya, Stoneburner and Stover, 2002). Governments played a fundamental role by encouraging discussion of problems and solutions, putting HIV at the top of the

agenda, and making public commitments that acknowledged, first and foremost, that HIV/AIDS was an important public issue. Several stakeholders and organizations worked in many ways towards a common objective. Communication strategies used interpersonal and mass communication interventions. Many media organizations offered opportunities for open debate. Out of these experiences, one important lesson has emerged: a combination of actions by governments and civil society is crucial in confronting HIV in particular, and more generally, in tackling development issues (Scalway, 2002; UNAIDS, 1999).

There is increasing sensitivity to the problems of applying universally strategies that have been successful in specific contexts. In countries where political and cultural factors limit participation and maintain hierarchical relationships, participatory approaches might be difficult to implement, as they require a long-term and political process of transformation. This does not mean that participation should be abandoned as a desirable goal, but that interventions that aim to mobilize communities need to adopt different characteristics in different circumstances.

Communication and social change

If the convergence of several disciplinary and theoretical traditions in development communication is partly responsible for perennial conceptual confusion, it is also the source of disciplinary and theoretical cross-pollination. Scholars, professionals and activists working in forms of development communication have been trained in a variety of disciplines (communication studies, cognitive psychology, journalism, anthropology, sociology, behavioral sciences, public health, information systems, education). Until recently, the possibility of cross-disciplinary collaboration and influence was insufficiently exploited, and seemed to be a problem rather than an advantage, a source of proprietary, defensive arguments about 'best practices'. The convergence around 'five key ideas' suggests, if not a complete reversal, certainly a positive trend of integrating ideas from various disciplines.

There are many recent examples of this trend. Witness the interest in 'social capital' and 'social networks', concepts which, while having a distinct theoretical DNA, currently straddle disciplinary boundaries. Likewise, the use of political and media advocacy also reflects an interest in exploring different paths to bring about social change that recognizes both the strengths and weaknesses of the media. Ongoing efforts to search for a common theoretical and programmatic ground, such as recent work by the Rockefeller Foundation and Johns Hopkins University, are also testimony to this trend (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani and Lewis, 2002).

Perhaps one of the most promising attempts to find commonalities is the idea that social change is the ultimate goal of development communication (Servaes, Jacobson and White, 1996; Wilkins, 2000). 'Social change' serves as an umbrella term for a variety of communication initiatives and actions that set social transformations in motion. 'Social change' allows analysts and practitioners from

a variety of disciplines to find common ground and articulate efforts toward a common vocabulary. Of course, this is not an entirely new idea, but it has slowly moved toward the top of donor and agency agendas. The debate focuses less on defining 'best practices' for 'information-education-communication' or channeling community participation, issues that had long occupied the field, and instead takes a broader position on how communication contributes to social change.

Disagreement persists on a number of important issues: who determines improvement? What indicators of social change are considered? What role do different actors play in enabling social change? How can individual and social change be integrated? How does social change happen? Is it the result of the sum of individual changes, as psychologists affirm? Is it the consequence of social processes that are not the sum of individual changes, but rather the result of structural, macro-social changes, as sociologists conclude? What is the role of communication in processes of collective action and social change?

To think in terms of how communication contributes to social change also seems useful to avoid getting embroiled in well-worn debate about the meaning of 'communication' in 'development communication'. Given the diversity of disciplinary and professional backgrounds, it is wishful thinking to imagine that it is possible to formulate a single definition that would satisfy all the parties, once and forever. Nor is it clear what purpose this should serve. Trying to find the 'real' definition of 'communication' and to police disciplinary borders is a red herring, particularly considering other more pressing and interesting challenges and tasks. Moreover, it would be misplaced to expect such efforts to achieve a theoretical synthesis. To produce an unambiguous definition of 'communication' seems a tall order. Since the field first originated, the notion has lacked a single definition. There have been important attempts to clarify its meanings, but no canonical definition has ever been generated.

The fact that 'communication' and 'communications' are still used indistinctly reflects this elusive conceptual ambiguity. For some, communication means community empowerment and social mobilization; for others, the work of media and other information technologies; and for others, public relations and publications. There is little chance of settling the debate, and the eventual benefits of reaching conceptual consensus are unclear. The issue cannot be resolved because communication scholars and practitioners seek to answer related but different questions. How is cultural change promoted? How are information and innovations spread? How does communication contribute to community empowerment? How do citizens mobilize to take over ownership of their lives? How does communication affect behavior change?

The divide has persisted in the field. On the one hand, communication is understood as an instrument helping development projects to achieve specific goals, mainly through the dissemination of information. Thus, if the goal is to reduce infant mortality, teach new farming methods, and promote specific environmental policies, communication involves methodologies and tools for spread-

ing information and changing behavior in order to achieve the development results. From this perspective, communication is conceived as 'strategic communication', a link in the 'information-education-communication' chain, a component in comprehensive initiatives to engender transformations in health, political, environmental, education and other issues. Communication intends to maximize the delivery and effectiveness of messages. It is a branch of the information sciences and commercial practices such as public relations, marketing, and advertising.

On the other hand, communication is defined as the goal of development, as stated in the mission of programs and institutions such as UNESCO and UNICEF (which defines communication as a 'right'). Development should aim to improve the dialogic capacity of communities, particularly in poor areas of the world. The lack of access to communication and information is one of the most tangible problems in the developing world. Efforts should be directed at enhancing the opportunities for communities to talk and listen to others, identifying problems, determining goals, deciding courses of action, and assigning responsibilities. Communication is about building the community rather than transmitting information. Media technologies are instruments in facilitating the communication process rather than vehicles for exchanging information. Communication is understood as citizenship, as a way to comprehend membership and action in political communities. So, for example, community radio is conceived as a mechanism for people to voice their opinions about specific issues and a resource to mobilize citizenship into action.

Given the conceptual duality of communication, it comes to no surprise that theories and strategies have given answers to some, but not all, questions. The issue at stake is not the lack of robust explanations or perceptive insights, but rather, the need to clarify questions and goals. Like the discipline of communication at large, development communication deals with a number of related yet separate problems (Nair and White, 1993). Stimulating participation, changing media policies, contributing to behavior change, increasing access to media, and expanding opportunities for getting information have all been proposed as the goals of interventions in development communication. What is needed is to further discuss the problems that the field addresses, and to examine ways to reach goals rather than to offer predetermined solutions (Wilkins and Mody, 2001).

The next challenges

Development communication faces two sets of challenges. The first set of challenges deals with two critical aspects of development projects: scale and sustainability. After more than five decades of experience in development communication, we seem to know what works (Morris, 2001). Because there are persuasive explanations and findings about 'what works' in small-scale, community projects, yet a shortage of convincing results at the national level, 'scaling up' projects has become an important concern, particularly for donors. Results from community

empowerment and participation projects can't be easily 'trickled up'. How can successes in community projects concerning environmental protection and infectious diseases be replicated on a larger scale? Are lessons directly applicable to programs that target larger groups? (DFID, 2002; International HIV Alliance, 1998; WHO, 2002).

Another preoccupation is the sustainability of development projects. 'Sustainable development' features prominently on the agenda of donors and agencies, referring to development actions that put communities at the center and have long-lasting impact (United Nations, 2002). The concern for the duration of development work (and results) derives from a sense that projects show results as long as donors regularly inject funds and make a long-term commitment. As Michael Edwards (1999: 83) eloquently puts it, "Winning short-term gains on the basis of heavy external inputs is not difficult; what is difficult is sustaining them against the background of weak politics, fragile economies, and limited capacities for implementation". This lack of continuity is problematic, among other reasons, because such practice makes community interventions dependent on donors' agendas, which are prone to change due to several factors (from policy shifts to personnel changes) (Bräutigam, 2000). Rather than helping to generate community ownership, funding patterns intensify a sense that projects 'belong' to the donors. When the future of projects hinges on donors' priorities, it is illusory to expect that communities will acquire a sense of ownership and maintain their accomplishments. In other words, the problem is to avoid foreign-induced development that follows the needs and expectations of Northern actors and, rather, to stimulate development that responds to Southern, internal priorities.

A second set of challenges deals with issues specific to communication. One is bridging the divide between 'small' and 'big' media. Although one may argue that this distinction is becoming obsolete as new technologies erase old boundaries between 'narrowcasting' and 'broadcasting', it is important to pay attention to both kinds of media. The Internet and other hybrid communication technologies are increasingly eliminating that distinction and certainly offer new opportunities, but for the vast majority of people in the developing world, 'small' and 'big' media remain the most accessible.

Typically, communication studies pay exclusive attention either to commercial, large-scale media or to community-based media. While it is unquestionable that the mass media are important, given their reach and popularity, we should not lose sight of the relevance of 'small' media. Plenty of experiences attest to the importance of citizens' media in mobilizing communities and nurturing citizenship in the developing world (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Mody, 1991; Rodríguez, 2000). However, it is dangerous to fall into a romantic position that sees grassroots media as the only spaces where citizens can voice opinions, get information, and redress social conditions, while ignoring the fact that large-scale media institutions are of tremendous importance in people's everyday lives. There are plenty of reasons for the extensive suspicion felt in development circles about

the role of the big media: throughout the developing world, they largely function according to principles (political benefit and economic profit) that do not promote democratic and development goals. However, such distrust informs a 'small-is-beautiful' mentality that brushes aside the potential of mainstream media for contributing to development goals. Media experiences that aimed to foster a dialogue about 'taboo' issues such as HIV and female genital cutting suggest that the mass media are crucial in generating public discussion among citizens and commitment from political authorities. In specific circumstances, they provide important information that makes a difference in controlling epidemics, create a 'buzz' around development initiatives, put issues in the national agenda, and mobilize populations.

Another important matter that deserves further attention is the connection between communication and cultural change. The relationship between communication and culture lies at the core of development. Certainly, pioneering projects in the field have examined it, but from a 'white man's burden', modernist perspective that, explicitly or implicitly, proposed 'Western' culture as the model to be followed while denigrating other cultures. Today, *pace* multiculturalism and feminism, this kind of perspective, if not completely debunked, is less influential in development circles than in the past. Much remains to be discussed, however.

One of the most troubling issues is the relation between development communication and cultural change. Some projects aim to preserve and strengthen local beliefs and practices, while others aim to eliminate them. While cultural diversity is at times cherished and encouraged, it is also seen as an obstacle to development goals. Local cultures are seen as what should be changed: patriarchy prevents women from making healthier decisions, homophobia perpetuates stigma, traditional sexual arrangements contribute to HIV transmission, certain funerary rituals spread disease, religious and magical beliefs dispute scientific research about the effects of vaccinations. Also, local cultures are seen as providing valuable and necessary resources for promoting development/social goals: community networks are crucial in disseminating information, and the support of religious leaders is crucial in reaching populations. These tensions raise a number of issues about development and cultural rights which are rarely confronted head-on, particularly from a communication perspective. Who had the right to determine which cultural practices are desirable and need to be preserved? This gap is surprising, particularly considering how extensively development communication scholarship has criticized the impact of global flows of information on cultural diversity; however, it has not sufficiently explored certain dilemmas central to cultural change.

One of the most important sets of questions deals with the cultural ethics of development communication. When is universalism defensible? Does relativism always trump universalistic principles? What if communities invoke cultural sovereignty to defend practices that are widely contrary to other people's (particularly Northern) norms? In many cases, there is an unmistakably Western,

individualistic conception, full of do-good intentions, that aims to promote cultural change based on ideals articulated in international human rights documents. Consider the ongoing debate on female genital cutting. As defined by donors and NGOs, the goal is to achieve cultural change ('the elimination of the practice'), and the challenge is to find effective mechanisms for changing deep-seated cultural norms and practices (Population Reference Bureau, 2001). Clearly, those who perform the ritual (traditional healers, medical professionals) benefit from the existing power system that informs FGC and call upon 'cultural traditions' to defend their positions. Development organizations criticize them by waving the flag of international human rights as the basis for building a common, humane world and promoting a rights-based approach to development. Similar dilemmas are also present in other development interventions, such as safe motherhood, family planning, and HIV prevention. How can we reconcile local knowledge and practices with Western-styled conceptions of safe childbirth? Upon what grounds should we defend cultural identity while aiming to change sexual and marriage practices rooted in paternalistic cultures? How is it possible to draw a distinction between cultural relativity and the search for a common political and ethical ground? What can communication say about these dilemmas? While ethicists and international law scholars have made interesting inroads into these questions, communication analysts still need to grapple with them.

My objective in this article was to issue a call that would transcend debate in the field of development communication by suggesting areas of convergence and future directions. The most challenging research and practical questions are no longer whether 'transfer of knowledge' or 'participation' should be the end goal of communication, a debate that, like polyester pants and disco music, is reminiscent of 1970s fashion. Some scholars and professionals certainly continue to believe that perfecting the arts of knowledge-transference or tapping the potential of new information technologies should be communication's sole preoccupation and contribution to development. There will always be those who believe that communication's role in development means producing materials (at best, ubiquitous, culturally-sensitive posters), resorting to communication as the cure-all solution when everything else has failed, or consider communication an optional line in their budgets. Changing these views and defending why communication matters in development are worthy efforts, particularly for program officers whose jobs depend on communication's achieving recognition as a fundamental component in development programs. Those goals should not be the only concerns, however. If the field is to remain an important space for debate and reference in development theory and practice, it needs to tackle questions that are central to both *development* and *communication*.