The lucky cloverleaf:
Four facets of communication for development and sustainable social change

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There are approximately ten thousand three-leaf clovers for each four-leaf clover. Legend or superstition says that each leaf in a four-leaf clover has a meaning: the first is *hope*, the second is *faith*, the third is *love* and the fourth is, quite obviously, *luck*, a value added.

The image and hope-loaded symbolism of the cloverleaf somehow correlates with Amartya Sen's four reasons why communication is essential for human development: *first*, the ability to communicate contributes to well-being and the quality of human life; *second*, it has an important protective function in giving voice to the neglected and the disadvantaged; *third*, mass media has a function in disseminating information and allowing critical scrutiny; and *fourth*, mass media has a crucial role in value formation through open public discourse enabling public adaptation to change.

Communication needs all four to contribute to value formation for sustainable development and social change. Each facet may become an important strength or a determinant weakness. Ensuring that the four leaves are in place may be the best way to support sustainable processes of communication where peoples voices are heard and communities are empowered.

The four issues are inter-related on a common ground: the exercise of the right to communicate is central to development in freedom. Much has been written about the relation between the ability to communicate and the potential for social development, and again, along with Amartya Sen we believe that:

> "*Public debates and discussions, permitted by political freedoms and civil rights, can also play a major part in the formation of values. Indeed, even de identification of needs cannot but be influenced by the nature of public participation and dialogue. Not only is the force of public discussion one of the correlates of democracy, with an extensive reach, but its cultivation can also make democracy itself function better. For example, more informed and less marginalised public discussion of environmental issues may not only be good for the environment; it could also be important to the health and functioning of the democratic system itself*"[1].

It is imperative, however, to establish distinctions between the general social function of mass media in relation to freedom of speech and access to information in a given society,

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[1] Amartya Sen: "Development as Freedom" (1999). Anchor Books, New York, page 158.

and the specific roles of communication in the context of a participatory development process. On the one hand, there is mass media, private or state-owned, commercial or public service, and on the other hand there are communication processes that do not just broadcast and inform but unswervingly contribute to development by strengthening the voices and the organisations of those most affected, thus making them central to the decision making process. The roles are clearly not the same but are often tangled.

Freedom of expression is a general principle safeguarded by democratic societies. It may or may not directly benefit citizens in the sense that the majority may not have access or may not be willing to use the privilege of free speech. For example, the fact that freedom of expression is recognised by the constitution does not mean that any citizen can be free to write and publish his or her opinion or have entrance to mainstream radio or television stations to air his or her ideas. Multiple filters will most probably prevent a normal citizen from enjoying in practice the benefits of "freedom of opinion and expression"[2]. Social norms, institutional forms of censorship or political agendas in private and state media usually impede normal citizens to use the freedom of expression that, in theory, is guaranteed by constitutional rights and by international human rights. It is in fact very similar to what happens to other articles of the Human Rights Declaration. Although internationally recognised and endorsed, there is not one single country in the world where the 30 articles are respected and enforced. In countries classified as "free and democratic", not everyone is "born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1); more often some are less "free and equal" than others.

This is why communication in development corresponds to another category, clearly focused in promoting sustainable development through participation and empowerment, rather than generally exercising the role of so-called fourth-power (under much disparagement nowadays as we will later see in detail). In the development context, it may be more vital to focus on proximity media (or community media or citizens' media, among other names also used), which is generally culturally relevant to those most affected by social change. If the issue is *voices*, community media is by far a better option in the perspective of sustainable development. Nevertheless large development organisation need to move from the "people centred" *discourse*, already embedded in most development documents, programmes and projects, to concrete *actions* on the ground and within their institutional settings.

Hope: a horizon for people's voices

The *ability to communicate* is mediated by numerous conditions and constraints, such as the political, cultural and social context, the access to adequate tools, the regulatory environment, and/or the capacity or "agency"[3] that is developed for the purpose. However, lack of conceptual clarity about the role of information and communication in development may interfere with peoples' quest for freedom of expression.

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[2] Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html
[3] In the sense that Amyrta Sen uses this word.

A major confusion when discussing the role of communication and the right to communicate within the development process is the misunderstanding between "information" (one way) and "communication" (two ways). The confusion of terms is particularly noticeable in English speakers and writers who uncaringly use any of the two words to name processes that are distinct and differentiated. This confusion is only second to "communications" (the tools) and "communication" (the process) also very widespread in development agencies and even in the academia[4]; or to equating "communication" to "media", much so as if "education" was automatically equated to books and pencils, instead of processes. The popularisation of words that have become ordinary in the development jargon has not been accompanied in parallel by the appropriate concepts. The general divorce between communication studies and social development doesn't help to acquire greater clarity.

Similarly, "information rights" -which were during the 1970s and 1980s a central issue in the UNESCO led struggle for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)- are often confused with the "right to communicate", conceptually distinct, at least in time (historically) and breath (coverage). Whereas "information" rights deal basically with access to information sources that are varied and relevant to the perspectives of Third World countries, "communication" rights –more recently promoted through platforms emerging during the 1990s- relate to peoples' human right to make their voices heard and to establish their own media.

The MacBride report, a corner-stone for information rights during the 1980s, pleaded for democracy in the global system of information exchanges, calling Third World nations to strengthen their national media infrastructures and information flows; this was too much for the US and the UK, the two countries decided to leave UNESCO and have since tried to undermine the UN agency for education, culture, communication and science. Since the 1990s and after the "launching pad" for global civil society that Seattle came to be, international networks such as Indymedia and the CRIS campaign have been struggling to establish a new paradigm, while most governments and some UN organisations are still betting for the old one. The divide that was clear in both WSIS conferences (Geneva and Tunis) is somehow made of this non-assumed distinction between the right to access information (transparency & accountability) and the right to communicate (participation for social change)[5].

No less important is the distinction between "journalists" and "communicators". Again, both words are used randomly in spite of profound differences[6]. The consequences of changing the labels to journalism studies thirty years ago are felt today. The old

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[4] This, in spite of common dictionaries being quite explicit about the distinction between both terms. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary says that communications, with 's', is "*a system (as of telephones) for communicating*" or a "*system of routes for moving troops, supplies, and vehicles…*" whereas communication, without the 's', is "*a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour…*"

[5] Gumucio-Dagron, Alfonso: "From the Summit to the People", Information for Development, India, July 2005. Available electronically at: http://www.i4donline.net/july05/rightcomm_full.asp

[6] Gumucio-Dagron, Alfonso and Clemencia Rodriguez: "Time to Call Things by their Name: the Field of Communication & Social Change", in Media Development 2006/3, WACC, United Kingdom.

"journalism" departments or faculties became the new "social communication" studies worldwide, but the content of the curricula did not change much. Advertising, marketing, ICTs and public relations were added to justify the new name, but conceptually it became more confusing than ever, since the emphasis on mass media (radio, television and print) was kept unaffected. There are now thousands of universities offering studies that address the needs of mass media and fully satisfy the demand that was generated through three decades of privatisations, but very few universities offer a profile of *communicators* trained to deal with development issues and equipped not only with information *about* development, but mainly with an strategic approach to development communication planning and implementation. We know of less than twenty universities in the world that have this kind of emphasis[7]. Following the four-leaf clover example, there are globally ten thousand new journalists for each development communicator.

Let's briefly choose an example: a national communication strategy to combat HIV/AIDS is needed in Mozambique… Is a journalist or a communicator better prepared to respond to the challenge? The journalist may suggest intensive "campaigns" of messages to be aired by radio and television networks, and the public relations specialist may design high-visibility tactics involving famous artists and sports-people. The communication for development specialist will act differently, establishing first of all the channels for dialogue and debate with all stake-holders, and deciding collectively how to move the communication strategy forward. Rather than messages, the communication specialist may think on participatory processes at all levels of society. Rather than short term measures and marketing campaigns that, as we know, have failed, the communication specialist may suggest long-term strategies addressing socio-cultural and political issues through strengthening the voices and the values of those most affected.

We could go on establishing distinctions that are not clearly made in the ways communication is perceived, named, conceptualised and applied in development programmes; and this wouldn't be a matter of exquisite academic debate on definitions, but a crucial issue that may explain why, still today, development organisations have such a confusing approach to communication for development and social change.

The old paradigm of information as a solution for under-development and the panacea of modernisation continue to be strong in the minds of many development planners, although abandoned long time ago by those that were the first proponents in the early 1970s[8]. The notion that access to information is the single most important enabling factor for leapfrogging into "modernity"[9] is still haunting development planners as if it was a new discovery, although we have plenty of evidence nowadays that the quantity of information is not the remedy for structural inequalities. Information alone cannot supersede issues of poverty that have deep roots in the violation of basic human rights:

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[7] The "classic" reference is the College of Development Communication at the University of The Philippines at Los Baños.

[8] In particular Everett Rogers and his book on "Diffusion of Innovations". Rogers did a very critical review of his own work in 1976, after he had the opportunity of interacting with Latin American thinkers.

[9] Fifty years after its publication, the work of Lerner, "The Passing of Traditional Society" (1958) is still a mythical bibliographic reference in spite of its patronising discourse and its cultural ethnocentrism.

unequal distribution of land, cancellation of political liberties, gender disparities, ethnic discrimination, unfair international trade agreements, war conflicts encouraged by hegemonic powers, and of course, the non-recognition of communication rights, among other.

Proximity media

There is no question that information is helpful in development, particularly if purposely tailored to meet the needs of specific communities of interest. There are many illustrations of this, and the most successful are not related with large-coverage mass media, but with communication of proximity: local radio, street theatre or community telecentres. Let's briefly mention three examples:

a) A good example of proximity in local radio and at the same time of a proactive use of Internet would be Kothmale Radio in Sri Lanka, a good example of demand-driven information dissemination. People request to the radio station the information they need; the team at Kothmale Radio, searches the information using libraries and web access, and then returns this information through the radio, crafted as thematic programmes. This demand-driven information search and dissemination wouldn't be possible in national mass media broadcasting over communities of multiple interests.

b) It may be hard to believe, but there are places in this world where communities are so isolated that they do not even have "access" (as listeners or viewers) to radio and television. The Popular Theatre project conducted in Nigeria in the early 1990s in support of the Universal Childhood Immunisation (UCI) covered local governments that were out of reach of mass media. Immunisation targets were met by encouraging community participation through drama plays in local languages, specifically created on themes related to health[10].

c) Internet is often seen as the panacea for development, but seldom used adequately to promote social change. The S.M. Swaminathan Foundation in Chennai, India, is known for it success in supporting the Village Knowledge Centres, a network of web-access sites linked to "value added" centres where web pages are created to meet the specific needs of the local population of fishers and peasants: weather, market prices, credit, or health services[11]. Contrary to the "world wide web" which is typically 90% irrelevant to the local needs, the value added to information of local relevance is another powerful argument for proximity media.

Information is fine, and helpful. However, having access to *information on poverty* may not be as equally important as having a voice to deliberate and debate about the *causes of poverty*. What kind of information is there in the web to access? Who produces it? How is the content of the information decided? What kinds of filters are involved in the

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[10] The author was responsible for this programme as UNICEF Communication & Information Officer. More information at: http://www.comminit.com/strategicthinking/pdsmakingwaves/sld-1877.html
[11] See: http://www.comminit.com/strategicthinking/pdsmakingwaves/sld-1903.html

process of generating the information and reporting on real issues? How is information circulated? Which information is not circulated and why?

These and other questions which prompted the MacBride report 25 years ago[12] are still valid. The report commissioned by UNESCO revealed enormous unbalances in information flows and the politics behind. A wave of alternative grassroots' media emerged as a reaction to the monopoly of mass media and it became crystal clear for everyone that large private media conglomerates were producing and disseminating biased information to meet the interests of the wealthy nations. Things have gotten worst since, not better, to the point that the alternative voices that claimed 25 years ago that the "fourth power" was colluded with commercial and political interests are now replicated by mainstream voices. No less than the director of prestigious Le Monde Diplomatique, Ignacio Ramonet, is in campaign to denounce the corruption of values of the "fourth power" and calling for a "fifth power" to be built around peoples' voices[13]. His arguments against the concentration of mass media in fewer hands, the bias of hegemonic information flows and the lack of voices for the majority of the population in the world, may not be new, but are renewing the attention on issues that relate with communication rights and democracy. Freedom of speech cannot be confused any longer with the freedom of media owners to use information for their political or commercial purposes.

Peoples' voices, nevertheless, have been expressing in the margins for many years. Community media, to name one example, developed in Latin America since the late 1940s and grew to the point where more than six thousand community radio stations are established and operating in the region. They operate in rural and urban areas, supported by a diversity of institutional settings, and addressing -from a variety of perspectives, the needs of the communities they represent (communities of interests, not necessarily geographically demarcated communities). The figure alone indicates that, collectively, they are far from being marginal and isolated experiences anymore.

Illiterate Indian women who take control of their daily lives through the use of video, or poor workers in Bolivian mines who acquire political consciousness through the militant use of community radio, are only two of many seminal examples where the poor take in their own hands the means to express their situation and release the potential of growing collectively as dignified human beings and communities. Video SEWA in the outskirts of Ahmadabad, our first example; or the miners' radio stations in the second example, are among those paradigmatic illustrations of people moving from passive and submissive circumstances, to becoming actors and decision-makers on issues affecting their daily lives and their future development[14].

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[12] "Many Voices, One World. The MacBride Report" (1980), UNESCO, Paris.

[13] Ramonet, Ignacio: "Set the media free" Le Monde Diplomatique, October 2003, Paris. Available electronically at: http://mondediplo.com/2003/10/01media

[14] See Gumucio-Dagron, Alfonso: "Making Waves: Participatory Communication for Social Change" (2001), The Rockefeller Foundation, New York. This is a book containing 50 participatory communication examples in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Also available online: http://www.comminit.com/making-waves.html

The horizon of peoples' voices is to become mainstream voices since they are so essential in development, and particularly for development strategies that aim to involve communities in the decision-making process. Communication for social change, under the various personae that it embraces, is becoming an indispensable component of development planning and implementation. From base-line research to evaluations, through the whole process of participatory development, communication is proving essential for *sustainability*, now and finally understood not only from a financial standpoint, but from a social and institutional perspective. Voices reinforce freedom of action and the individual growth that empowers people for social change.

Faith: the process towards ownership

Participation in community media is much more than *giving voice to the neglected*. It is communal process dealing with collective decision-making rather than with individual participatory approaches to generous media openings. Without denying the importance of personal change, it is significant to establish that too often individual access to mass media has only resulted in cathartic drills rather than encouraging communication processes for the benefit of the larger group and community.

The fact that impoverished citizens have access to speak-up in radio stations or to appear on television -as often as this may be- doesn't fundamentally change the relationship of dependency established between those that graciously "open the waves" and those that take advantage of the openings to wholeheartedly express their claims. The power still resides in those that can open, or close, the windows allowing expression. An interesting example of this cathartic approach to media access is the case of "*Compadre* Palenque" in Bolivia, during the 1980s. *Compadre* ("Godfather") Palenque was a popular folk musician turned into broadcaster and revamped into politics when broadcasting made him popular enough to run as a presidential candidate. His very popular radio and television programme, *La Tribuna del Pueblo* (Peoples' Tribune) had a simple format: people would line to access the microphone (that *Compadre* himself would be holding), to make allegations on all sorts of issues concerning their lives, including personal issues ("*my husband beats me…*") *Compadre* would then add a short comment with a moral value or address the issue to the respective authority, before the claimant was taken away to leave room to the next in line. Palenque grew as a political figure and ranked third in one of the general elections.

Participatory communication is more than cathartic access to media controlled through political or economic private interests: it relates to the capacity of a community to organise and acquire sufficient leverage to manage on its own a communication process, be it through community radio, street theatre, mural paintings, Internet or any other media tools.

The sense of ownership is an essential feature of this participatory process. Ownership doesn't necessarily remit to the physical property of media, although that helps. The essence of ownership is though the management of the communication process. Is the community able to manage the process? To what degree there is ownership in terms of democratic participation in programming, producing and, above all, decision making?

The question of owning the media is no doubt important, but not the most essential component of ownership as a process. A radio station may be given in loan to a community, run jointly "with" the community or legally owned by the community… The difference in the level of ownership will be determined by where and how decisions are made on strategic issues. Bolivian miners could say they really *owned* their radio stations because they not only had possession of them physically and institutionally, but they mastered the communication process as well.

The confidence, *faith* and social energy that will be created and conveyed through media ownership is enormous. How else can be explained that poor workers from the Bolivian mines would donate a day of their meagre salaries to support the running costs of their stations? Moreover, how else could we understand that when the radios were threatened by the Bolivian army, women, elders and children would surround the station buildings offering their bodies to the bullets rather than allowing the army to take over? In the case of Bolivian miners' stations, paradigmatic from any standpoint, there was a reciprocal flow of social energy between the radio stations and the organised workers, and both benefited from it. Miners' unions grew in strength with the help of their radio stations, and the stations multiplied during the 1950s with support from the unions throughout other mining camps. At some point, in some places, the lines between the union and the station were too thin to be seen[15].

It doesn't matter how the communication process starts, as long as it evolves in the direction of participation and ownership. At the core of this process, the voices of those that are more disadvantaged and neglected are essential. Many participatory communication processes started as "voice" projects supported by progressive churches or NGOs, or even government or international organisations. They have proved to be sustainable only when people have participated with a sense of ownership. Certainty about the potential for sustainable social change is possible when communities lead the process, not institutions external to the communities, no matter how well-intentioned they may be.

The origins of community media experiences encompass a variety of approaches, and it is the evolution of each experience that, in the end, characterises the experience as participatory and independent, or as dependent on external influence. Again, the key question remains: who is making the decisions?

There are numerous interesting communication projects that add to development and social change the prospective of long-term sustainability through community participation and appropriation. However, some are still in the process of getting to the phase where the responsibility for decision-making is fully among those affected. The confidence needed to reach that stage may be the result of a long process and is never immediate.

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[15] Important research on this experience has been published in English. See for example articles by Robert Huesca (such as http://tinyurl.com/n4xnh) and a book by Alan O'Connor: "Community Radio in Bolivia – The Miners' Radio Stations" (2004). Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY (USA).

Let's briefly look at the variety of origins and how progression determines the level of sustainable participation for social change:

Community initiative.- Among thousands of community based communication experiences, very few indeed initiated as a planned resolution made by the community itself. The case of Bolivian miners' radio stations is one of the few and its evolution over the years was consistent with its origins. Similarly, Labor News Production in South Korea, emerged as the factory workers themselves decided that they needed to establish communication processes and programmes to support the political activism of their unions. Among the leading community radio stations of South Africa, Radio Zibonele and Bush Radio, were created by media activists during the early 1990s –still under the Apartheid regime- and became recognised in 1995.

Local NGO & church support.- Many of the 6,000 community radio stations in Latin America started as projects supported by the local progressive Catholic Church, within the parameters of the Church of Liberation. The Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), the Nepal Press Institute, and the Himal Association joined forces in 1997 to create Radio Sagarmatha, an independent station that has been instrumental in leading the way towards democracy in Nepal (other similar stations have been created since). In Tanzania, near the border with Burundi and Rwanda, Radio Kwizera (Radio Hope), has been instrumental for peace and reconciliation. The station was created, supported and managed by the Jesuit Refugee Service, but aimed to become a community radio run by local communities and refugees.

International cooperation.- Other experiences started as communication and information projects led by international cooperation agencies, NGOs or solidarity movements. The Community Audio Towers in The Philippines were originally FAO or UNICEF projects and received from the UN organisations the equipment and training they needed. UNICEF, FAO and UNESCO have been traditionally the leading UN agencies in promoting development communication, and specifically supporting participatory approaches to communication, although UNICEF has unfortunately derived more into institutional visibility during the past ten years. Video SEWA, mentioned above, and Video and Community Dreams (Egypt) started with support from Martha Stuart Communications, a New York based NGO. The Kayapo video was originally supported by anthropologists from the US and Brazil working with indigenous communities in the Amazonian forest. The Suisse Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) funded local NGOs to create and manage Radio Mampita, Radio Magneva and other two stations in rural areas of Madagascar. The World Bank has supported community radio stations in Timor Lest and other countries of Asia and Africa.

State policy.- National states have also been instrumental in creating and supporting grassroots communication initiatives as part of their development policies or their strategies to promote the inclusion of marginal communities. In Mexico, the National Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) has been supporting over the years a network of twenty community radio stations operating in areas where the population is significantly

made of Maya, Purepecha, Mixteca, and Husteca communities, among other.[16]. In Sri Lanka, Kothmale Community Radio, among the first that subscribed to convergence with new ICTs, is in fact a government station[17]. The Universal Service Agency (USA), a South African government initiative in partnership with the private sector[18], has created since May 1997, 133 telecentres all over the country, some of them following the UNESCO model of Multipurpose Community Centres.

The above are just examples of how the initiatives to create space for local voices are of very different origin. However, it is only the development of each experience that proves the quality of participation and social change. The network of indigenous radio stations en Mexico mentioned above is still centrally funded and managed by the government agency; the directors are appointed by the INI and the level of participation is limited to access to programming, rather than to decision-making. On the other hand, many of the radio stations initially set by progressive catholic priests in Latin America became independent entities, managed by the communities. This has been also the case of community audio-towers and the Tambuli network of radio stations in The Philippines, which were eventually assumed by the community.

Love: knowledge, accountability and change

Disseminating information, as said before, has not proved to be very challenging in terms of reverting the trends of development and ensuring accountability and sustainability. The confusion between *information* and *knowledge* may also be added to the list of misunderstandings mentioned earlier in this text.

Information is only one component of knowledge; however knowledge is the result of information being exposed to culture, community values and individual experience. Knowledge is not transferred from one individual to the next, but recreated within each individual and community sharing sets of common values. Critical scrutiny of information is only possible when cultural values and identities are alive and well. For information to become knowledge, a process of communication has to be in place through which value formation occurs.

There is no doubt about the crucial role of communication for social change in contributing to the strengthening of community values and cultural identities, and making sense of information to become knowledge, bridging local knowledge with information acquired through external sources. The mere existence of a community media alternative draws the line between what is perceived as *theirs* and what is *ours*. The use of the local language to communicate through a community theatre troupe or a local radio station is invaluable in terms of creating the conditions for constantly revaluing knowledge and putting it to work for development.

One example that immediately comes to my mind is the Kayapo indigenous communities of Brazil. Deep in the Amazonian forest, the Kayapo tribes have enjoyed a re-birth in

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[16] See the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) website: http://cdi.gob.mx/ini/radiodifusoras/index.html
[17] More information: http://www.digitalopportunity.org/article/view/72470
[18] Their website is: http://www.usa.org.za/

many senses, paradoxically through the use of new technologies to rescue their spiritual values and cultural traits. Far back in 1985 video cameras were introduced among the Kayapo by several anthropologists working with them. The initial purpose was to allow the Kayapo themselves to tape their rituals, dances and songs to preserve them for future generations. However, the *appropriation* of video as a communication tool took the Kayapo much further: not only they preserved their culture, they also revitalised it, and not only had they reaffirmed their cultural identity, but they used it as a resource to fight against discrimination and attempts to reduce their communities to reservations. The Kayapo used communication as a process to defend their territory and reaffirm their culture within the larger ensemble of cultures of Brazil[19].

Cultural pride, *love* for values and traditions, are essential ingredients in the communication process leading to value formation towards participatory development and social change. Values such as solidarity, collective work, networking among like communities, are reinstated in the community environment through dialogue and debate.

Whose accountability?

Communication can only intervene in the arena of accountability when it can first demonstrate its own accountability to the community. If a communication process is not adequately representing the voices of the community, it cannot argue for the accountability of external stakeholders, such as government, the private sector, international development agencies or NGOs. The strengthening of local participation and ownership are then central to position communities in face of other institutions, otherwise, the community perspective wouldn't be adequately represented to claim for accountability.

At this junction it is important to note that accountability has generally become a synonymous for government responsibility in development. This is frankly in contradiction with what we have seen happening throughout the globalisation process. Privatisation of state-owned companies and strategic economic sectors have left many governments, particularly in Third World countries, as mere managers of poverty, without any resources to effectively combat it. The private sector, on the other hand, has acquired enormous power in the course of inheriting from national states, often at the price of peanuts, strategic sectors of the economy such as mining, agriculture, manufacturing, energy and communications. Ironically, national states are nevertheless expected to assume responsibilities on education, health, the environment and general development, without the resources to meet the needs. Why then, should governments alone be held accountable for national development and not the private sector that owns and benefits from most strategic resources? Accountability should not only be the supervision of how the scarce government resources are spent, but instead how the larger national resources are benefiting development and the well-being of the general population. Seeking transparency in government should never hide behind a curtain of smoke the need to also demand transparency from the private sector that in many Third World countries has control over larger strategic social and economic sectors.

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[19] One of the chapters of "Making Waves", mentioned above, is on the Kayapo experience.

Communication, as a national strategic sector, should not be left apart from scrutiny and accountability. Given the very close relationship between the national mass media and both government and private sector political and economic interests, accountability of national resources for development programmes should not be taken for granted by the mere existence of mass media outlets, as most of them may not exercise their task as truly independent monitors. Even those that are independent from political parties, are often financially dependent on advertising revenues or contracts with the government, with the private sector and with development organisations, which puts them in a delicate position when covering matters of accountability. The "brown envelopes" to "soften" journalists or the practice of taking away advertising from critical independent media, is practiced by the private sector as much as by the government. Direct threats and pressure on journalists are often orchestrated by private companies that don't appreciate to be scrutinised by the media, as it happened in Mexico with journalist Lydia Cacho who denounced "the king of jeans", a businessman, for his involvement in a network of paedophilia[20].

This concern –freedom of expression curtailed by the private sector- is related to Ramonet's analysis on the Fourth Power and the need to build a Fifth Power, truly independent from economic and political influences.

Consequently, organisations of the civil society are increasingly building their own structures to monitor the behaviour of mass media companies. Media observatories and "watchdogs" are becoming more necessary than ever before. The existence of self-control by some media houses, through the appointment of a "readers defender" or ombudsman has not really touched on issues of editorial policy and accountability. The reports from the ombudsman usually end over the chief editor's desk and, even less encouraging is the fact that his or her salary is paid by the media house, not by an independent party. This is why media observatories, funded by independent sources, can truly analyse issues of accountability in the media, and thus, influence the reporting on government and cooperation performance in development programmes. Latin America has leading examples of media observatories, which have helped media houses to behave with transparency, and readers to be better equipped to analyse what mass media has to offer. Peru, Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico are among the countries where observatories have reached a higher level of influence. Other observatory specialise in specific areas of social change, such as ANDI (Brazil)[21], which focuses on issues related with children and youth, and has recently established similar observatories in eight countries in the region. DOSES in Guatemala, runs an observatory specialised in issues of gender and discrimination.

If we agree that independent media and watchdog organisations are essential for keeping governments, the private sector and the international cooperation accountable, we must also agree that community media plays at the community level the same role. And we

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[20] More information on this case can be found on a report by the Council On Hemispheric Affairs: http://tinyurl.com/f98r8

[21] See Agencia de Noticias dos Direitos da Infancia (ANDI) website: http://www.andi.org.br/

shall agree that community media is in the first place accountable to its constituency. Participatory processes in community media should be in place to ensure *internal* accountability that will allow playing a function in demanding *external* accountability. Both affect peoples lives and the development process.

Luck: value formation and the enabling environment

As a value added, *luck* seems to be a player when analysing the diverse settings that co-exist in the context of communication for development and social change in the world. The enabling environment for *value formation and open public discourse* depends on sustainability as much as sustainability depends on participation and ownership. Freedom of expression may not be an *effective* benefit for the population and social development may not be *sustainable* in the long term if the environment for cultural diversity and multiple voices is not in place. This notion has to do with legislation and regulation, with national policies and development strategies, however it goes much further to institutional and social mechanisms that guarantee the *right to communicate* over the more generic and less structured *freedom of speech*, generally benefiting those than "have" (concentration) against those that "have not" (negative discrimination).

Legislation that guarantees the right to communicate may be in place, the political environment may be conducive to planning and implementing development policies that consider communication rights as a core component, however, there are many other factors that often contradict the larger regulation and policies, and prevent concrete strategies to be developed.

Institutional agendas that are set by the government, by the private sector or by the international cooperation, may hinder the full benefits of legislation, regulation and policies. Too often, the decisions are made by individuals, not by representative bodies, which prevent the enforcement of the legal and political decisions that make what we call an "enabling environment".

Proximity media may be the closest expression of participatory communication processes that strengthen community voices and ensure ownership of the development process; however the potential of community media is greater if national policies and communication strategies addressing development are in place. Those strategies usually fill the vacuum that exists between political will (legislation for example) and the development discourse (the rhetoric of international development), by providing a specific framework to act at the community level.

Consider, in a given national context, all the levels that are intermingled in providing the enabling environment for communication for social change and development: specific legislation and regulations, communication policies, national strategies, regional and local political support, etc. As well as other that are maybe less easy to capture but no less influential: national and international development organisations encompassing the strategies and understanding the concepts, local authorities contributing to implementation of hose strategies, and communities engaging in participatory process towards a horizon of sustainable social development.

The three sustainabilities

Sustainability is often seen as an economic and financial issue alone.   A communication programme or project is considered "sustainable" if it can pay salaries, services and generate some income to avoid long-term dependency on external sources. This is in our view a very narrow way to consider sustainability, because it excludes the end goals of setting a "voice" process: issues of ownership, relations with the constituency, networking among communities and similar experiences, improving technological convergence, and in sum open permanent and sustainable channels for local voices to exercise their right to communicate.

In recent years a new perspective on sustainability of community media is being adopted by researchers and practitioners. A seminal study, "La Práctica Inspira" ("Practice Inspires") was conducted in Latin America by a group of independent researchers[22] under the auspices of AMARC and ALER[23], the two main regional networks of community radio stations. The study covered more than 40 stations in various countries in the region and looked at three aspects of sustainability: *social* sustainability, *institutional* sustainability and *financial* sustainability.

We have more than covered above issues related to *social sustainability*, such as community participation and ownership. A community radio station may have the hardware, the salaries and services paid, and enough funding to produce local programmes; however, that doesn't tell much about how the station is valued by its constituency, the community of interests that should be a the heart of a process where *voices* are important. It reminds me of a local "community" radio station in Africa, where the director was proud of the laudatory postcards he was getting from Finland… whereas the local community had no participation at in the station at all. How a radio station relates to the social tissue, and how it represents –through direct participation, the various social sectors in the community, is critical for sustainability. The nature of programming is an essential part of social sustainability, because it reflects the level of participation in the decision-making process.

We will not discuss in detail the *financial sustainability* because there is abundant literature on it, though much of that literature doesn't go very far from complaining about "lack of funding" and describing the difficulties to "survive". Case studies reveal that when community media is of fundamental importance, the community, as poor as it may be, will find ways of contributing to its economic sustainability. But again, social sustainability will come to the rescue of more material needs. We've seen poor villages in Burkina Faso paying for petrol for the generator so their tiny community station would air at least a couple of hours a week. And we have mentioned the impoverished workers in the Bolivian mines, donating a day of their meagre salaries to sustain their stations.

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[22] The author was part of a core team of six researchers that designed the conceptual framework and research tools, later applied by a larger number of contributing researchers.
[23] Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica (ALER) is made mostly of Catholic radio stations, production centres and national networks. See more at the website: http://www.aler.org.ec/

Those small *barangay*[24] I visited in The Philippines were able to upgrade from community audio-towers to radio stations because people, poor farmers, contributed to buy the transmitter and the antenna.

There is no doubt that financial issues are important for sustainability, however most community radio stations -and there are thousands to prove it, have managed to combine various sources of income to sustain their operation and at the same time to ensure that they are not dependent on one single source of income that would curtail their autonomy. Local advertising, agreements with local NGOs and with churches, renting production facilities and equipment, and organising special events to raise funds, are some of the means that community media has used over the years. It is not unlikely to find stations that get a significant percentage of their total income through short message services, thus becoming also a "telephone of the rural areas"[25].

We will now focus on sustainability that depends largely on aspects that are not fully controlled by the communities or by the stations. *Institutional sustainability* has two important facets to consider. On the one hand, the *internal* aspects, and on the other hand the *external* aspects dealing with the positioning of the communication process and its instrument (a community radio, in this case) in relation with the larger national and institutional development environment.

The *internal* aspects have to do in part with participatory democracy within a community media project; meaning, the place of each individual working for a common communicational and political horizon, the internal relations of power (and sharing power) and the decision making process, as delegated by the larger social community groups. It also has to do with the rationality of certain technical decisions that are made and why a particular technology is used.

The internal relations of power reflect the level of participation. Who appoints the director? Who sits in the decision-making committee? How are discussions conducted and decisions made? How representative of the community are those making the decisions? And also: what is the perspective of training and promotion of staff? How is team-work developed? Is there an agreement among staff on the vision on participatory communication? How is programming decided and built? Is there room for innovation in programming? What patters of programming are followed and why?

The issue of *appropriate technology* is important for sustainability and should not be seen only as a technical issue, that is left to technicians –often external, to decide. Here, the central idea is that in order to be sustainable community media (radio, television or telecentre) needs to develop the capacity or "agency" to handle its resources adequately. Equipment is something that any radio station will need to "manage", not only in terms of training the team to acquire the necessary skills, but also in terms of maintaining and

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[24] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barangay
[25] Mentioned during an interview in "Voces del Magdalena" (2006), a documentary by Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron, portraying a network of community radio stations for Peace in Colombia, along the Magdalena River.

developing a medium-term plan defining what *level* of equipment is needed, and for what purpose, in the perspective of renewing it in a given number of years. Many stations have failed because they started with high-end and state-of-the-art equipments donated by the international cooperation, without having developed first the capacity to maintain it and to plan the replacement in a few years. We've seen small community stations and telecentres largely underutilizing equipments too sophisticated for the local capacity to produce and broadcast; stations with large production studios and equipments covered with dust because they had never been used since they were first installed. And more sophisticated equipment ranged as unusable just because of the difficulty of getting small spare parts locally. These distortions, which are in fact related to conceptual shortcomings rather than with purely technical decisions, are frequently the result of vertical interventions by international cooperation agencies, acting with a very patronising vision of what is meant by *voices*.

Power and politics in development: a case study

Some *external* determinants of institutional sustainability are also affected by a patronising vision and often conspire against the establishment of participatory communication processes that are essential to development. It is not unusual to find well intentioned development officials, from the government or from international aid agencies, who "understand" the need of community voices and thus support communication strategies that are participatory and sensitive to the cultural environment. These are undeniably important allies in communication processes that part-away from the usual mass-media intense campaigns of institutional visibility. However, quite often, issues of power within the government or international development agencies may hinder the efforts and frustrate important advances.

The development of participatory communication experiences at the community level is not independent from the national context. Sustainability of community media is thus related to a larger environment of political decisions that play en favour or against the establishment of communication processes alternative to hegemonic media. National policies and political will are instrumental for the development of participatory approaches, however, may not be enough to ensure that innovative communication strategies are proposed and legitimised through participatory processes.

We mentioned at the beginning of this text the example of a national communication strategy to combat HIV/AIDS in Mozambique. It may have sound as a random example, but it could actually be an interesting case study of how communication processes that take place in a positive enabling environment may also depend, sadly enough, on decisions that are made in the end by individuals who use personal power to curtail participatory processes and are never held accountable for it. The case study on the Mozambican national communication strategy for HIV/AIDS deserves to be documented and should provide some lessons to prevent similar stories to happen in other

development contexts. It may not be the place here to provide a full account of that experience; however it is worth to briefly tell the story[26].

The Government of Mozambique, through de National AIDS Council, decided in 2003 that it was time to have a national communication strategy as part of the new National Plan to Combat HIV/AIDS. Communication had been marginal, as in many other countries of Africa, basically reduced to information and advocacy activities concentrated in urban areas, with little impact in rural areas. The progression of HIV/AIDS remained strong, partly due to the lack of prevention. Huge funding was allocated by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies to help people living with AIDS (PLWA) but very little to prevention activities, including communication. Known failures in other hard-struck African countries demanded a different approach to communication, often said to be essential to combat HIV/AIDS but seldom given the necessary human or material resources to perform.

A procedure that lasted several months started with an understanding with the National AIDS Council and UNICEF on the principles of facilitating a process of participatory communication for social change, to involve all stakeholders in the design of the national communication strategy. Otherwise said, the international consultant would not draft the communication strategy, but would facilitate a collective process of dialogue and debate ending in the design of the strategy. Several workshops were conducted at the national and provincial level, with the participation of all national and international organizations that had been working in relation to HIV/AIDS. This included a dozen of Mozambican NGOs, five United Nations agencies, bilateral cooperation institutions, four government ministries, churches of various denominations, representatives from the Mozambican mass media, universities and the main association of people living with AIDS. During the workshops, the collective of organisations mentioned above discussed the problems, made a diagnostic of information and communication in the country, and drafted a communication strategy with strong participatory components at the community level, but also with room for advocacy, mass media activities and training of journalists.

The national communication strategy was validated by the same group of organisations, through a process of collective reflection, and submitted to the National AIDS Council. Joanna Mangueira, then the director of NAC, expressed her satisfaction and her desire to start implementation. However, a surprising reaction from the UNICEF Representative threw to the basket-bin the collective work of almost one year. Marie Pierre Poirier didn't agree to the communication strategy and her personal positioning was in the end the deciding factor. In spite of UNICEF officials having been part of the process, and in spite of the government having accepted the strategy, the UNICEF Representative cancelled the initiative unilaterally and without providing an explanation. It is only by conjecture that we reached the conclusion that presumably Ms. Poirier was expecting a strategy that would focus more on institutional and personal visibility.

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[26] The author was involved as main international consultant and facilitated the process of designing a participatory communication strategy.

UNICEF as an organisation is not to be held responsible for the unfortunate policy turn that annulled the participatory process, the first of its kind in Africa. The lesson here is that one person, somehow ignoring the principles agreed by her organisation, had enough personal power to overturn decisions that were made collectively through a very thorough process of dialogue and debate. The "variable" of individual personalities within development organisations or government agencies is not to be neglected. Policies, regulations, or strategies may be irrelevant in the end, when systems of accountability are not in place. Ironically, Ms. Poirier was promoted by UNICEF to a larger country, Brazil.

Accountability has been mentioned above as having several prongs and moving in multiple directions. From the very simplistic notion that governments are to be held accountable, we have laid down a concept of accountability that involves governments, the private sector, the international cooperation, NGOs, mass media and also local media. Unfortunately the comprehensive understanding of accountability is seldom taken into practice, allowing for excesses –as the one described above, to happen.

The institutional framework is thus essential for the development of communication that truly helps people to participate in their own development, not just as "doers" of others' designs, but as decision-makers in their own right. For this to happen, development organisations (government, NGOs or international cooperation) need to be consistent with their discourse on the importance of participation in development. Most development institutions seem to agree that participation is the key to sustainable social development; however, very few take the discourse forward and translate it into concrete measures *inside* their own organisation.

The discourse may have changed during the past couple of decades, but we can point to at least four aspects –the image of the four-leaf clover comes back again, that prove that most development organisations have not implemented real changes in support of participatory approaches and more specifically, in support of participatory communication processes.

1. The first indicator is that few organisations have translated the rhetoric into *policies* highlighting participatory communication for social change and development. Most of them still perceive "communication" as information, advocacy or plain institutional visibility.

2. The second indicator is that communication *strategies* for social change are scarce in most development organisations. There is a wealth of mass media activities and short-term campaigns, but seldom a clear long-term vision of communication to strengthen peoples' voices and ensure sustainability.

3. The third indicator is a consequence of the above. In spite of the rhetoric, *budgeting* exercises show that communication is always left with very little resources, if any. Under the rubric of "communication" it is generally advocacy that takes the lot (posters, logos, one-time events, radio jingles, television spots,

T-shirts or blunt advertising). Little of it is destined to community-based communication processes.

4. The fourth indicator is that development organisations are reluctant to create posts for *development communication specialists* to facilitate communication strategy design. Yes, they often hire journalists, who have no strategic vision of development or experience in participatory approaches to communication. If any, communicators are placed in lower ranks, performing small tasks, including public relations, while the decisions on communication are made by managers with no experience and knowledge about it.

Where is then hope, faith, love and luck in the four paragraphs above? This is just to show that there are factors in the enabling environment that are often placed above the principles and processes that as communicators for social change and development we struggle to defend and promote. We may continue training people by hundreds, designing manuals, supporting local experiences that are perfectly valid and processes that motivate peoples' enthusiasm, but at some point we also need to focus on those huge institutional constraints that prevent social change to happen.

Legislation and negative discrimination

We have left for the end another crucial aspect of the enabling (or disabling?) environment, which is legislation, the general international and national framework which allows mass media or community media to exist and develop (in which directions?)

The issue of legislation protecting, promoting and regulating participatory media and local voices is still unsolved in most of the world, which is why *luck* and not just *love*, may still be a factor in the equation. From the perspective of free voices in independent media, in some countries legislation has been worst than political repression and has contributed to the annihilation of community voices, whereas in some other countries it has helped to legitimise and strengthen it.

More often than not, legislation has had a positive impact in countries where the facto situation was already in favour of community media. Peru is an example: with near four thousand radio stations in operation -and a vibrant national network[27] that comprises at least half of them, there was enough social capital to achieve a legislation set to protect community media and provide free access to frequencies. South Africa has also set the example by creating appropriate legislation and a regulatory telecommunications body that is –at least in writing, autonomous from government influences.

The context in Guatemala is radically different: a country recently emerging from decades or internal war where the army exterminated over 200.000 people, its economy is

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[27] Coordinadora Nacional de Radio (CNR): http://www.cnr.org.pe/

dominated by a handful of very powerful families moving around in helicopters[28] and directly or indirectly –through advertising, controlling mass media outlets. Meanwhile, the population largely made of indigenous Maya communities is living in extreme poverty, with scarce access to education and health services. Legislation protecting and promoting community media, or at least tolerating it, is still in the drawing board in spite of the Peace Accords signed in 1996, which specifically mention the responsibility of the state to promote diversity of cultures and voices through the media. The discussion over new legislation is radically opposed -not so much by the government, but by private media owners who managed to influence a regulation establishing that radio frequencies will be put to bid and taken by the highest bidders. Who wants to abide by the "rule of law" under those conditions of discrimination?

The privatisation policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in recent decades have negatively impacted freedom of expression by means of the de-regulation of the telecommunications sector, the privatisation of a national strategic natural resource such as the electromagnetic spectrum, and the imposition of market rules to define ownership in the information sector. Within the World Bank there is a clear intent to remediate the situation, but it is yet to become a visible institutional policy[29]. In the meanwhile, privatisation has brought in many countries legislation, regulation or de-regulation that negatively discriminates community media and largely favours private commercial mass media.

In such environments the "respect for the rule of law" becomes a very relative concept. Laws can be unfair, laws can discriminate, laws can marginalise. This is why laws sometimes need to change under the pressure of organised people; laws get better if people have a voice to critically assess them and hold the government and the private sector accountable. But this is not the case in countries where voices of the majority are not heard, and where community media is at a very incipient stage of development.

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)[30] has been working over the years, through its regional networks in Africa, Asia, Latin America & The Caribbean, in support of legislation that is *specific* to community radio. Sometimes, the successes in getting a positive response from governments have fallen short of providing an environment conducive to the development of community media. New legislation and regulations in some countries of Africa and Latin America are often plagued with restrictions: e.g. power of transmitters limited to a ridiculous low-wattage, area of broadcasting restricted to 2 kilometres, prohibition to get revenues from advertising or to broadcast news, etc. Full independence of these radio stations is often hindered by the need to seek support from development organisations and NGOs, in exchange of programming slots.

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[28] This is not a trivial annotation: in spite of its poverty, Guatemala is known to be the country in Latin America with the highest ownership of private planes and helicopters per capita.

[29] James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank, was supportive of the community radio initiative and allocated seed funds from the President's budget.

[30] World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC): http://www.amarc.org/

It has become clear that one of the main problems in the struggle for legislation is the inability to establish the criteria to clearly differentiate community radio from other forms of local private radio, municipal radio, confessional stations, or government supported local public radio. This lack of precision is notorious in Africa and Asia, where private local stations or evangelic radio networks are mushrooming under the label of "community" radio. More often, the agenda of newly created stations is just commercial: many local private stations are being established just to obtain a radio frequency that, in 10 or 15 years, will multiply its original cost and become a high-priced commodity. The "recognition" of community media is too often limited to a sentence in the telecommunications regulatory documents: community radio may be mentioned, but not defined. This is potentially more damaging than the total absence of legislation and regulation. The lack of national and regional community radio associations in Africa and Asia (with the exception of AMARC) makes even more difficult to discriminate those that are truly established to enhance peoples' voices and those that have another religious, commercial or political agenda. In Latin America, national community radio associations have enormously help to exert social pressure on their affiliates, to behave within the basic principles of participatory communication.

During the epoch of strong military or civil autocratic regimes en Asia, Africa and Latin America, voices of people didn't expect any legislation to be in place, nor did they waited to establish their means of communication in spite of political repression. The miners in Bolivia under the military dictators during the 1960s and 1970s, the black majorities in South Africa under the Apartheid regime, or the independent journalists in Nepal under the autocratic rule of the royal family, all took the initiative to create community media outlets -even clandestinely, that would allow them to echo the voices of people claiming for freedom of expression and development rights.

However, the situation of political oppression from authoritarian governments has evolved with the upbringing of formal "electoral" democracies, and not yet fully participatory democratic national environments, but at least less repressive regimes. The new challenges, however, reside in how to deal with the powerful media conglomerates that have the means to impose legislation that excludes community media and favours more concentration of media in fewer hands. With the exception of the toughest military dictatorships, governments have traditionally tolerated alternative and independent media, even in times where national mass media was exclusively operated by the State. In Bolivia, before the "liberalisation" of telecommunications, eight public universities had their own television channels with cultural and educational programming, and their own news departments. Print journalists had their own weekly journal, published every Monday. These disappeared with privatisation and the creation of the new commercial media outlets.

Before the 1980s, state media editorial content depended on who was in power in the government; today, the question to ask for grasping the issues of bias of information and censorship is: who owns such newspaper or such television network. State television and radio stations in Latin American countries usually broadcasted a wealth of locally-made educational programmes emphasizing the national and cultural identity; however after

privatisation the new private media outlets, particularly open television networks, are very much dependent on importing canned programming, in a pathetic attempt to compete with cable networks.

It is a huge mistake to continue agitating the ghost of government controlled media and to hide the reality of private commercial media monopolies. Many countries have already gone through that process during the past 30 years and the conclusion is that public media was better in many respects. Civil society movements for communication rights are not only fighting today to establish independent participatory media channels, but also to strengthen public service media under the protection of national states.

In that context the demands for regulation are the only reasonable way to create an enabling environment to legitimise community media.   The most important single item to include in any project of legislation is the criteria to define community media. This is not to say that a one-paragraph caste-in-iron definition is needed. That would not help and is impractical. What is really needed is and agreement on a few criteria that would help recognise if a station can be classified as "community", or as "religious", or as "private local", or as "public service", or "state & municipal". All may be legitimate options, but the aims and functions are different in each case, which is why it makes sense to have diverse sets of criteria. The criteria for community media could include, for example: collective decision-making on issues of editorial policies, programming and institutional aspects. This means that the main decisions should be taken by a collective of community representatives, elected by their own constituency. This collective (e.g. the Community Media Council at the Tambuli radio stations in The Philippines), should decide on the director of the station, the editorial policies and issues of relations with social organisations.

Mass media and voices

A *robust* and diverse national mass media sector is fine, as long as it doesn't become robust at the expense of the voices of people. Ending the state broadcasting monopolies often helped private commercial monopolies to grow without control, leaving public service media in shambles. While in Africa and former socialist countries of Eastern Europe the struggle may still be to privatise and thus end tight government control on media, in other regions of the Third World we have already experienced the other side of the coin: powerful private media conglomerates, the "fourth power" at the service of politic and economic interests, as limiting to journalists' freedom of expression as the old monopolistic state media. It only takes two or three decades to happen. During the 1970s and 1980s Latin America moved from state-owned public media towards a very rapid privatisation with almost no regulations. From a situation where the printed press was the only media sector not entirely controlled by the national-state, the region evolved towards the current situation where the majority of media outlets are in private hands and public media is on the ropes. Radio and television networks have multiplied many folds, and, following the same liberalisation pattern as in Europe or the United States, the concentration of media companies in fewer hands has taken place.

So much for diversity… The now classic example is satellite television, with hundreds of channels offering similar programming; the promise of diversity became an exercise of endless zapping. All the worst for news, repeated 24 hours a day and not only on CNN, but through all Third World television channels that have opted for downloading the international news from the CNN or Sky News satellites instead of producing their own international news as they did before. National networks are at the mercy of market laws that end imposing canned material, reducing local production to the minimum, even if radio stations seem to be in better shape to resist the homogenization of programming.

Guatemala, which we have already mentioned above, is an interesting although not unique example. In the name of "free press", one businessman (a Mexican citizen living in Miami), owns four out of the six open television channels, and a large number of radio stations. Presidential candidates travel to Miami to visit Angel Gonzalez during their political campaigns and it is of common knowledge that no candidate will ever get to the Presidency of Guatemala if he is not in good terms with Mr. Gonzalez. On the other hand, however, small community-based indigenous radio stations have been declared "pirate" and are arbitrarily shut-down. Police forces detain radio station directors and kidnap equipments and archives. Usually, these law enforcement operations involve dozens of policemen –as if a drug-bust, who ironically receive their orders from the prosecutor in charge of defending journalists and the exercise of freedom of expression. This prosecutor, in turn, is only obeying to the powerful chamber of private media owners. The government, who traditionally tolerated independent indigenous media, doesn't want to get into trouble with private media owners so remains silent.

Similarly in Brazil, repression has attained community media even under the progressive government led by President "Lula" da Silva. ANATEL, the huge telecommunications autonomous body is responsible for shutting down numerous community radio stations, mainly because it is influenced by private commercial media rather than by the need of democratising access to radio frequencies.

Concluding remarks

There is no question that people struggling for their right to communicate need the support of development organisations, local, national and international, to maintain durable processes of participatory communication for development and social change.

For *voices* to be heard and accountability to be promoted upwards from the community level, the enabling environment of legislation and regulations, policies and strategies, has to be in place, transcending the rhetoric of the development discourse, and the discourse of "free press" which too often favours only the powerful.

Sustainability of participatory media needs to consider indicators of social responsibility and participation, cultural pertinence, institutional democracy and of course the overall policy environment. Consistent communication for development strategies need to be designed and implemented in ways that transcend institutional visibility or mere access to information.

Communication for social change is too serious to improvise and to leave it to decision-makers that have a limited understanding of it. More specialised professionals are needed as planners, as well as better funding of communication strategies to accompany development programmes from its inception, and not as randomly added activities for institutional reporting and memory.

The truth is: participation leads to autonomy, independence and freedom, and communities that are free and autonomous, and can express their voices through their own media, as less likely to be manipulated. Communities that could hold governments, cooperation agencies and mass media accountable for their actions, are more likely to become effective partners and demand a real stake in the decision-making process. The bitter part of it is that it is obviously much easier for development organisations, and less problematic, to intervene with their programmes in communities that are passive receivers and not a source of demands and conflict. Institutional annual reports will look nicer and who cares about sustainability in 10 or 20 years? Most development officers in those organisations will have been promoted by then, anyway. It is a cynical statement, but it also true, as anyone who has worked in development would know.

The bottom line is that participatory development cannot be effective if participation is not encouraged through communication processes. There is no better way to facilitate peoples' participation in their own designs, than providing opportunities for their voices to be heard and their organisations to strengthen.

15-Aug-06