

4.7. DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

"Development communication is the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential." (**Nora Quebral**; Quoted in *Development Communication – rhetoric and reality* by Pete Habermann and Guy de Fontagalland.)

What does development communication mean in the South African context?

Stated below are some key features of a developmental paradigm of communication. Development communication in this sense refers to communication which takes into account the needs of society, the developmental goals of government and general empowerment of the citizenry.

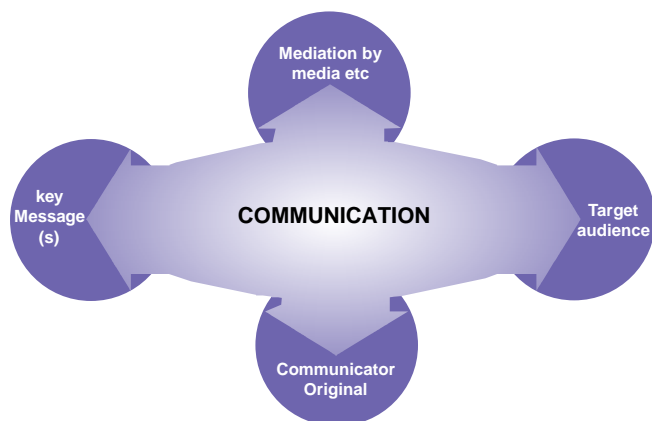
In South Africa, Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCCs) have been identified as the primary approach for the implementation of development communication and information as they offer a wide range of services that communities can use for their own empowerment. However, it must be borne in mind that they constitute one, probably the most important manifestation of the development communication approach.

Providing services and information in an integrated fashion seeks to address particular historical, social and economic factors, which characterise freedom of access to information and citizen participation in South Africa. This includes socio-economic problems such as poverty, high unemployment, low standards of living (people living below the poverty line), poor access to basic services, remote settlement patterns, lack of access to technology, lack of information, poor health services, lack of education and skills, lack of proper infrastructure, etc.

The discipline of communication offers the development process a number of inputs:

- a way to survey a new environment, especially by establishing consultative vehicles
- a way of raising consciousness and awareness amongst communities of issues pertaining to a better life for all – something to aspire to
- a way of promoting feedback – a dynamic two-way process can be set up between people and 'developers'
- a way to teach new skills
- selling a national dream and a vehicle for programmes directed at nation building.

It is critical to understand the following key components of communication (see structure below)



Key elements of development communication approach:

- **It must be responsive/empowering.** Development communication seeks to instruct the communicator to determine first the needs of communities and various other stakeholders. Communication must have, as its central message, the improvement of the quality of life of the citizenry. It does not provide futile or sterile information, only deemed essential by central planners. People understand their own needs better and through this approach communication becomes a tool in the planning and development process, not a mechanism to persuade communities once unpalatable decisions have been made ('in their best interests!').
- **It is interactive and hinges on feedback.** It is fundamentally, about consultative processes being managed at community level and encourages intense interaction around government's programme of action. It is not a one-way process but involves dialogue mechanisms about the information which was transferred.
- **It should be innovative and creative.** When the message is uninspiring, it affects the entire communication process. The message must show clearly how the information transmitted will make a difference in the life of the recipient – it must not instill doubt or disbelief, but trust and confidence. Development communication workers should, however, balance creativity with an understanding of what communities would be prepared to accept and consideration should also be given to the norms and prevailing values of that community.
- **It enhances participatory democracy.** This approach builds participatory mechanisms and functional networks involving NGOs, CBOs and Traditional Leadership structures, while also encouraging links with networks from across the country and indeed all over the world. These can either prove or disprove the validity of the information



An example of development communication responsive to the needs of the community.

transmitted. Therefore, it is not about 'government speak'.

- **It's about sustainability and continuity.** All appropriate forms of media have to be used to provide the required information and two-way communication services, among others print and electronic media, direct communication with communities through unmediated products and community liaison, the Internet and telecentres. It is not about



Development communication is meant to improve the quality of lives of the citizens.