**Ten Key Issues about (Development) Communication**

The 10 points presented in this section address some of the myths and misconceptions about communication, especially when related to the field of development. These misconceptions can often be the cause of misunderstandings and lead to inconsistent and ineffective use of communication concepts and practices. The first two points on this list are about communication in general, while the others refer to development communication in particular.

1. “Communications” and “communication” are not the same thing. The plural form refers mainly to activities and products, including information technologies, media products, and services (the Internet, satellites, broadcasts, and so forth). The singular form, on the other hand, usually refers to the process of communication, emphasizing its dialogical and analytical functions rather than its informative nature and media products. This distinction is significant at the theoretical, methodological, and operational levels.

2. There is a sharp difference between everyday communication and professional communication. Such a statement might seem obvious, but the two are frequently equated, either overtly or more subtly, as “He or she communicates well; hence, he or she is a good communicator.” A person who communicates well is not necessarily a person who can make effective and professional use of communication. Each human being is a born communicator, but not everyone can communicate strategically, using the knowledge of principles and experience in practical applications. A professional (development) communication specialist understands relevant theories and practices and is capable of designing effective strategies that draw from the full range of communication approaches and methods to achieve intended objectives.

3. There is a significant difference between development communication and other types of communication. Both theoretically and practically, there are many different types of applications in the communication family. In this publication, we refer to four main types of communication, which are represented significantly in the work of the World Bank: advocacy communication, corporate communication, internal communication, and development communication. Each has a different scope and requires specific knowledge and skills to be performed effectively. Expertise in one area of communication is not sufficient to ensure results if applied in another area.

4. The main scope and functions of development communication are not exclusively about communicating information and messages, but they also involve engaging stakeholders and assessing the situation. Communication is not only about “selling ideas.” Such a conception could have been appropriate in the past, when communication was identified with mass media and the linear Sender-Mes-sage-Channel-Receiver model, whose purpose was to inform audiences and persuade them to change. Not surprisingly, the first systematic research on the effects of communication was carried out soon after World War II, when communication activities were mostly associated with a controversial concept— propaganda. Currently, the scope of development communication has broadened to include an analytical aspect as well as a dialogical one—intended to open public spaces where perceptions, opinions, and knowledge of relevant stakeholders can be aired and assessed.

5. Development communication initiatives can never be successful unless proper communication research is conducted before deciding on the strategy. A communication professional should not design a communication campaign or strategy without having all the relevant data to inform his or her decision. If further research is needed to obtain relevant data, to identify gaps, or to validate the project assumptions, the communication specialist must not hesitate to make such a request to the project management. Even when a communication specialist is called in the middle of a project whose objectives appear straightforward and clearly defined, specific communication research should be carried out if there are gaps in the available data. Assumptions based on the experts’ knowledge should always be triangulated with other sources to ensure their overall validity. Given its interdisciplinary and cross-cutting nature, communication research should ideally be carried out at the inception of any development initiative, regardless of the sector or if a communication component would be needed at a later stage.

6. To be effective in their work, development communication specialists need to have a specific and in-depth knowledge of the theory and practical applications of the discipline. In addition to being familiar with the relevant literature about the various communication theories, models, and applications, development communication specialists should also be educated in the basic principles and practices of other interrelated disciplines, such as anthropology, marketing, sociology, ethnography, psychology, adult education, and social research. In the current development framework, it is particularly important that a specialist be acquainted with participatory research methods and techniques, monitoring and evaluation tools, and basics principles of strategy design. Additionally, a good professional should also have the right attitude toward people, being empathic and willing to listen and to facilitate dialog in order to elicit and incorporate stakeholders’ perceptions and opinions. Most of all, a professional development communication specialist needs to be consistently issue-focused, rather than institution-focused.

7. Development communication support can only be as effective as the project itself. Even the most well-designed communication strategy will fail if the overall objectives of the project are not properly determined, if they do not enjoy a broad con- sensus from stakeholders, or if the activities are not implemented in a satisfactory manner. Sometimes communication experts are called in and asked to provide solutions to problems that were not clearly investigated and defined, or to support objectives that are disconnected from the political and social reality on the ground. In such cases, the ideal solution is to carry out field research or a communication- based assessment to probe key issues, constraints, and feasible options. Tight deadlines and budget limitations, however, often induce managers to put pressure on communication experts to produce quick fixes, trying to force them to act as short-term damage-control public relations or “spin doctors.” In such cases, the basic foundations of development communication are neglected, and the results are usually disappointing, especially over the long term.

8. Development communication is not exclusively about behavior change. The areas of intervention and the applications of development communication extend beyond the traditional notion of behavior change to include, among other things, probing socioeconomic and political factors, identifying priorities, assessing risks and opportunities, empowering people, strengthening institutions, and promoting social change within complex cultural and political environments. That development communication is often associated with behavior change could be ascribed to a number of factors, such as its application in health programs or its use in mass media to persuade audiences to adopt certain practices. These kinds of interventions are among the most visible, relying heavily on communication campaigns to change people’s behaviors and to eliminate or reduce often fatal risks (for example,

AIDS). The reality of development, though, is complex and often requires broader changes than specific individual behaviors.

9. Media and information technologies are not the backbone of development communication. As a matter of fact, the value -added of development communication occurs before media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are even considered Of course, media and information technologies are part of development communication, and they are important and useful means to support development. Their application, however, comes at a later stage, and their impact is greatly affected by the communication work done in the research phase. Project managers should be wary of “one-size-fits-all” solutions that appear to solve all problems by using media products. Past experience indicates that unless such instruments are used in connection with other approaches and based on proper research, they seldom deliver the intended results.

10. Participatory approaches and participatory communication approaches are not the same thing and should not be used interchangeably, but they can be used together, as their functions are often complementary, especially during the research phase. Even if there are some similarities between the two types of approaches, most renowned participatory approaches, such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) or participatory action research (PAR), do not usually assess the range and level of people’s perceptions and attitudes on key issues, identify communication entry points, and map out the information and communication systems that can be used later to design and implement the communication strategy. Instead, these are all key activities carried out in a participatory communication assessment.