

At the start of the Sustainable Development Goals: An Academic/Research Agenda

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- Communication for Development advocates and scholars should commit themselves to a deeper engagement with policy makers to ensure that communication is recognized as a central component in all development initiatives. This will involve a systematic coordinated effort to establish a clear, accessible body of evidence drawn from current best practice.
- Universities are a significant knowledge, information and training resource for communities. Regional institutions need to be identified to strengthen into centres of expertise and technical support, including establishing a core curriculum, strengthening the faculty, creating new posts, providing research funds, supporting internships, and establishing links with professional organizations. A network and partnership of specialised research institutions, committed to stimulating and strengthening sustainable capacity for training and quality control in Communication for Development and social change, is needed.
- Research that addresses the achievement and sustainability of processes and outcomes of Communication for Development should be encouraged. This requires a participatory approach, a shared framework between development agencies and local stakeholders, and community involvement in design, implementation and dissemination.
- From a research perspective, different kinds of evidence exist for different types of outcomes. The evidence for social structural change (e.g. empowerment, equity, policy change) is largely of the anecdotal or qualitative type, and evidence for individual change (e.g. behaviours including participation, efficacy/self-confidence, gender attitudes, etc.) is predominantly quantitative. There is nothing wrong with anecdotal and qualitative evidence, but they invite different inferences. On the other hand, quantitative evidence may provide short-term advice, which is not reliable for long-term or contextualised recommendations. It is possible to quantify higher order changes, but to do so requires methodological approaches that few projects have the time, resources or donor support to undertake.
- Evaluation and impact assessments should include participatory baseline formulations and communication needs assessments. They should also include self-evaluation by the communities themselves and the concept of 'social usefulness'. They should be used to feed back at the policy level. There is a need for effective and convincing evaluation models and data to show evidence of the impact of Communication for Development. Sustainability indicators based on qualitative

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dimensions of development need to be emphasized, involving the potential of ICTs to collect feedback interactively. Research should also be reinforced in order to better identify communication needs.

- While many successful small-scale examples of Communication for Development exist, these need to be scaled-up, thus improving practice and policy at every level. A focus on small-scale projects (pilot projects) is acceptable, but evidence-based and properly researched benchmarks need to be set.
- Training initiatives should be focused on collaborative learning in Communication for Development, encouraging experiential, value-based, culturally sensitive training in participatory Communication for Development and fostering a community of practice across the regions. In this context, education of journalists and communicators is crucial. Training institutions should be supported in order to ensure that the new generation of journalists and change agents has the commitment to tackle the crucial issues of societies in a professional and relevant way.
- More systematic and strategic fellowship and sponsorship programs are needed, funded by national and international donor agencies, for scholarships for masters and doctoral level training to build the cohort of people with development communication competencies.
- To develop and disseminate a better and more robust body of evidence on what works, considerations should be given to:
 - Establishing a common set of indicators to be used in the evaluation of programs that capture impact on participatory processes as well as on outcome measures.
 - Improving on-line archiving of and access to 'grey literature' to better capture the plethora of outcomes descriptions and evidence that remains unpublished.
 - Advocating for better editorial quality standards for published articles and documents.
 - Developing a collaborative database or clearinghouse to assemble and assess evidence on social development interventions.