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Title	Participatory approaches to communication and development : the Philippine experience.
Author(s)	Porio, Emma.
Citation	Porio, E. (1990). Participatory approaches to communication and development : the Philippine experience. In AMIC-IDRC Seminar on Development and Communication in the 1990s : What Needs to be Done? Singapore, April 2-6, 1990. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research & Information Centre.
Date	1990
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1517
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**Participatory Approaches to Communication and Development :
The Philippine Experience**

By

Emma Poria

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**PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT:
THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE¹**
by Emma Porio, Ph.D.²

Introduction

Communication paradigms and structure of information systems mirror mainstream development models and the existing power relations in society.

Until the seventies, the development scene was dominated by a growth-oriented vision. This model emphasized capital investment, increased production and exploitation of resources, specialization of markets and skills, and growth through foreign investment and foreign markets. Unfortunately, this vision failed to deliver the development promise to the majority of the people in the developing world. Instead, it has spawned an increasing debt-burden, increased inequities between rich and poor, crisis in environmental resources and a host of other problems. Within this context, communication and information systems have served more the needs of the few who have control of resources and power rather than the majority of the population.

Participatory approaches to communication and development represents a search for the fulfillment of this elusive dream of development for all.

This paper argues that attempts to utilize participatory approaches in communication and development in the Philippines have been slowed down by the fundamental structures of power, poverty and inequity. This argument is pursued by looking at experiences in participatory programs and their outcomes.

¹Paper prepared for the IDRC-AMIC Seminar-Workshop on Development and Communication in the 1990s: What Needs to be Done? 2-6 April, 1990, Singapore.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology-Anthropology, Ateneo de Manila University and Research Associate, Institute of Philippine Culture of the same university.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first section provides a historical context of development models while the second part cites case studies of participatory programs in communication and development. A concluding section analyzes the patterns observed from these case studies and its implications to communications and development in the 1990s.

Historical background

The paradigms in communication and development have been shaped by the prevailing conceptions of how the world around us operate. Thus, for a long time, social science as the handmaid of modernization followed the classic scientific positivism. The assumptions and values of the physical sciences were adopted to the social sciences with such vigor and eagerness. Scientific generation of knowledge was motivated by the need to control and master the forces which serve as obstacles in obtaining the promise of development. Rationality and the technocratic solution carved bold development plans to increase the rates of GNP, reduce population growth rates, infant mortality and to deliver basic services to all. This model ignored the crucial role of geo-politics, power structures, cultural norms and institutions.

But despite these efforts, the paradox of underdevelopment persisted. While the developed areas enjoyed productivity and abundance, the periphery continued to be bogged down by poverty. Because of the failure of economic rational models, a search for development models which put people at the center led to some of the participatory initiatives in development.

Participatory Programs in Communication and Development

Castillo (1983) provided an excellent review of participatory development from the 50s to the early-80s. She concluded that the participation of the people in these so-called participatory development programs was minimal.

For this paper, I will cite three programs/projects which utilized a participatory approach from the mid-80s onwards. These are: the Barangay Agrarian Reform

Committee (BARC) of the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Community Information and Planning System (CIPS) of the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PHILDHRRRA), and the Local Resource Management Project (LRM) of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). These programs represent bottom-up approaches to rural communication and development in reaction to the prevailing top-down model.

These cases, however, should not be interpreted as the best representatives of the so many participatory initiatives today in the Philippines. Rather, I picked them up because I had access to their initial evaluation. Current participatory initiatives are conducted in the areas of health and nutrition, population and family planning, social forestry and environmental control, credit and cooperatives, irrigation and farming systems, etc.

Case Study No. 1: The Barangay Agrarian Reform Committee

Agrarian reform is touted as the centerpiece of the Aquino administration's program on development. Given this responsibility, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), created the Barangay Agrarian Reform Committee (BARC) in 1988 as an implementing mechanism for agrarian reform at the village level. DAR instituted BARC "in recognition of the people's right to be actively involved in planning formulation, program implementation, monitoring and evaluation." Thus, the program was set-up "not just to lighten DAR's burden but to make agrarian reform truly a community based program." BARC, therefore, is the main participatory mechanism of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) of the Aquino regime (DAR, 1989).

Functions and membership. BARC is mandated to perform two major functions: (1) land tenure improvement and (2) program beneficiaries development. For the first function, BARCs are tasked: (1) to assist in the identification of lands, qualified beneficiaries and landowners in the barangay, as well as to assist in

gathering data needed in land valuation or determination of lease rental; (2) to attest to the accuracy of initial parcellary mapping of the beneficiary village; and (3) to mediate and conciliate between parties involved in an agrarian dispute. For the second function, the responsibilities of the BARCs are: (1) to assist in the set-up and maintenance of a community-based information building system; (2) to assist in the preparation of the barangay development plan; and (3) to facilitate and coordinate the delivery of support services to beneficiaries.

Voting members of BARC are drawn from representatives of the following sectors: (1) farmer and farmworker beneficiaries, (2) farmer and farmworker nonbeneficiaries, (3) agrarian/agricultural cooperatives, (4) other farmer organizations, (5) nongovernment organizations, and (6) landowners. Nonvoting members are representatives of the Department of Agrarian Reform (who acts as the BARC secretary), Department of Agriculture, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Land Bank of the Philippines, and barangay council.

Emerging patterns of implementation. In an initial evaluation regarding the implementation of the policy in 1989, three main issues emerged as affecting the performance of BARCs: process and strategy of organizing, membership, and activities. A survey of 269 provincial BARCs showed the following patterns. In organizing the committees, it was found that there was really no genuine participation from the grassroots. Forty-three percent alleged that DAR personnel did not orient or brief the community assembly about the functions of the committee. Instead, they had prepared a preselected list of officers and members of the BARC. In 32 percent of the cases, DAR personnel visited the mayor and barangay; then called for a barangay assembly and explained about the BARC. The assembly was then grouped into sectors to elect their sectoral representatives. However, 15 percent reported that DAR personnel appointed or handpicked the sectoral representatives. Twenty-four respondents even argued that BARC existed only "in paper." In all of the regions, representatives reported that their reason for organizing was because "they were told to do so by DAR."

In terms of leadership, it is interesting to note that 74 (28 percent) of the leaders were farmer/farmworker beneficiaries. An almost equal number (72) however, were nonbeneficiaries, who were either barangay officials or landowners.

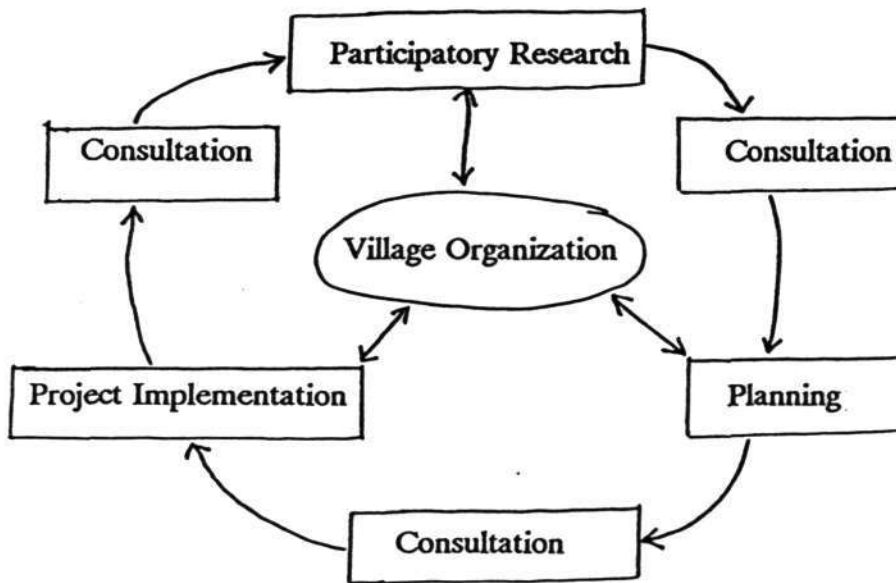
Concerning the implementation of the program, 67 percent reported that the committee did not function at all since its organization, while 32 percent said that they functioned but could not state clearly what those activities were. Only two respondents stated that they had clearly implemented the mandated functions of BARC. Moreover, 53 percent of the BARCs surveyed claimed that they had not involved their respective communities in any of their activities. They also cited the following reasons for the inability of BARC to sustain activities: lack of information on CARP; lack of information on the vision, concept, mandate, functions and role of BARCs; inadequate information on the plans and programs of DAR; and the domination and interference by "political" personalities of the barangay.

The election of representatives was supposed to insure a fair representation of the farmer beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries since this sector constituted the largest. But as election results revealed, democratic processes did not really insure that the people's representatives were representative (Lynch in Castillo 1983). Though landlords and barangay officials were not beneficiaries or prospective beneficiaries of agrarian reform, their block was represented to determine how the program will be implemented in their communities.

Case Study No.2: The Community Information and Planning System (CIPS)

Pioneered by the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in the Rural Areas (PHILDHARRA), CIPS argues that there are three conditions for empowering communities. These are: education, organization, socioeconomic upliftment.

CIPS empowers communities through community organization which allow them to analyze their situation, formulate, plan, and implement appropriate solutions to their problems. For these processes to work, information is very crucial. Thus, the Community Information and Planning System is based on the following model:



Source: Polistico 1989

Figure 1. The Community Information and Planning System Model

The model shows that information and the management of an information system are very crucial in the dialogue, organization, and consultation processes necessary to come up with a workable plan of action for community development. Information about the social dynamics of their communities is very crucial in analyzing situations and the possible solutions to them. More importantly, the participation of the community residents in all these processes is very vital to the building of self-reliant, self-sustaining communities.

In the village level, a committee oversees that the CIPS cycle of implementation is followed and that decisions at every level are communicated to and acted by the respective bodies (Polistico 1989). Research, planning, and project committees are organized to carry the respective functions in the village.

Emerging pattern of implementation and issues. Initial evaluation of the CIPS implementation in five areas showed that the system was able to guide the community groups in identifying the root causes of their problems and coming in up with creative solutions to them. Community-based organizations, through the assistance of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), came up with solutions to their problems such as lack of capital and basic services, i.e., as water, health, and food. Although initial results seemed to be quite promising, problems also surfaced. For example, in some areas the peace and order situation disrupted the CIPS cycle of implementation. In some communities, some powerful entities in the community managed to interrupt the progress of community organizing and conscientization.

It seems that the fundamental structures of inequity and poverty in the village limit the potentials of participatory planning and development. For how much can one plan, when one has limited access and control of resources?

Case Study No.3: The Local Resource Management (LRM) Project

The failure of most rural development programs to alleviate poverty in the countryside led the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1982 to experiment on the viability and cost-effectiveness of a people-centered approach to development. This program, known as the Local Resource Management Project, was designed to reorient local planning efforts towards confronting rural poverty through the participation of the poor by increasing their control and maximization of their resource bases. It was also an effort to reverse the planning process from the traditional top-down approach to an emphasis on bottom-up inputs in rural development planning. Conceived as a ten-year development project, this new bottom-up approach, called "poverty-group focused planning" is the heart of the LRM project.

Since 1982, LRM provided a package of technical, financial, and commodity assistance to the provinces of Albay and Catanduanes in Region V; Antique and Capiz in Region VI; and Southern Leyte, Leyte, and Eastern Samar in Region VIII. This program tested various approaches to provincial and municipal planning, local financial administration, and beneficiary participation in development projects.

Through the LRM, poverty-group focused planning attempted to address the problems and needs of communities which had not been effectively served by the traditional top-down planning approaches. It assumed that poverty groups had specific constraints and opportunities owing to difference in resource bases which traditional planning could not take into account. LRM focused its interventions on three major poverty groups: landless workers, sustenance fishermen, and upland farmers including coconut farmers. Altogether these three groups account for about two-thirds of the rural poor in the Philippines.

LRM inputs and interventions to beneficiary groups consisted of technical assistance and training in community organizing and in identifying, planning, implementing, and managing both short-term and long-term income-generating

projects (IGPs); and financial assistance to community-based and beneficiary-initiated projects.

The LRM project conceptualization and implementation reflects a tripartite relationship among the government organizations (GOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the community-based people's organizations (POs). Here, the GOs and NGOs serve as facilitators to the empowerment of a people-centered development anchored on a community-based resource management.

Emerging pattern of implementation. From 1983-87, LRM Phase I reached over 35,000 direct beneficiaries of subprojects like feeder roads and upland trails; small-scale agro-industrial and fishing projects such as livestock raising and meat processing, and deep-sea gill-net fishing; and community self-help projects such as community gardens and jet pump installation. Moreover, it also set-up 125 community organizations with over 3,000 members from several poverty groups who have identified and implemented over 78 income-generating projects such as deep-sea fishing, pre- and post-harvest facilities and services, agricultural produce and supply trading, and diversified agricultural production.

Responses of poverty groups to LRM intervention. The initial evaluation of the beneficiary groups and their ability to sustain their efforts to control and maximize their local resource bases yielded mixed results. It showed that different poverty groups could be stratified according to the following levels: presustenance, sustenance, and potentially entrepreneurial. Experiences in the field revealed that the presustenance and sustenance groups experienced difficulties in engaging and sustaining entrepreneurial activities. In some cases, they dipped into the association's funds because of their subsistence needs. Owing to their impoverished conditions, they also could not afford to sit in training sessions/seminars which were designed to help them manage and sustain their projects.

Organizing poverty groups so they can actively participate in the planning and implementation projects is not enough to sustain the development efforts. Other

factors such as the power relations in the community often reformulate the dynamics of implementation. The poor cannot be organized and be expected to go against those whom they had been dependent for a long time in the community. This was demonstrated by a fishermen's group in Borongan, Eastern Samar. After an NGO trained the group in community organizing and project management, the latter engaged in deep-sea fishing with financial assistance from the LRM project. The housewives of fishermen were to market the catch of their husbands so that they would realize most of the proceeds instead of going to the middlemen/fish traders. This plan was not realized because the wives did not have the capital base and market network that the fish trader have. More importantly, the fishermen felt it was not "proper" to take away the livelihood of the person whom they have always depended for emergencies.

The above problems were also compounded by the GOs which were not adequately prepared for the transformation of orientation in authority relations between the beneficiary groups and government bureaucratic entities and structures that the new partnership demanded. Although, NGOs obtained high scores in organizing the beneficiary groups, they needed to forge better working relationship with their GO partners.

Participatory Development and Participatory Research Methods

The above models of participatory development also utilized different participatory methodologies. In her monumental work on participatory development in the Philippines, Castillo (1983) did not attempt to distinguish between these two.

Research methods associated with top-down approaches to communication development and planning were oriented to the positivistic philosophy of control and social engineering. Knowledge about social realities were "objective, social facts" which can be used to control the process of manipulating the environment. The researcher, the "knower" and generator of knowledge was distant from his/her "study" or "target" population. This orientation gave emphasis to the parameters of

the study population, variables to be manipulated in the research process. It also assumed that knowledge was "randomly" distributed in the population.

In contrast, participatory, people-centered models of development put emphasis in the processes associated with planning, implementation and monitoring of development programs. Thus, it gives particular attention to the "beneficiaries" and "partners" of development and their participation in the process. It also recognizes that the market place is not equal. Those who control the power structures could have more access and control of resources. Thus, it adopts a positive bias for the disadvantaged sectors of society.

Discussion

In the above case studies, the overriding concern is to involve the people or the communities so that the program can contribute to sustainable development. These programs utilized strategies such as community organizing or mobilization, and identifying and implementing projects which help them have control over as well as maximize their resource bases.

The current participatory or "bottom-up" approaches to communication and development are reactions to the mainstream top-down models. These approaches are designed to enable the people at the community level to have an input in the formulation of appropriate development projects so as to improve their access and control of resources.

To what extent that these programs were able to effectively "involve" the people in the process and achieve its goals of sustainable development? Community organizing, aided by an information system set-up through participatory research methods, seem to have "empowered" some community groups to identify and implement relevant projects, but this did not seem to transform their life chances.

Conclusion and Implications

Although there is a lot of optimism among NGOs and POs of the potentials of participatory models, what is evident is the fundamental resistance of those who

have benefited from the existing structures. These emanate from within and outside of the community. For participatory approaches to flourish, it still needs to sharpen its strategies to erode the influence of these power structures.

There is also a growing conviction that the existing bureaucratic and institutional entities may not be able to perform the "catalyst" role, badly needed in today's development scene. Thus, the initiatives of non-governmental organizations and community-based groups is increasingly becoming crucial.

For the 1990s, there is a need to put communication strategies in the service of promoting a just, and sustainable social transformation where majority enjoy its fruits, not just a few political and economic elite. This means taking a pro-people bias in translating and communicating development plans from the national planning boards to the larger population. It also means widening the access and control of information systems used in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development programs.

It must also be recognized that the consequences of the problems of the 1990s such as the environmental crisis, increased debt-service burden, and increased inequities will affect both the rich and poor classes and nations.

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