THE COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION: TOWARDS A NEW DOMAIN IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION


ABSTRACT

CDC has ventured into exploring the development of community communication (comcom) as one of the domains of development communication. The paper analyzes how the elements of comcom have been operationalized and practiced in the various extension programs and projects of CDC through the years. It concluded by determining the essentials of community communication such as participatory approach, capacity building, empowerment, support of local institutions, and networking. Outcomes and impacts of the programs were identified as well, including the need for a clear comcom ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The three-fold function of instruction-research-extension is deeply embedded in the way the College of Development Communication (CDC) performs its activities. Concepts being taught are tested in the field as part of faculty’s action research or as students’ theses; their immediate practical outputs applied to the college’s extension planning and implementation; and general learnings are derived to form part of the body of knowledge of various courses taught to students. In addition to “action-reflection”, CDC makes it a point to engage in information/knowledge sharing among its partners and collaborators, thus expanding its operation paradigm to a cycle of action-reflection-sharing.
In 2011, CDC took a bold step in its curriculum development. It shifted from having four major areas of specialization in its BS Development Communication program to a generalist curriculum. The major areas of specialization in the old curriculum include community broadcasting, development journalism, educational communication, and science communication. The first two are media-centered, the third one focuses on process, while the last one is content-based.

Efforts to rationalize development communication (devcom) as reflected by its domains have since continued. With the recognition that media are mere tools and that the process where they are appropriated being more important, CDC ventures into exploring the development of community communication (comcom) as one of the domains of devcom. In order to fulfill this, a number of its extension projects and activities have been analyzed to determine how comcom is being designed, operationalized, and implemented as part of the overall project package, and find out what its impacts are.

The domain of comcom is an important springboard for CDC’s extension programs. It provides the underlying philosophy, ethics as well as methods and tools for undertaking the extension work with the partner communities and other stakeholders in development work. In turn, the extension activities serve as the testing ground for refining the theories and principles being espoused by the domain.

**OBJECTIVES**

In line with the main goal as reflected in the title, this paper aims to:

1. Discuss devcom as a discipline and the place of comcom in it;
2. Elaborate the various conceptualizations of comcom and the features that distinguish it from other devcom domains;
3. Analyze how the elements of comcom have been operationalized and practiced in the various extension programs and projects of CDC through the years;
4. Derive the essentials of comcom based on the experience of the extension programs and projects analyzed; and
5. Discuss the outcomes and impacts of comcom extension programs and projects.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Overview of Development Communication as a Discipline**

Since its first articulation by Nora C. Quebral in 1971, devcom, Los Baños style, has evolved and will continuously do so. Quebral has in fact re-defined devcom 40 years after as “the science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic, overall growth that fosters equity and the unfolding of individual potential.” In simpler terms, it is a process of assisting poor communities move to a state of growth or progress that puts premium on social inclusiveness and capacitation of individuals. The latter, we know, is best achieved by education, both formal and non-formal.

The devcom’s focus on poor communities and the marginalized calls for a special communication practice that will first and foremost provide information sources and communication resources readily accessible and highly relevant to the needs of this sector. It also requires partnering with other stakeholders in the community who have the mandate and resources to address poverty reduction. Definitely, the mainstream media is not designed to do this; national radio and TV stations all intend to cater to the information needs of the faceless general public. Hence, they focus on national news, current events, sports and political affairs of general interest to the public.
But those in specific areas such as those badly affected by El Nino, for example, need to know exactly how they will cope. They will be most interested in the technologies available that can adapt to such bad weather event, if there are any, and how these can be availed of. They will also be interested to know the specific steps to mitigate the negative impacts of this natural event and who can possibly assist them on these matters. In other words, they would want information and knowledge tailored fit to their needs as a group located in a particular area of the country. These gaps are just a few of what comcom can help fulfill.

Initially, the Los Baños school conceptualized devcom with three domains that are strongly media-based: audio-visual communication, print communication and broadcast communication. Through the years, the three domains were renamed to be more reflective of the development thrust of the devcom discipline, thus the birth of development journalism, educational communication, and development broadcasting. In 1994, the only non-media based domain, called science communication, was added as the fourth field of specialization in the undergraduate program. The college research and extension programs are carriers of what these core domains espouse.

No less than the devcom pioneer herself has said that today’s devcom is not the same as it was in the 1970s and will be different in the future (Quebral, 2012). Being a confluence of two processes—development and communication—the study and practice in these fields have driven the changes in devcom. Two characteristics remain the same, however: devcom as a branch of human communication and devcom’s bias towards the poor, powerless, and the disadvantaged in the countries of the South (Quebral, 2012).

**Conceptualizations of Community Communication**

Community and communication are both derived from the Latin word “communis”, which means “to make common.” People live in a community by virtue of the things they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess the things in common (Dewey as cited by Delli Carpini, 1998). Hence, communities cannot exist without communication; and the capacity of the community depends upon its capacity to communicate.

Comcom has long been a part of devcom literature. The term itself may not have been widespread in its use as the media-based domains took center stage in the devcom extension activities during the early years. All along, however, the prevailing thought is that development broadcasting and development journalism constitute comcom practice in the field of devcom extension.

The concept and practice of comcom started with one that distinguishes it as “two-way” or interactive but may also be mediated. Berrigan (1979) articulated it as a two-way communication between the communicator and the public through community media. Here, community media are adaptations of media for use by the community for whatever purpose it so decides (Berrigan, 1979).

The word “community” is central to the concept. Comcom focuses not just on any community but on communities with special needs and interests. These may include farming communities, migrant communities, indigenous communities, areas with high malnutrition or disease occurrence, and the likes. This means that the community being referred to is not a mere or loose grouping of people but one with its established history and memory (Berrigan,1979). It occupies defined spatial and political territory (as local leaders have roles to play in comcom), engaged in repeated social interactions (not alienated from one another), with shared values and interests, and is driven by a common desire to accomplish common goals (these last two bind their efforts together) (Berrigan, 1979).
As practiced in earlier years, comcom deals with communities that exhibit certain degree of deprivation. Usually, they are those that are isolated or less accessible, with poor access to service providers, low communication resources, and generally passive and fatalistic. Because of such special needs, Berrigan (1979) noted that they are the ones that need specialized communication approach called comcom.

In succeeding years, comcom evolved into a distinct field, the shape of which has depended largely on the perspectives taken by people and institutions who study and apply it on ground. From a process perspective, the then Institute of Development Communication views it as a process of social interaction in small groups using interpersonal and/or indigenous and small media and is highly participatory in nature (IDC,1993). Manyozo (2012) views it as one that refers to grassroots, participatory communication processes (stories, proverbs, orality), with a program of motivation and activation taking place within communities, with or without mediation.

From a political perspective and echoing its participatory nature, Maslog (1995) cited comcom as a form of grassroots communication of the people, by the people, and for the people. From a goal perspective, comcom aims to facilitate community problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, interest articulation, advocacy, and social mobilization (Ongkiko and Flor,1998). Zulberti (2003) added other goals: promoting collective action and cultural identity with the use of local or indigenous knowledge.

Informed by Freire’s critical pedagogy (1972), the bigger goal of comcom is empowerment and emancipation or the “liberation of man from restraints and limitations of ignorance and dependency.”

An effort was undertaken by Ilagan (2013) to develop the parameters of comcom based on the conceptions made earlier by the different authors cited above. She then used these parameters for studying the coffee farmers’ engagement in comcom in the context of their adaptation to climate variability. These consolidated parameters of comcom are as follows: interaction with others, involvement in small groups, use of small media, focus on community interests, participation in major activities, and definition of group goals or objectives.

In 2004, participation became the buzz word giving rise to the concept of participatory development communication or PDC. Besette (2004), who coined and advocated the term came up with a model and framework of how PDC can be undertaken by development and communication practitioners. Comcom became akin to PDC which is defined as “planned activity based on participatory processes and on the use of interpersonal communication to facilitate dialogue among different stakeholders around a common goal.”

In all the definitions cited, comcom has been differentiated from other media practice in terms of its bias towards the use of “community or small media.” Community media refers to community radio and community newspapers which are oftentimes based in the community they intend to serve. Unlike the mainstream media, the focus of their content is on local news and current events of high relevance to the members of the local community. So while DZMM would talk about the death of 44 soldiers in Mamasapano in Mindanao, a community radio like Radyo DZLB would talk about the impending death of coconut trees in the locality being affected by the scale insects that infested the crops; or of the lost carabao of Mang Pedro and how the poor animal may still be recovered through the help of the entire barangay.

The advent of new technologies today has broadened the definition of media in comcom. Today, community cable television (CCTV) and social media are legitimate additions to the list. They subsequently led to the broadening of the term “community” in the comcom concept. Whereas, community
has been defined by physical and geographical space before, today it is defined more by common interests and established or repeated social relationships. Hence, communities may also be virtual and scattered out in many places in the world.

**DISCUSSION**

**CDC Extension Programs and Projects in Comcom Over the Years**

**Framework for Extension Planning at CDC**

Fundamental to the formulation of any extension project in the College is the use of the P-process as a tool for planning (Figure 1). Used essentially for communication planning and adopted to extension planning, this framework requires the conduct of a baseline study (**step 1: inquire**), the results of which serve as basis for formulating the extension project design. Hence, any element in the project (i.e., intended stakeholders, objectives, key messages, media/channel) is rationalized and backed up by the needs or gaps identified in the baseline (**step 2: design strategy**). Based on the strategic design, specific extension materials are then conceptualized and developed. But before any mass reproduction of materials is done, pre-testing is carried out to insure that the materials are technically correct and socially acceptable (**step 3: create and test**). Then, this is followed by organizing the group or team that will be responsible for managing, implementing and monitoring the project (**step 4: mobilize and monitor**). To complete the cycle, an evaluation scheme is also developed and made part of the plan. The results then serve for refining the succeeding phases of the project (**step 5: evaluate and evolve**).

From the 1960s up to the present, CDC has implemented a number of programs and projects that very well reflect the elements, features, and process of comcom. The forerunners are: Radyo DZLB, Sandiwa and *Los Baños Times*. Through the years, these programs have evolved as they responded to new contexts, technologies and challenges, along with new knowledge and changes occurring in the devcom field itself.

**Community Educational Radio: Radyo DZLB**

Radyo DZLB is a community radio station owned by UPLB and managed by CDC. The radio management staff is composed of CDC’s faculty and research and extension personnel from the Department of Development Broadcasting and Telecommunications (DDBT). DZLB has established a network of partners from within and outside UPLB. It has four main objectives:

1. To disseminate developmental messages and address issues that concern communities primarily in Laguna and parts of Batangas, Cavite, Rizal and Quezon.
2. To serve as linker-facilitator in helping improve the quality of life of its intended stakeholders.
3. To act as an extension arm in popularizing science and technology (S&T) research results from various research institutions.
4. To serve as a training center for students and practitioners in broadcasting.

As a comcom extension facility of the College, Radyo DZLB emphasizes the medium being limited to a particular community: the populace of Laguna and its surrounding communities in Batangas, Rizal, and Cavite. It is not meant to be a mainstream radio station for the National Capital Region nor Metro Manila.

In terms of content (or messages), DZLB lives by its tagline “Tinig ng Kaunlaran” (voice of development). Hence, it deliberately broadcasts programs on agriculture, agrarian reform, environment, forestry, cooperatives development, health and nutrition, family and child development, and culture and the arts, among others. It capitalizes on technologies developed by UP Los Baños for its main menu of messages.

Abiding by the principle of being participatory, DZLB forges partnerships with academe, government agencies, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), private organizations and the community/people’s organizations. Community participation threads through the planning, production, and broadcasts of its programs, to ascertain that these are needs-based. The listeners are given space to be part of program planning and production.

DZLB has pioneered the School-on-the-Air (SOA) program, a form of capacity building for listeners with common learning needs. This is one function that no mainstream media can do. A SOA is a specially designed radio program where lessons are well-planned and presented systematically in a progressive manner to achieve desired results under a teaching-learning situation. Enrollees or students listen to educational broadcasts in their own home or in groups. In addition to the program host, the SOA has a radio teacher who is an expert or subject matter specialist. The SOA makes use of non-formal education techniques and processes to achieve behavioral objectives of learning. It is cheap, fast, easy and practical as a type of non-formal learning (Librero, 1985).

DZLB employs SOA as a major strategy to educate people living in its coverage areas. Its SOA format and programs have served as a model for other broadcasting stations in the country, most notably those conducted by the Department of Agriculture information officers and development communication specialists in other state colleges and universities (Handout on Radyo DZLB, AngTinig ng Kaunlaran, 1116 kHz AM).

It aired its first SOA in 1967, discussing dairy farming. This can be considered as the first distance education project of the University of the Philippines. Since then, DZLB has aired more than a hundred SOA programs that equip its learners with knowledge and skills on socioeconomic activities intended to help develop their human potential and attain a better quality of life. The lessons cover rice production, environmental protection, agrarian reform, solid waste management, cooperatives, nutrition, health, vegetable gardening, starting small food businesses, fruit processing, meat processing, microfinance, and establishing and maintaining efficient cooperatives, consumer education, rice-shrimp culture, among 100 other developmental and livelihood topics.

SOA topics are selected based on audience needs, economic significance, and availability of resources. The SOA programs are conducted in collaboration with partners from government, academe, and NGOs. More than 15,000 farmers, homemakers, and rural youths have graduated from DZLB’s SOA (Handout on Radyo DZLB, AngTinig ng Kaunlaran, 1116 kHz AM).

To a large degree, DZLB puts into practice the comcom mechanisms for being two-way and participatory. The SOA’s success hinges on its assessment of the audience needs, close
collaboration with its partner institutions, employment of effective feedback mechanisms, and availability of logistical support.

Research on DZLB's SOAs show mixed results. In general, knowledge gain among the majority of the learners has been noted even several years after their SOA participation. Many of the learners also share what they have learned with others. Some are able to apply the knowledge and skills gained from the SOAs. As a comcom and an extension medium, DZLB SOA has also its limitations such as non-application by some listeners of the knowledge and skills gained. This may be attributed to unavailability of technology inputs, low usefulness of the technology because it is highly technical in nature (e.g., biotechnology), low retention of information (which, in turn, was affected by the participants’ low educational status), lack of capital, and lack of post SOA monitoring and oversight from concerned government agencies (Tabing, 1970; Angeles, 1977; Nuñez, 1983; Lavadia, 2003; Guerra, 2009; Marin, 2009; Narajos, 2011).

**Community Newspapers: Sandiwa and Los Baños Times**

Working in tandem then with DZLB during the early years was a community newspaper for Laguna called Sandiwa (roughly translated as “one spirit”). It had its counterpart 30-minute radio program with the same title that was aired regularly at DZLB. In the 1970s, it was published every other two months, with 500 copies in circulation as an 8-page tabloid-sized newspaper. Its correspondents and contributors came from different line agencies at the provincial level, e.g. Bureau of Animal Industry, Bureau of Agricultural Extension, Rural Health Unit, National Irrigation Authority, among others.

With rural folk, particularly farming and fishing households, as intended readers, Sandiwa regularly published columns on farming, livestock raising, fishing, homemaking, health and sanitation, and crossword puzzles, aside from community news (Torres, 1980). As a comcom medium, it was featuring not the political figures, nor the showbiz personalities but the unknown common barangay folk or local government agencies who were quietly contributing to the progress of their communities. Hence, it published stories of outstanding farmers or mothers and women in Laguna showing their photos prominently. As a result, local folk developed a sense of pride in what they were doing and this served as a challenge to others to do the same.

Its philosophy was "to help in the best possible way in improving the quality of life of people living in the rural areas, by bringing them important and latest information about the different aspects of life, particularly those which deal with agriculture and other related endeavors” (Torres, 1980). True to its philosophy, Sandiwa’s subscribers perceived the newspaper as a credible source of farming information and as a development-oriented community newspaper (Torres, 1980).

For some reasons, Sandiwa went out of circulation. In 1983, another community newspaper called Los Baños Times was put out by CDC. This time, the newspaper was supposed to be a laboratory output of students taking up courses in Management and Production of Community Newspaper. With the revision of the BS Devcom curriculum, the work has been assumed by the students taking up the course in Multi-media Materials Production and Management. Managed by the Department of Development Journalism (DDJ). The Los Baños Times has since limited its coverage to the town of Los Banos only.

From 1983 to 2011, the most frequent development news stories in Los Baños Times in terms of frequency and space allocation were about education, ecology environment, and local politics (Gruta, 2012). This is still in keeping with its nature as a comcom medium. The coverage of Los Baños Times has broadened from agriculture-related topics to other development concerns to cater to the changing needs and interests of its readers. Moreover, aside from content, Los Baños Times has evolved in format and approach, using various platforms as new information and

In 2014, DDJ started an action research to establish *Los Baños Times* as a collaborative community news platform. Related to this, it began to publish *Los Baños Times Libre* in March 2014. CDC’s vision is for the various stakeholders in Los Baños and nearby communities to become actively involved as collaborators in planning, producing, and managing *Los Baños Times*, an essential for it to be rightly called a comcom medium.

Currently, Department of Development Journalism faculty and staff are part of the editorial board along with 19 collaborators, consisting of 10 local government agencies, 3 barangays, 5 civil society organizations, and a school. These partners participate in editorial meetings and are assigned stories to write. The more active participants are those from civil society organizations. Several stories from collaborators have been published already. Their names appear in both the byline and the editorial board. According to Oepen (1990 as cited by Opubor, 1999), participation of community members in the planning and production of content for a community media is one feature of comcom. In this way, community members become the storytellers and, in the process, “regain one’s own voice” (Rodriguez, 2001).

In establishing collaboration between *Los Baños Times* and selected local government agencies, barangays, schools, and civil society organizations, efforts were made to hold dialogues with concerned community leaders and members. One of these dialogues was about the action research’s nature, requirements, outcomes, and limitations, as well as the potential collaborators’ expectations and limitations. This was done to foster understanding. As Freire put it, dialogue does not only open the lines of communication but implies respect, with people seeing each other as equals (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006).

With today’s range of development issues and concerns and a more heterogeneous readership, *Los Baños Times* has broadened its scope to cover relevant and important development issues in the community, especially on food security and nutrition, natural resources and environment, education, health and well-being, and entrepreneurship. It promotes local cultural practices. It tells the stories of ordinary men, women, and children vis-à-vis these development issues and concerns from their own perspective. This orientation is in line with the recommendations of UNESCOs MacBride Report and similar calls for more diversified information sources, specifically favoring local and community-based sources (Rodriguez, 2001).

**Community Cable Television: Dito sa Laguna**

With the opportunity provided by the presence of the Community Cable Vision Corporation (CCVC) in Los Baños, Laguna, CDC ventured into using community cable television (CCTV) as one of the media for its extension activities. A number of its faculty, REPS and radio technicians underwent training on TV production conducted by invited experts from the Radio Netherlands Training Center (RNTC). From community radio and newspaper, CDC expanded its comcom media to CCTV. Again, the medium is “small” in terms of its coverage.

Based on a contract signed with CCVC, CDC produces the community television programs in cooperation with its partners from the academe, local government units (LGUs), NGOs, and people’s organizations. Meanwhile, CCVC airs the 30-minute program once a week, every Saturday.

Studies have already demonstrated how community television can make people aware of technologies or innovations and how it can motivate behavior change. As part of the strategic planning and production process for a community television program, the
CDC staff conducted a baseline study among selected towns in Laguna on stakeholder needs, preferences, and participation in local television programming. The results were used as guide to develop the content, format, and approach for a community cable TV program. The CDC acquired TV production equipment from donations and funds provided by the University. It converted the DZLB Drama Studio into a modest TV production studio. Location shootings were carried out, too.

In 2014, Dito sa Laguna (DSL), the first CCTV production ever of CDC, was finally aired on CCVC’s Channel 8. As implied in its program title, DSL caters primarily to communities in Laguna. Its program content features the aspirations, information needs, key issues and solutions as well as accomplishments of the Lagunenses. Its objectives are to: 1) utilize cable TV as medium for people’s development through participatory communication, interaction, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration; 2) reach out to communities by providing them relevant information, education, and public service; 3) serve as social laboratory for students to apply development communication theories and principles; and 4) serve as vehicle to support UPLB’s research and extension activities.

DDBT coordinates program production. Its faculty and research and extension professionals (REPS), along with other CDC staff, serve as program planners, writers, directors, producers, and hosts. Students also participate through scriptwriting, reportage, and production of video clips as part of their undergraduate course practicum. Former DZLB partners assist in planning and coordinating episodes of the program. DSL partners contribute to content development or act as program guests and experts.

From March 2014 to February 2015, DSL has broadcast a total of 68 episodes across six programming seasons in collaboration with CDC students and various partners. The topics include agriculture, climate change, disaster risk management, forest and environment, food, health and nutrition, microfinance, financial literacy, labor and employment, citizen safety, persons with disabilities, arts and culture, tourism, local festivals and other events, and ethics in the workplace.

An initial evaluation of the DSL program by CDC staff is ongoing. Students are also encouraged to undertake research on DSL program assessment. The results will be used for re-planning, upscaling, and improving the program. A field evaluation among its viewers is also in the pipeline.

Some key factors have been observed to contribute to DSL program success. These include the commitment of its staff, students, and partners; spirit of volunteerism; stakeholder participation; practice of knowledge sharing; continuous training on community TV production; cooperation and collaboration among partners; the value placed on public service; and recognition of community television’s role in development.

**Educational Communication Services: Adopt-a-School**

In addition to Radyo DZLB, Los Baños Times, and DSL, the College has been extending educational and development services via an “Adopt a School” program, starting in 2008. This initiative is being spearheaded by the Department of Educational Communication (DEC) and is a response to the call for partnership by the Department of Education (DepEd). The first adopted school was the Los Baños Central Elementary School. Later, in 2012, CDC adopted a new school: Bernaldo N. Calara Elementary School, also in Los Baños.

Edcom as a domain of devcom is defined as “a complex, integrated process involving people, procedures, ideas, devices and organization for analyzing problems and devising, implementing, evaluating and managing solutions to those problems in all aspects of human learning (AECT, 1977 as cited in Cadiz, 2003). Hence, its extension activity focuses on enhancement of learning through educational technologies.
As an extension and an instruction activity, the Adopt-a-School program has for its intended community the school stakeholders such as the teachers and students. The goal is to enhance formal learning delivery systems through the following interventions: development and implementation of learning system designs (LSD) and learning materials; conduct of tutorial classes, seminars, and training workshops; and even feeding programs. The faculty together with the students of courses in Fundamentals of Educational Communication and Technology, Production of Educational Media Materials, Media-Based Learning Systems, and National Service Training Program (NSTP) – Literacy Training Service (LTS) and Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS) undertake such activities.

Invariably, the activities entail consultation meetings between CDC and the school principals and teachers as well as audience and learning needs analysis involving the students and their parents. These integral processes help the proponents of the activities to design and implement appropriate interventions for learning (UPLB-CDC, 2009, 2011, 2012).

**Regional Network: Isang Bagsak Southeast Asia**

Isang Bagsak South East Asia (IBSEA) was a research-cum-extension project funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and coordinated by CDC from 2003 to 2005. It covered capacity building and networking in participatory development communication or PDC. It aimed to capacitate researchers and practitioners of natural resource management (NRM) in the use of PDC and to strengthen their respective community-based action research. In this project, PDC is referred to as “a new form of dialogue” that “aims to engage local communities in the process of charting their own future” (Kavanagh, Bessette, & McKay, 2006).

The program marked the expansion of CDC extension communities from local to regional level. It also led the College to working with other stakeholders in the community whose mandates and roles have important bearing on meeting the needs of the poor. So it became inevitable that as part of its comcom practice, CDC has to communicate and work with LGUs, government service agencies, NGOs and other groups in the civil society sector with resources, expertise, financial, other in-kind assistance that can very well be tapped for the ultimate benefit of the poor. They are the intermediaries without which the poor could hardly transition from poverty to a state of dynamic growth.

As a distance and experiential learning program that emphasized the PDC principles of learning by experience and team/community learning, IBSEA involved a series of undertakings that included introductory workshop, team discussion meetings, regional electronic forum, regional mid-term training workshop, evaluation and planning workshop, and a monograph writeshop. Program participants were teams of researchers and development practitioners from civil society organizations, government agencies, and academic institutions in Cambodia, Philippines, and Vietnam.

As an exemplar of comcom and that of PDC, IBSEA puts premium on learner participation and ownership of the learning process. As a result, the project helped participants to achieve NRM and people-centered development outcomes. The participatory nature of the appraisal and planning, as well as perseverance in dialogues and innovative communication approaches, helped raise community awareness about existing problems. Such awareness, in turn, enabled community members to propose their own solutions. Evidence-based communication helped the team to involve local government, and bottom-up communication provided researchers an opportunity to actively engage with their respective communities and later secure institutional commitment (Cadiz, 2008).

But as in any project, it is not without its share of challenges and difficulties. Among these were the language barrier, discomfort with the use of inductive learning, and reliance of the
distance learning modality on information and communication technologies (ICTs) including connectivity that sometimes fail.

In addressing various communication needs—those pertaining to information exchange, knowledge acquisition, skills development, problem solving ability, and consensus building, among many others, the importance of consulting with stakeholders in the development of NRM and communication interventions became evident (Bessette, 2003). Thus, one important realization in this project is that people are capable of active participation during planning, monitoring, and evaluation, hence they should be presented with “a basket of options” instead of pre-selected solutions so they can better deal with new information, methods, and/or technologies. In this context, communication was not limited to the dissemination or media-related activities; it encompassed strategic use of methods and materials to elicit participation in the ongoing development initiative, support learning, and build consensus.

In communicating with community members and policymakers, communication tools that proved useful for the participants included mass, traditional, and community media, as well as various forms of interpersonal communication. The communication tools supported two-way and participatory communication and facilitated information dissemination and collaborative learning. These tools were used to validate local/indigenous knowledge, sustain discussion, reach people beyond the immediate locale, facilitate inter-group communication, and record and evaluate activities.

Adaptive Learning and Linkages in Community-Based Natural Resource Management

Change is occurring at all levels of society and at all fronts. As such, communities need to know how to adapt to their changing contexts, especially in terms of sustainably managing the environment. This capacity, according to Cadiz and Dagli (2010), is called adaptive learning. "Adaptive learning is based on the premise that learning from experience empowers participants to respond more effectively to new uncertainties, enabling them to change old ways of doing things and allowing them to make better decisions in managing the natural resource base” (Cadiz and Dagli, 2010).

In February 2006, CDC began a two-year collaboration with IDRC to implement an adaptive learning project called ALL in CBNRM (Adaptive Learning and Linkages in Community-Based Natural Resource Management). The research-cum-extension project articulated further the concepts and learning from IsangBagsak, a previous program on participatory development communication (UPLB-CDC, 2006).

ALL in CBNRM used participatory development approaches. As a comcom, it was designed for the community of CBNRM researchers and practitioners in Southeast Asia, working in different ecosystems such as forestry, coastal, and wetland (UPLB-CDC, 2008). Combining interpersonal and online learning strategies, the project aims to create a community of participatory-oriented NRM researchers and practitioners, a wider knowledge base and network, and to develop synergies among the community or network members. It involved the participation of learning groups from the academe, NGOs, and government agencies engaged in CBNRM from six countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (UPLB-CDC, 2006) and regional (Southeast Asian) organizations (UPLB-CDC, 2008). Here, the community covered a regional level but was more virtual, mediated by an online medium, the Internet.

The project presupposed the centrality of communication in its processes. Further, it adopted the “perspectives and methods of participatory research and development, including social and gender analysis, adaptive and social learning, participatory rural appraisal, participatory action research, and participatory monitoring and evaluation” (Cadiz & Dagli, 2010).
Specifically, the project intended to develop understanding and know-how among its learning groups regarding the following: (1) roles and concepts of CBNRM and adaptive learning; (2) arriving at a collective understanding of local community and CBNRM context; (3) enhancing the community’s capacity to set goals and solve problems; (4) understanding the stakeholders’ relationships in a CBNRM setting; (5) developing and implementing participatory communication strategy; (6) enhancing processes and tools for collective action; (7) developing partnerships; (8) participatory documentation and participatory M&E; (9) facilitating participatory learning processes for production, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge; and (10) participatory processes for policy change (UPLB-CDC, 2008).

According to the project’s terminal report, ALL in CBNRM “has touched and effected change” among 19 learning groups, including project teams, organizations, and networks in Southeast Asia. The changes observed vary considerably – from an appreciation of the role of communication in field-based NRM research and development to more systematic communication initiatives in projects and an integration of the PDC process in the research and development cycle of NRM field projects” (Cadiz & Dagli, 2010).

Learning among the participants took place through face-to-face discussions, regional workshops, field mentoring and technical backstopping, and regional online discussions.

Furthermore, five contextual factors of learning were identified: institutional commitment; local and regional networks; knowledge interfaces; and establishment of personal relations among learners and facilitators.

An evaluation of ALL in CBNRM shows that the program has accomplished several social and economic outcomes among its participants (UPLB-CDC, 2008). These include strengthened collaborations, trust-building, women's participation and development, socio-cultural development, and strengthened community-based organizations, livelihood improvement, improved agriculture value chain, and community participation in agricultural technology development.

The project also contributed to improvements in policy and governance, as well as to the ecological conservation of the NRM sites where the learning groups worked on. Moreover, it enabled its implementers and learning groups to develop and produce various knowledge and learning resources that contribute to mainstreaming adaptive learning and networking in CBNRM at the local, national, and regional levels” (UPLB-CDC, 2008).

**Strengthening Local Nutrition and Education Programs through Communication Initiatives**

Implemented from January 2014 up to the present, CDC’s project with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) aims to strengthen local nutrition and education programs in three pilot sites: Aroroy and Milagros towns in Masbate and Bobon town in Northern Samar. This was done through communication initiatives for behavior change and community empowerment. The three municipalities were among the UNICEF’s list of LGUs needing technical assistance in implementing anti-poverty programs. Moreover, these three LGUs volunteered to participate in the project.

Consistent with the PDC model of Bessette (2006), the project formed local core groups in each LGU to actively co-manage the program. They participated in capability-building activities on strategic communication planning and communication materials development. Each core group consisted of focal persons from the municipal health, nutrition, social welfare, agriculture, planning and development, and education offices. The barangay (village) captains of the pilot areas were also oriented to the project and invited to participate. Participation, in this context, meant involvement in identifying development problems, looking for solutions, and deciding on the method of implementing the said solutions (Bessette, 2004).
The central issues for which communication intervention was deemed as necessary were prevalent malnutrition and low preschool enrollment and attendance. During problem analysis, the core group members brainstormed to identify the root causes of problems in their community. Later, they were able to connect problems and causes that were initially viewed as disparate, thereby gaining a better appreciation of the vicious cycle of poverty. Among the reasons cited as directly impacting on malnutrition and lack of school attendance were insufficiency of resources and people’s “mindset” with regard to hygiene and sanitation. These two barriers prevent them from directly addressing the main issues. Results of the problem and audience analyses were validated through focus group discussions (FGDs) hosted by the pilot barangays and participated in by caregivers of infants and young children, primarily parents and grandparents.

Based on the findings from the initial activities, each core group formulated—with guidance from the CDC team—strategic communication plans that target a variety of audiences, including policymakers and community organizations. They were also capacitated in terms of materials development through seminar-workshops.

In their respective plans, the core groups identified approaches deemed as suitable to their needs and can give optimum results. The strategies identified included the following: (1) tapping existing local mass media, such as an LGU-owned radio station in Aroroy, to deliver public service announcements and hold school-on-the-air (SOA) programs to reach people even in far-flung areas who need information about proper hygiene, sanitation, and nutrition; (2) involving a local youth theater group in Milagros in the information campaign toward good health and nutrition; (3) using learning materials such as educational board games, comics, videos); and (4) mobilizing the community to improve pre-school education in Bobon. These strategies supplemented the conventional practice of using group media tools (e.g., flipcharts and posters) and community assemblies for information dissemination.

In consultation with local chief executives and spearheaded by planning and development officers, communication activities were integrated into existing social programs of the government to ensure sustainability. Among such regular programs are family development sessions under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, nutrition month activities, and school building improvement.

Achievements so far include expansion of the enhanced nutrition-related communication activities from selected pilot areas to all barangays in Aroroy, convening of the inactive local nutrition council of Milagros, appointment of a day care worker to serve as pre-school teacher in Barangay Arellano, Bobon, and increase in the LGU budgetary allocation for nutrition activities.

Among the changes brought on by this project to the three municipalities, the most significant has been the recognition of the LGUs that the work for children’s nutrition is manifold and requires teamwork and resilience as well as creativity. The LGUs and their respective core groups have indicated their resolve to work together toward achieving their indicators. As articulated by a nutrition action officer during the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) workshop, not only have the core group members been capacitated with regard to communication planning and materials development, they have also realized two important lessons: (1) how nutrition and education are affected by and, at the same time, can help solve poverty-related community problems; and (2) working together to address these problems.

Through their experience with the project, the LGUs have learned to appreciate the use of strategic and evidence-based communication initiatives in setting clear indicators with which to measure the success of their interventions.
Rural Communication Services through Community Rural Radio (RCS-CRR) in Bangladesh

Rural communication services (RCS) refers to the provision of need-based, interactive, ICT-enabled, and participatory communication processes to satisfy the demand for knowledge and information of rural population (FAO, 2014). RCS integrates the use of community media and processes to strengthen linkages among research and extension services, local institutions, NGOs, academe, media, the private sector, and farmers. It aims to improve access of rural people to agricultural information and advisory services and enhance communication process for knowledge sharing and lesson learning between and among different stakeholders in the agricultural production system (Torres, 2011).

The government of Bangladesh (GoB) expressed its need to improve its agriculture extension delivery and advisory services. It recognized the gap between its institutional capacity and human resources to implement communication services that meet the challenges of the country’s agriculture sector particularly climate variability and change, food security, and natural resource management. In response to the GoB’s request, FAO funded the Technical Cooperation Program entitled “Enhancing Rural Communication Services for Agricultural Development through Community Rural Radio” to the Agriculture Information Service (AIS) of the Ministry of Agriculture. Under the project, community rural radio (CRR) is the core medium for reaching out to farmers, women, youth, children, and indigenous people in rural communities. CRR also serves as the central hub for various communication and advisory services.

The project aimed to strengthen the capacity of the Bangladesh Agricultural Information Services (AIS) to plan and implement communication for development (ComDev) strategies and plans, and to institutionalize effective rural communication services. The project was implemented from 2011 to 2013 over a 23-month period (Project Terminal Statement, 2013).

Throughout the project duration, CDC provided technical assistance and advice to the RCS-CRR project in terms of training on strategic communication planning, installation of a community rural radio inAmtali, Barguna District, establishment of the RCS unit in the AIS-MoA, preparation of a communication campaign on salt-tolerant rice variety with CRR as core medium, project evaluation, and sustainability.

From CDC’s experiences with the RCS project, four stages of institutionalization of rural communication services (RCS) for agricultural development were identified: 1) preparatory stage; 2) pilot testing stage; 3) planning for sustainability stage; and 4) full implementation stage (Tirol, 2014).

The preparatory stage focused on getting ready and gaining support for RCS among various stakeholders. Under this stage, communication activities included 1) national institutional mapping; 2) RCS feasibility study; and 3) national planning workshop for RCS. The national institutional mapping yielded a profile of organizations that could be potential RCS partners. The feasibility study enriched the viability of establishing RCS. The national planning workshop initiated the series of capacity building programs for stakeholders. It also provided a venue for orientation about RCS and its activities.

The pilot testing phase involved a field application of an RCS project as a concrete and tangible example of a communication service. In collaboration with the FAO-funded Emergency Cyclone Recovery and Restoration Program (ECRRP), an information and communication plan for saline tolerant rice variety (STRV) was carried out in the Amtali village, south of Dhaka, Bangladesh. During the pilot testing phase, communication activities included: 1) formation of the RCS core group and operational guidelines; 2) establishment of Rural Communications Unit (RCU) to house RCS at the Agriculture Information Service (AIS) of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); 3) planning the mechanisms for linkage with local RCS and other institutions; 4) identification of rural communication services; and 5) field pilot testing of RCS in a development project.
The planning for sustainability stage was concerned with challenges on how to make RCS survive, gain stability, and achieve permanent institutional status. Two communication activities were the workshops on sustainability mechanisms and the advocacy seminar.

Full institutionalization was the last stage. At this stage, RCS should have become an organic, integral part of an institution. Furthermore, it would have officially become the national communication strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture. However, in this study, full institutionalization was not reached due to limited operational life span of the project. Project staff meetings and meetings with key officials regarding the institutionalization of RCS were held during this stage. Through these meetings, letters, documents, and procedures for institutionalization of RCS for agricultural development were prepared (Tirol, 2014).

The RCS-CRR project generated the following key outcomes: 1) improved institutional and local capacities in the design and implementation of communication strategies and plans on priority issues such as food security and climate change adaptation; 2) initial establishment of RCS-CRR to serve agricultural priorities and to strengthen linkages among agricultural extension, research institutions, information services, NGOs, and farmers; 3) strategic communication plan on management of saline-tolerant rice variety based on the use of CRR; and 4) lessons learned through monitoring of results; and 5) recommendations for upscaling and sustainability of RCS-CRR services and activities.

The institutionalization process for RCS-CRR at the national and local levels encountered both enabling factors and constraints. The former included openness of AIS to shift from top-down to bottom-up approach; understanding and appreciation of key ministry and government officials of the systematic process involved in RCS; and willingness of the government to maintain the infrastructure. Limitations were institutional culture and political nature of the institutions involved.

A UPLB-CDC graduate student assessed how RCS facilitated the delivery and adoption of the saline-tolerant rice variety (STRV) among farmers in Amtali, Barguna, Bangladesh (Hassan, 2015). Data were collected using survey, focus group discussion, and social network analysis. Results indicated that training was the most sought rural communication service. Government extension service was the most trusted RCS provider followed by NGOs. Government was also the most influential information source. Information received on STRV was useful and shared with fellow farmers. The most used channels were face-to-face and mobile phone with FM radio. Farmers partially adopted the recommended STRV practices because they lacked financial capital. Group meetings were positively associated with extent of adoption as they strengthened peer affirmation and action. NGOs as service providers were also associated with extent of STRV adoption since they provided technical and material inputs to farmers. Farmers experienced problems in the adoption of STRV which include lack of capital, small farm size, unavailability of farm inputs, and lack of credit facilities (Hassan, 2015).

Information Sharing and Learning in Agriculture: The CCComdev Global Platform

In 2010, CDC’s extension programs took on a regional and eventually global level. In partnership with FAO of the United Nations, it was tasked to host and manage the CCComdev global platform. This is an internet-based medium for capacity building and collaboration among development workers, academicians, media practitioners, and farmer organizations engaged in communication for rural development. It was officially launched as the official platform for information and knowledge sharing among those engaged in communication for development all over the world during the 13th UN Roundtable on Communication for Development held in September 2014.

The project has been extended to December 2015. Three major outputs have been generated by the project so far: (1) mapping of global learning needs and training opportunities in Comdev,
(2) production of the Communication for Rural Development Sourcebook, and (3) establishment and operation of CCComdev global platform and CCComdevAsia regional platform. As part of capacity building, the sourcebook serves as a field-oriented learning resource and reference material for training workers in rural development institutions, farmer organizations, staff of FAO and its decentralized offices and other partners and practitioners working in the rural sector. The platforms, on the other hand, take advantage of the ICT's potential by serving as the hub for knowledge sharing and learning on Comdev and rural communication services.

The steps taken in setting up CCComdev entailed a conscious process of abiding with the principles of being demand-driven, socially inclusive, and participatory. This web portal features a world map of training opportunities in rural communication, library of learning resources, news, gallery of multimedia materials, links to regional platforms (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), social media and online community, and a policy monitor.

A recent activity in the portal involved the conduct of regional virtual consultations on the contribution of rural communication, community media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) to family farming; main trends, challenges and priorities for rural communication services; and a common agenda to promote and enhance collaboration in communication for rural development at the regional and global level. Participants included development professionals, communication and community media practitioners, civil society organizations, rural development agencies, government representatives, scholars and representatives from the private sector. A number of resource persons, academicians, and media practitioners also participated in the consultations. Results have been compiled into a compendium that could help guide policy and program direction for family farming (Torres & Dagli, 2014). Key results were also presented during the 2014 international Forum on Communication for Development, Community Media and ICTs (FCCM) for family farming in Rome, Italy. These served as basis for formulating a program of action for advancing family farming in the succeeding years.

As a mediated platform automatically linked with the social media (facebook, twitter) CCComdev faces a number of challenges in facilitating information and knowledge exchange between and among its intended participants. These are: locating and identifying relevant content; mining voluminous knowledge sources; leveling off on terms and definitions; motivating and sustaining participants’ interest; maintaining a fresh look; overcoming information overload and fatigue; linking with social media; regularity of access to the Internet; and reliability of connectivity (Torres, 2014). Despite these challenges, the prospect of bringing together the stakeholders to a common platform where experience informs learning and vice versa remains very encouraging.

**Rural Radio Initiatives - Coastal Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project in Bangladesh**

This is the most recent regional extension project being conducted by CDC with Bangladesh government. It is tied up to the Coastal Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project (CCRIP) of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives and focuses mainly in capacitating rural radio staff in communication planning, implementation, and management. Funded jointly by the Government of Bangladesh, IFAD, ADB and KfW, the project aims to address acute poverty and climatic vulnerability in coastal districts.

The use of community or rural radio is foreseen to enhance access to relevant information for farmers and small producers (e.g. market days, commodity prices, weather forecast, extension of crop, fish and livestock production as well as cultural and
social issues). The current project addresses the need for a Communication for Development (Comdev) Plan in support of resilient livelihoods, using primarily rural radio as the core medium.

CDC provides technical assistance to the Rural Radio Initiatives (RRI) of CCRIP using Communication for Development (Comdev) process. Comdev is a participatory communication approach that makes use of community media such as rural radio interfaced with ICTs to facilitate access to information and knowledge sharing among rural stakeholders. It allows people to make informed decisions and promotes their active engagement in local development. CDC conducts a series of trainings on strategic communication planning among radio personnel of four selected rural radios in the southern region of Bangladesh.

Once the strategic communication plans, with rural radio as the locomotive medium, are completed, the project is expected to yield the following outcomes:

- Communities are informed and actively engaged in climate-resilient innovation and livelihood adaptation through rural radio along with strategic local communication plans;
- Improved communication and radio services for resilient livelihoods;
- Local stakeholders informed about project activities and related issues; and
- Communities engaged in climate-resilient innovation and livelihood adaptation.

As of this writing, 3 out of the 8 missions envisioned for the project have already been undertaken by CDC. The rural radio staff members are now at the stage of completing their strategic communication plan. The project started in April 2015 and will be completed by April 2016.

CONCLUSIONS

Essentials of Community Communication

Aside from the consolidated parameters of comcom presented earlier, CDC’s experiences from the above extension programs and projects highlight several essentials of comcom - a new domain of devcom that CDC would like to put forward.

Foremost of these is the participatory approach. While the concept of participation is integral in devcom and is a by-word in sustainable development, it is the bedrock of comcom. It informs all its processes, methods, tools, and outputs.

Capacity building is another cornerstone as well as running thread in community communication. There is always a new knowledge to gain, a perspective to widen, a skill to learn, a relation to strengthen, especially in the context of working together and for the greater good.

Community communication engenders empowerment, because on this essential rests the ability and even the courage of a community to truly participate in development endeavors, to make informed decisions, and to initiate community action.

In CDC’s experience, community communication endeavors were able to generate successes when they have the support of local institutions, particularly of the LGU. Such support is important for sustainability. Concerned sectors in the community could look to institutions for help and guidance, even encouragement and legitimacy.

Related to the above is networking. Often, resources – human and otherwise – cannot be fully provided by the community members themselves. In many cases, they would have to look outside themselves for such resources and even for fresh perspectives. Hence, the need to establish and strengthen networks.
Capping all the above is the need for clear comcom ethics. Being concerned highly with social inclusiveness and equity, certain ethics need to be observed by development and communication professionals in traversing the domain.

It is posited that altogether, the above essentials make comcom an effective approach and process toward that much-desired path and goal of sustainable development.

Outcomes and Impacts

Almost all of the CDC extension programs and projects have been subjected to post evaluations, except for a few which are relatively new transformations of old projects such as the *Los Baños Times Libre* and *Dito sa Laguna*. For those which have been evaluated such as the Radyo DZLB, Sandiwa, Isang Bagsak, ALL in CBNRM, CCComdev, RCS –CRR, adopt-a-school, the following outcomes and impacts have been reported.

1. **Knowledge and capacities of stakeholders were enhanced.**

Collaboration and partnerships strengthened. CDC extension projects are always anchored on partnership with other stakeholders in the community such as the LGUs, line agencies at the local level, schools, research institutions, NGOs, people's organizations and organized groups, among others. At the global level, CDC has been a constant work partner of FAO, UNICEF and other academe with devcom programs. Thus, over the years, work partnerships with these organizations and sectors have been strengthened.

Knowledge sharing in the community broadened. With more stakeholders getting involved and through the use of various media (radio, cable TV, local newspaper, social media), sharing of knowledge on particular topics such as nutrition and issues of the day has been broadened. This is deemed important for sound decision-making among those affected.

Women’s participation in development upgraded. Involvement of women has also been deliberately pursued in a number of projects such as the DZLB school-on-the-air, leading to more women getting involved in the planning, actual broadcast, production of materials, and evaluation of extension projects.

Communication initiatives systematized. Majority of the extension projects involved capacity building of stakeholders in strategic communication planning to support the extension activities. Hence, communication activities are done not on an ad hoc basis but in a more systematized manner following certain principles.

Active participation in planning, monitoring and other extension activities. Whereas before, stakeholders of CDC extension projects were mere recipients of local news and information, now they are active participants of the various extension projects. From planning, to implementation and evaluation, they contribute their ideas, efforts and other resources. They also help decide on the content. In the process, this increased their sense of ownership of the projects. They are also able to see for themselves the outcomes and impacts of the projects and learn lessons from them.

2. **Internationalization of CDC extension programs**

Membership in the UN Roundtable for ComDev. To the benefit of CDC, it has become a member of the UN Roundtable for ‘Communication for Development’ or Comdev. It is a prestigious body that aims to streamline Comdev in all UN development projects. It is convened every other two years by FAO to discuss the progress of the initiative.

Membership in the Global Research Initiative or GRI. This is another prestigious group at the global level composed of five academic institutions: University of Reading (UK), University of Queensland (Australia), University of Guelph (Canada),
University of Wageningen (Netherlands), and UP Los Baños (Philippines). It provides support to scholarly activities of FAO Comdev group.

**Devcom training provider in Asia.** Since 2011, CDC-UP Los Baños has been recognized during the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) as the training provider in devcom in the Asian region. This is attributed to CDC’s unique three-tiered academic program (BS, MS, and PhD Devcom) that is not replicated in any other parts of the world.

**Co-authorship of Source book on ComDev.** CDC faculty members were also tapped as co-authors of a sourcebook on Communication for Rural Development, a handy material for trainers as well as devcom practitioners and development workers. It is now widely used for training on communication planning by various UN agencies and other organizations all over the world.

**3. Institutional strengthening for the benefit of partners and clients**

**Setting up of a radio station in Bangladesh.** The extension project on RCS-CRR assisted the MoA in Bangladesh to put up its first government-owned community rural radio. This has been operational since 2012 and is now an institutionalized media service in the ministry.

**Establishment of RCS unit at AIS, MoA in Bangladesh.** Together with a radio station is the setting up of a new office on Rural Communication Services (RCS) at MoA which would supplement the CRR and the AIS in performing media services in agriculture.

**Setting up of the Sarawak Devcom Training Center.** As an offshoot of on-going technical assistance to the State of Sarawak and upon its request, a Devcom Training Center will be established in the state. Proposal and MOU are now being worked out to push the project through.

**REFERENCES**


