
**PARTICIPATORY ANCHORED DEVELOPMENT IN
SOUTH AFRICA AS EVALUATED AT
THUSONG SERVICE CENTRES**

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Communitas
ISSN 1023-0556
2013 18: 95-115

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the principles of participatory development communication. It is argued that that participation may exist only on a conceptual and ideological level in government policies in South Africa, resulting in the practice of diffusion communication. This article reports on how the communication approach of the Thusong Service Centres with their communities in Tshwane align with the normative principles of participatory development communication. A qualitative research approach was adopted to gather data, and purposive sampling was used, focusing on the six Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane, which are considered to be development communication vehicles. It was found that Thusong Service Centres do not fully meet the required principles of participatory development communication, which was used as the theoretical framework in this research. This inadequate alignment with the principles of participatory development communication implies that authentic development is not being realised.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the major factors that have slowed human development in South Africa is the lack of developing communities' participation in the design and implementation of policies and programmes that affect their lives (GCIS 2009). In recognising South Africa as a developing country, attention is drawn to appropriate methods and approaches in mobilising change. Participatory development (facilitated by participatory development communication) is the process by which people become leading actors in their own development as opposed to being mere recipients of external development interventions. In order to address development problems and the concomitant mass poverty, it has become necessary to shift the focus of development communication from a linear information dissemination paradigm to a transactional, dialogic mode of communication.

An essential requirement for development is the political will to drive programmes that are aimed at improving the lives of the poor and the disadvantaged (GCIS 2009). In South Africa, the government has demonstrated this political will in various policies, including the Comtask Report. This report mandates government to establish Thusong Service Centres (formerly known as multi-purpose community centres) as the primary vehicle for the implementation of development communication (GCIS 1996: 36). "Thusong" means "a place to get assistance" in Sesotho. A review of the literature shows that although extensive research has been conducted in this field, the focus in previous research has not been on the approach that government uses in its communication with communities.

Development communication has gone through various development paradigms. Firstly, the modernisation paradigm, adopting a linear communication approach, suggests that it is essential that the newly independent, developing nations adopt Western ideas and innovations, in order to "catch up" with the developed nations (Nyamnjoh 2005). Subsequently, inadequacies in modernisation have given rise to the dependency paradigm, which focuses on underdevelopment (Frank 2005) and cultural imperialism (Servaes 1983). The dependent society is a silent one, and its voice is merely an echo of the voice of the authorities. White (1994b: 25) criticises the modernistic and dependency paradigms by arguing that in order for development to occur, the community should be empowered into self-reliance. It is during this time that the participatory paradigm was born.

It is widely accepted that participation is the normative approach regarding development (Cohen 1996: 230; Tri 1986b: 35; White 1994a: 30; Yoon 2004). Therefore it is argued in this article, based on the nature and function of the Thusong Service Centre, that it (the Centre) should adopt a participatory communication approach (Rogers 1976: 52). It is clear that the South African government also subscribes to the notion of participation when talking about participatory governance. However, although participatory governance implies

both political and developmental participation the focus is often on the former. The contribution of this article is that it brings a participatory communication perspective to government communication (cf. Fourie 2012 for full argument).

Ascroft and Masilela (1994: 260) argue that the notion of the developing community's participation in development planning, policy-making and decision-sharing has remained a concept that is honoured more on paper than in practice. This article argues that it is through community participation that the mandate of Thusong Service Centres may be successfully implemented. It is against this background that the findings of an investigation of the communication approach of the Thusong Service Centres are presented. The study investigates how the communication of the Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane compares with the normative principles of participatory development communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The various paradigms that have marked the evolution of development communication are still active on different levels (IDRC 2004). Despite these diverse approaches and orientations there is nevertheless consensus today on both the need for grassroots participation in development and on the essential role that participatory communication plays in promoting development (IDRC 2004; Ascroft & Masilela 1994: 290; Rogers 1976: 52).

Paradigm shifts in development communication

Until the 1960s, economic theories explained the lack of development as being a consequence of industrial and technical backwardness, while sociological theories attributed a lack of development to the cultural backwardness of the illiterate masses (Kumar 1994: 76). Accordingly, it was believed that the quickest solution for development would entail the borrowing of the modernisation strategies of Western societies which were deemed to be developed. This resulted in the emergence of development communication during the modernisation paradigm where specialists in development advised the poorer countries (Lerner 1976: 287).

According to Schramm (1964: iv), it is understood that before there may be free and adequate information in any country, there must be sufficient development of the mass communication. He further states that mass communication is influential in modernising a developing culture which is, in turn, necessary for national development. Lerner (1964: 247) claims that mass communication is the great multiplier of development – the device that may spread new ideas, attitudes and knowledge more rapidly.

The basic assumption of development was that “modern” people act in a rational and informed manner and that success inevitably results from careful planning

(Moemeka 1999; Schiller 1976: 6). However, this “rationalist and positivist” approach in terms of which everything may be measured and uncertainty eliminated is hardly a reflection of real life (Nyamnjoh 2005).

Moemeka (1999) explains that since development communication initiatives began in Africa in the 1950s it has been based on the erroneous belief, firstly, that development meant Westernisation and, secondly, that development meant modernisation. Nyamnjoh (2005) argues that development in Africa may have been impeded because, firstly, the continent has relied on a notion of development agendas that are both foreign to the majority of its peoples in origin and objectives, and which have not always addressed the correct issues or, indeed, addressed these issues in the right way. Secondly, development communication researchers have adopted research techniques that were designed to meet the needs of Western societies, and these research techniques do not always suit African cultures and societies.

A reaction to modernisation was the emergence of the dependency paradigm in the mid-1960s, which was a way of explaining the persistent poverty of the poorer countries (Wallerstein 1976; Frank 2005). As victims of cultural imperialism (Schiller 1976: 6) and due to their dependency on the wealthier nations, the poor nations find it difficult to formulate autonomous development policies in accordance with their own cultural histories and societal interests (Servaes 1983: 13).

Servaes (1983: 13), a pioneering participatory development communication scholar, emphasises the need for culturally sensitive development programmes. He criticises the modernisation theories as being based on the assumption that as societies develop they lose their individual identities and gravitate toward a common culture. The essential input that indigenous communities have to offer to the development process is thus ignored. This results in overlooking the cultural nuances of communities and, eventually, in the failure of the development effort (Chitnis 2005).

White (1994b: 25) refers to the concept of self-reliance as an integral aspect of participation – both as an outcome and as a part of the process. In order to become self-reliant, the focus must be on strengthening local economic resources and on making the community more self-sufficient. This would mean that a community of self-reliant people would move from dependence to independence. Subsequently, the participatory development paradigm was born which encourages individuals’ active participation in their development.

With the above-mentioned shift in focus from the linear mode of communication during the modernisation era to participation of the developing community, it is necessary to fully involve the communities in identifying their needs and taking

ownership of activities and information (Cohen 1996: 223; Rahim 1994: 127; Tri 1986a: 10). It is also necessary to incorporate communities' exposure to technology as it is an essential component for empowerment (Rahim, in Servaes 2000: 84).

Participatory development communication emphasises the importance of strategic communication, a research-based communication process, in achieving development goals (UNICEF 2005: 1; Bessette 2004; Mozammel & Schechter 2007: 7). It underscores that communication is as much a science as an art, as much a process as it is about outcomes. Setting goals, both midterm and long-term, is an important step to measure the success or failure of any programme including that of development initiatives.

Phases for strategic development communication

Various phases may be used in the strategic communication process and constitute the basis from which participatory development communication should be conducted. Mozammel and Schechter (2007: 7) outline five phases which were used as the benchmark for strategic development communication during analysis in this research.

Phase 1, in which the communication management function is established, entails developing the strategic communication intervention. Phase 2A involves conducting a strategic communication assessment, followed by an operational communication analysis in Phase 2B. Bessette (2004) refers to this phase as the identification of problems and potential solutions and the implementation of concrete initiatives. Phase 3 involves developing a communication strategy and action plan. Implementing communication activities represents phase 4 where officials in the project management take various steps in order to put into practice each of the communication activities as laid out in the afore-mentioned action plan matrix. In the last phase, monitoring and feedback activities are implemented.

Strategic development communication, however, does face the challenge not to become just another form of top-down communication. Mozammel and Schechter (2007: 7) provide some examples of communication activities that could be used to ensure that the communication strategy has a participatory nature:

- ♦ *customised sensitisation workshops*, which include information about the proposed project aimed at key stakeholders;
- ♦ *stakeholder consultations* which emphasise bottom-up communication, a voice for the poor, the development of trust, ownership by and relationships among all stakeholder groups;

- ♦ a *management information system* (MIS) to collect, analyse, store and disseminate information that may be useful for decision-making;
- ♦ *visioning sessions* and participatory rural appraisal techniques to encourage dialogue with the community;
- ♦ *community mapping* to provide insight into the community's current status in respect of development;
- ♦ a *transect*, a walk through a neighbourhood to gain insight on the community's physical reality;
- ♦ the *Venn diagram* for visualising and analysing relationships, which may be further used to eliminate corruption and abuse of power;
- ♦ *problem trees* whereby community members identify their own priorities;
- ♦ *citizen report cards*, a way in which reliable and consistent feedback and communication for accountability may be obtained; and
- ♦ *governance scorecards*, a tool to monitor government service delivery.

Development communication literature shows that formal research is strongly in favour of a Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA), a component in strategic communication for development (Belbase 1994: 457; IDRC 2004; Bessette 2004). PRCA is a participatory research method that involves the community in the process of communication programme planning from the outset (Bessette 2004). This is enabled by the dialogic process of communication, which is discussed using Freirean dialogue.

Freirean dialogue

In his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (1970) criticised one-way communication in education and advocated a more interactive approach which would raise learners' consciousness.

According to Srampickal (2006), conscientisation comprises several stages, starting with "intransitive thought" during which people believe that their own actions are incapable of changing their conditions. "Semi-transitive thought" is the next stage towards conscientisation, where people believe partially in themselves as vehicles of change and, to some degree, they try to act in order to bring about social change (Srampickal 2006). The goal of the second stage is to facilitate critical reflection and thus develop autonomous thoughts. Central to Freire's thoughts were that the relationship between oppressor and oppressed should change. Freire proposed that the distance between teacher and student, and in this case local government and community, should disappear. He saw

communication in the form of dialogue as the process to change this relationship (Shefner-Rogers *et al.* 1998; Singh 2008: 702). By means of dialogue participants come to understand the circumstances that led to the disadvantaged position. Only by understanding your world can you name the world, and by naming the world you change the world.

For this article it is important to note that Singh (2008: 705) highlights that Freire in his later work acknowledged that the teacher starts from a position of power. At the start of the dialogue the teacher has more knowledge about the subject and also the power to steer the dialogue on a certain course. The idea is not for this person to solve the community's problem, but rather to serve as an enabler for the community to be able to solve their own issues. In the third stage, individuals reflect on their actions and take new actions (Ridner 2004).

This final state, which Freire (1970: 71) terms "critical transitivity", corresponds to the achievement of conscientisation. This stage involves a dynamic relationship between critical thought and critical action, which is triggered by the ability to think holistically about one's condition.

Freirean dialogue is advocated in the current article due to the strong link to empowerment. When following the viewpoints of Freirean dialogue, engagement between government and citizens could be a learning process for both community and government. This in turn could lead to self-efficacy which would restore the power balance and in the long run benefit participatory governance.

It is therefore argued that dialogue, in the context of participatory development communication, should lead to empowerment. This further implies that all phases of development (implementation, evaluation, benefits and decision-making) should be participatory.

Levels of participation

Yoon (2004) states that *participation in implementation* is where people are actively encouraged and mobilised to take part in the actualisation of projects whereby they are given certain responsibilities, set certain tasks, or are required to contribute specified resources. Upon completion of a project people are then invited to review either the success or the failure of the project – *participation in evaluation*. Yoon describes the third type of participation as *participation in benefit* which refers to the process whereby people enjoy the fruits of a project. Finally, he describes *participation in decision-making*, where people initiate, discuss, conceptualise and plan the activities that they will conduct as a community. Yoon (2004) claims that *participation in decision-making* is the most important form to utilise in the development process because it allows the members of a community to have power over their own lives and their environment. This concurs with

Freire's (1970: 76) concept of empowerment. However, development efforts do not always implement all four aspects. It should be acknowledged that the higher the degree of participation, the greater the chance that development will occur, thereby benefitting community members.

The literature review yielded the formulation of the following normative principles:

- ♦ Participatory development communication requires sustainability and continuity.
- ♦ Participatory development communication is a dialogical process.
- ♦ Empowerment of the developing community is necessary for participatory development communication to be realised.
- ♦ In order for participatory development communication to be practised, the element of community participation should be prevalent.
- ♦ Participatory development communication involves due consideration of the community's socio-cultural context.
- ♦ Participatory development communication involves strategic communication.

The above-mentioned theories and principles underpinned this research; hence the results will contribute to understanding the importance of applying the principles of community participation in development communication.

METHODOLOGY

The study used exploratory research to gain insights into the phenomenon of participatory development communication at Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane.

A qualitative approach was adopted and three methods for collecting data were used: semi-structured interviews with Government Communication and Information Services (GCIS) personnel, personal observation of all six Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane, and a qualitative content analysis of government mandate documents regarding development communication. A purposive sampling technique was used. It focused on all six Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane. The following documents which provide the mandate for Thusong Service Centres as the primary vehicle for development communication in South Africa were analysed:

- ♦ Communications 2000: A vision for government communications in South Africa, Comtask Report 1996
- ♦ White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997

- ◆ Cabinet Memorandum No. 15 of November 1999
- ◆ President's State of the Nation Address (SoNA 2004)
- ◆ Thusong Service Centres Government Communications: Business Plan 2006-2014

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with senior GCIS personnel were conducted in an attempt to determine the approach adopted by government in its interaction with communities regarding development communication efforts. The interview guide was informed by the principles of participatory development communication. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, after which the texts were analysed by means of coding the dominant themes that had been identified.

Personal observation was used as a means to observe the real-life setting and actions of the members of the Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane. This further assisted in determining the communication approach adopted by these Thusong Service Centres. In this study, the researcher's role was that of complete observer, in terms of which the researcher was present on the scene, but did not participate or interact with insiders to any great extent.

Although the results of this study may not be generalised to the other Thusong Service Centres in South Africa, it may be deemed useful when planning development communication initiatives.

Analysis

The data gathered from the empirical study was analysed using thematic categorisation. Although open coding was used in the analysis of the data (Schwandt 2001: 26), the formulation of theoretical constructs assisted in providing a foundation for analysis. The data generated during the empirical study was tested against the normative principles identified in the literature and the findings were compared with each of the data-gathering methods as a cross-referencing mechanism for validity and reliability.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The themes and subthemes relating to participatory development communication that emerged during the empirical study are discussed below.

Sustainability and continuity

The research found that although government communication initiates *cooperatives* and engages in *partnerships* between the community and various government departments, these display a linear structure. In other words, communities are not

given equal levels of influence and decision-making authority, thereby preventing community members from actively sustaining development efforts independently. This is contrary to Frank's (2005) concept of self-reliance.

One of the objectives of Thusong Service Centres in regards to development is to create networks of economic opportunities in order to address the socio-economic conditions in developing communities (GCIS 2009). The empirical study indicated that although this is being implemented in Tshwane through workshops, it is either done on a small scale or not sustained. However, no actual networks are created for continuity, *sustainability* and eventually self-reliance. Instead, community members are provided with information in a linear manner, and there is no evidence of follow-up with community members. Community members thus do not have the opportunity to become the subjects of their own development instead of merely the objects of processes.

The study provided evidence that the Tshwane communities' *own knowledge* was not generated in the development communication process. During an interview, a senior communications officer (SCO) indicated the following: "It is imperative that knowledge and skills development take place, but this area needs more work and attention". Ultimately, not enough was being done to equip the developing communities in Tshwane with knowledge, skills and sufficient opportunities to create self-reliance.

Dialogue

The environment for participatory development communication is expected to be supportive, creative, consensual and facilitative, leading to the sharing of ideas through dialogue (Thomas 1994: 52; Freire 1970: 68).

The empirical research found that the various *communication methods and channels* specific to participatory development communication as identified in the literature review are not utilised optimally by government communication. In respect of *engagement* with the community, it was established that government officials communicate from a position of authority, whereby knowledge is imparted to community members, which also demonstrates a linear information-dissemination process. An SCO remarked during an interview: "The community must be able to liaise with you to be able to encourage reciprocity, unlike information dissemination, which is being practised in our communication to communities, which I am not in favour of". The afore-mentioned response does not align with Freire's participatory, dialogic and reciprocal communication (Freire 1970: 101).

The research ascertained that *feedback* received from community members for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the appropriateness of programmes

was verbal, informal and on an *ad hoc* basis primarily during the *needs analysis* that the GCIS conducts. There was no evidence of structured feedback from communities, which goes against Bessette's (2004) argument that monitoring and feedback during the development initiative is fundamental.

In summary, the empirical findings indicated that the GCIS does not engage in meaningful dialogue with its communities, although this is a prerequisite for authentic development to occur. Also, their actions are contrary to the principles of Freirean dialogue (Freire 1970: 29).

Empowerment

The findings showed that communities did not take *ownership* of development communication initiatives, due to authorities retaining power during the process. An interviewee stated: "Although decisions are taken at the workshops where community members gather, most decisions are taken by the ward councillor on issues that affect that particular community in respect of infrastructure, for example, building of the schools. The ward councillor also decides who will receive contracts."

It was also found that government communication does not fully adhere to the theoretical principles of *empowerment*, thus Yoon's (2004) participation in decision-making is not prevalent in development initiatives in Tshwane. Furthermore, the lack of empowerment opportunities that was evidenced through this study creates communities that may be perceived as intransitive or semi-intransitive and lack the skill and cognition to be critically transitive (Campbell & Jovchelovitch 2000; Freire 1985: 75). A response from an SCO was as follows: "The community as a stakeholder in the development communication process is generally a superficial exercise. Yes, community members are consulted but not fully involved."

The use of *communication technology* is a potential source of empowerment (Servaes 2000) in that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) may be used to promote literacy in the development communication process. The President's State of the Nation Address (SoNA) of 2004 contains information on government's undertaking to ensure that modern ICTs are introduced at the identified development nodes. However, Thusong Service Centres show a deficiency in this provision where personal observation reveals a lack of free facilities. According to Chitnis (2005), empowering people in the development communication arena means that they are allowed access to resources in order to overcome existing oppressive forces. Although policy documents advocate the introduction of such tools and services, it was found that it is not a prioritised action by government.

Finally, Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane do not display evidence of the *literacy* programmes necessary for people's empowerment, yet these communities are in dire need of such interventions (Rahim 1994: 120; Thomas 1994: 50–51).

Community participation

Of significance is the inadequacy of government communication's intervention in ensuring communities' participation from the inception of development communication projects. Although the implementation of "consultation" is insufficient for authentic development to occur, the interviews revealed that the communities were nevertheless *consulted* on their development communication needs. This finding contradicts Freirean dialogue (Freire 1970: 76) and Yoon's (2004) theory which claims that participation in decision-making is the most important form of participation.

It was found that the stakeholder forums that government communication hosts have a top-heavy communication approach, which results in an apathetic attitude in the community. This research showed that government speaks to the community from an authoritative position and attempts to impart skills and knowledge to community members, instead of allowing them the opportunity to participate in a process that is meant to change their lives. Thus, this finding counters Yoon's (2004) argument where he argues that participation in decision-making allows the members of a community power over their own lives and their environment.

In addition, there was no evidence of Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA) techniques during the development communication programme to ensure relevance and ownership of the project by the developing community. The literature on participatory development communication illustrates that PRCA is a fundamental facet of development communication (Belbase 1994: 457). Government communication conducts semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions with community members to gain their insights during the informal needs identification process, which is indeed aligned with participatory development communication principles (Mozammel & Schechter 2007: 7). However, these activities are conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, and no formal structure in respect of research principles exists.

Part of incorporating community participation involves *establishing common ground* with communities. It was found that although community members were involved during the needs analysis process, this did not bring about mutual trust because the community was not adequately involved in the adoption of research procedures. Freire's (1985: 73) critique that the dependent society is by definition a silent society, may be related to community members' apathy towards development communication. This may be attributed to communities' dependence

on government for their mobility, which results from a lack of community participation in the development process and is demonstrated in communities' reluctance to attend community meetings that are held. It is noteworthy that community workers seldom work with the entire community (Lombard 1992: 65), as confirmed by the research conducted with the GCIS and emphasised by an interviewee: "Key independent thinkers in the community may often be excluded from initiatives because of geographic reach".

Socio-cultural context

The interviews point to the fact that government communication takes into account communities' cultural and language issues in its communication efforts. This was evident from the assertion by an interviewee: "Information sent out to communities is available in all eleven official languages". This was also confirmed during the personal observations. During the research, it was noted that partnerships had been formed with members of the community, including traditional leaders. These partnerships allow community members to provide input regarding their indigenous knowledge. However, what was clear is that the foregoing considerations are not applicable from the outset or throughout the initiative. Therefore it may be deduced, according to Yoon's (2004) benchmark of levels of participation discussed earlier in this article, that partial participation is used in this instance.

Strategic communication

The five steps advocated by Mozammel and Schechter (2007: 7) were used as the benchmark for the strategic communication adopted by the GCIS in their development communication initiatives.

The first phase, according to the literature, indicates that the communication management function should be established. The Thusong Service Centres in Tshwane employed trained communication professionals, but it was found that the existing staff lacked the capacity to cover all areas adequately. The personal observations revealed that none of the centres in Tshwane employed centre managers. This situation has a negative impact on a sound action plan towards developing the communities.

The second phase in participatory development communication planning requires that a strategic communication assessment be conducted. The empirical study shows that government communication does not engage in formal research. Furthermore, there was no sign of PRCA methods being adopted as reported on earlier in this article.

Phase 2B involves an operational communication analysis, which requires all stakeholders to be involved in identifying problems and potential solutions and implementing concrete initiatives in a collaborative way. The study shows that the only sign of such activity is during the informal needs analysis process which is conducted in an *ad hoc* manner.

The third phase involves the development of a communication strategy and action plan. The interviews and analysis of the GCIS's Consolidated Action Plan 2010 and the Thusong Service Centre-Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Communication Plan 2010 indicated that the GCIS compiles an action plan for each project but does not address participatory development communication principles as their focus. Instead, these plans address operational but not strategic issues. Although there was an indication of prior planning, the emphasis was on commemoration days in the government calendar, which indicates that there is a gap regarding formal research, which is a much needed component for successful development communication.

The study acknowledged the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which is the strategic planning instrument for development and is a planning document used to manage and guide all planning, development and decision-making in the municipality. This relates to a response from an interviewee regarding the communities' involvement in the Public Participation Forums: "I think our communities are passive and do not want to get involved in development communication activities. Whenever there is an Integrated Development Plan process, most of the people who attend those meetings are members of the political party that the ward councillor comes from."

The above response demonstrates communities' apathy to participate and this relates to Freire's (1985: 73) critique of the dependency paradigm.

The fourth phase in strategic planning involves the implementation of communication activities, where appropriate methods and techniques should be used according to the identified needs of the community. It was found that various government departments implement activities in isolation. An SCO remarked: "There is a danger of duplication of activities amongst the various government departments. Also, there is a lack of an information-sharing culture which exists." The afore-mentioned response does not correspond with Mozammel and Schechter's (2007: 7) strategic communication requirements outlined in this article.

Phase five incorporates monitoring and feedback activities. The interviews established that there was no comparative analysis between the benchmark study and a post-implementation baseline study. However, it was found that the GCIS uses the Ward-level Information Management System (WIMS) programme

(a management information system) that works well for the communication officers. On the other hand, contrary to the theoretical principles of participatory development communication, feedback activities are not used to monitor development communication activities scientifically. The interviews indicated that the research that SCOs conduct with communities is not formal in nature. However, certain GCIS personnel form part of the Forum for South African Director Generals (FOSADG), where formal research issues are discussed. An interviewee commented: “Formal research is conducted, but I am not sure how; maybe quantitative, maybe qualitative. My research is finding out exactly what is happening in terms of identifying needs or gaps in the community.”

The interviewees indicated that formal research was only conducted if the need arose. It was further noted that most of the formal research that is conducted is outsourced because of a lack of capacity in the research department. Despite the need for formal research in the development communication process (UNICEF 2005: 1; Bessette 2004; Mozammel & Schechter 2007: 7) this fundamental component is compromised by government.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the research reported on in this article was to indicate how the communication approach of the development communication hubs (Thusong Service Centres) aligns with the normative principles of participatory development communication. The investigation found that the principles of participatory development communication are not being fully practised; therefore this section provides insights regarding these findings and growth points for government’s consideration.

During the research, the normative principles were used as categories in exploring the phenomenon of participatory development communication, which led to the formulation of six theoretical constructs, which are used in the discussion below.

Firstly, *self-reliance* should be the goal of government to encourage participants to become independent in the development process, and not fall into a paradigm of dependence whereby cultural imperialism and cultural domination (Schiller 1976: 6) destroy native cultures and compromise communities’ independent thinking (White 1994b: 25).

When cooperatives and partnerships are formed, there should be an assurance of devolution of power, whereby all stakeholders are equal partners in the development communication process. Government should take on this responsibility by monitoring such activities to ensure that this objective is realised. It is further suggested that networks of economic opportunities for self-reliance are introduced for the sustainability of each community. These may include current initiatives,

but it is suggested that government publicise such initiatives robustly in the community and assist those who are currently passive receivers of information to act on such initiatives for their sustainability.

Secondly, it was argued that *dialogue*, as the core of participatory communication, should lead to empowerment. It was evident that there was very little scope for Freirean dialogue as communication was mostly done from a position of power.

Thirdly, *empowerment* should be promoted by ensuring that communities participate actively in the planning, decision-making and ownership of the development project. Government should plan with communities by creating structures that offer communities and developers opportunities to work together, and introduce activities that will empower communities. Freire (1985: 73) criticises the dependent society as a silent society and its voice is not an authentic voice but merely an echo of the voice of the authorities in every way, whereby the authorities speak and the dependent society listens. It is recommended that Thusong Service Centres provide computer services free of charge, which may include limited Internet connectivity for community members. Literacy and numeracy programmes should be introduced in partnership or collaboration with higher education institutions as part of their community engagement programmes, which is currently a requirement in higher education.

The proposition that oppressed and marginalised individuals can free themselves if they are given a voice and the ability to take control over their surroundings seems to exclude the role of structure as played out by the institutions involved (Giddens & Pierson 1998: 44). It is therefore recommended that the development communication process incorporates the communities' participation in decision-making. Not only should this principle be built into government policy documents, but it should also be incorporated into the day-to-day operations of development communication hubs. This approach will further enhance community autonomy.

Fourthly, *community participation* should be encouraged during the entire development communication initiative (Thomas 1994: 51; Rahim 1994: 118). It is recommended that the development communication programmes include relationship-building and performance-monitoring activities as outlined earlier in the literature review in this article. It is also recommended that a stronger commitment from government be introduced in the form of deliverables to communities during the process.

The fifth factor is that government should consider the *socio-cultural context* of each community during the development communication process, which includes the community's indigenous knowledge and cultural identity. This study acknowledges the high premium that government places on its communities' socio-cultural context. Culturally sensitive communication and the use of communities'

indigenous expertise are encouraged in order for participatory development communication to be useful. However, it is recommended that such indigenous expertise be included throughout government's development communication initiative in an authentic, participatory manner with communities.

Lastly, it should be ensured that government's development communication efforts involve *strategic planning* with the community (UNICEF 2005: 1; Mozammel & Schechter 2007: 7). Coordination of events, activities and initiatives requires a structured strategic plan, which should incorporate all key stakeholders and integrate the activities of the various government departments.

Currently, government does not engage in formal research with the Tshwane communities. Therefore it is recommended that research studies be conducted on the effectiveness of development programmes together with perception studies. This may be done in conjunction with the informal research studies that are currently being conducted. The findings of such research will inform subsequent plans of action to resolve communities' apathy towards development. Instead of merely acknowledging that community members are apathetic, government should be working to combat such circumstances for the greater good of the nation, which formal research will help to facilitate.

The literature indicates that the participation of the developing community will assist in promoting the adoption of new practices, empowering communities, and building networks and capacity among stakeholders, which are requirements for successful and sustainable development communication. Although South African mandate documents show the intention to implement participatory development communication, an analysis of the development communication hubs in Tshwane shows that there is inadequate alignment with the theoretical underpinnings of participatory development communication. The discussion in the above section then suggested ways in which to address these shortcomings and inadequacies.

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