

Book Review

Guy Bessette. *Involving the Community; A Guide to Participatory Development Communication*. Jointly Published By: South Bound and International Development Research Centre, 2004. ISBN 983-9054-41-4

Reviewed by **Fakeha Badar**¹

The author, Dr. Bessette is specialized in Development Communication and Participatory Development. He is a Ph.D. in Educational Technology. Along with writing this book, he authored two other books mainly focusing the area of Participatory Development Communication. This book is mainly written for researchers in the domain of development. In different parts of the book author introduces participatory development communication with its different concepts. He explains different approaches of two-way communication. Besette also presents and elaborates a methodology for communication strategies. In the book, author points out and gives a 10-step methodology for application of Participation Development Communication.

According to the author, definition of Participatory Development Communication (PDC) is, "A planned activity based on the one hand on participatory processes, and on the other hand on media and interpersonal communication, which facilitates a dialogue among different stakeholders, around a common development problem or goal, with the objective of developing and implementing a set of activities to contribute to its solution, or its realization, and which supports and accompanies these initiatives."

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In the part of “Introduction”, the author first gives the concept of Participatory Development Communication by illustrating the people and community participation in development initiatives. He explains how a communication actor (researcher and practitioner) can work for participatory development through effective communication. He also describes that the cores of participatory development communication are rooted in the active participation of the receiver and involvement of stakeholders who work with the communities. According to the author, communication actor and effective communication are the basic tools for participatory development but these are not the only tools to it. This process consists of bringing together all the stakeholders with two way horizontal process. Those can be NGOs, technical service providers, experts, words etc. Here, author firmly emphasizes on the abilities and involvement of the researcher / practitioner in the development process.

Author mainly divides the content of the book in three categories. In the first part, he introduces the concepts of PDC (Participatory Development Communication), reflective of the role of researcher who not only interacts with communities on local level but also identifies the potential of PDC. Here the focus is on the researcher who also acts as a communication actor. The first and foremost thing he mentions is the attitude and concerns a researcher shows while approaching to a community. The way he shows his understanding and discussion of issues and sharing information while communicating with the people is the first thing to be focused on. Author illustrates the role of Researcher by rejecting the old

paradigm of development i.e. “Resolve and Communicate”, and believing the new paradigm that says “Communicate and Resolve”.

The author proposes three sets of events as methodology of PDC in which first involves the contact and understanding the local setting while the second focuses on identification of common goal. In third part, he develops a strategy for communication.

According to the author, the core concept of PDC starts with the participation of every individual from local community; participation not only in activities but in the process of decision making as well. But in the case of dealing with different groups; responsibilities, right to express, and democracy should be well involved. He says that people should think as ‘owners’ rather than beneficiaries. It can be achieved through two-way communication, proper communication strategy, facilitating learning process, decision making, formatting and shaping of information, and discouraging gender discrimination.

In the second part of the book, author gives methodological approaches towards Participatory Development Communication through models which include 10-steps plan for effective development process. The first model represents a circular form of the steps which shows the continuity. It includes four phases of diagnosis, planning, intervention or experimentation, and assessment. This model, according to the author is about participation through communication.

In the second model of PDC, the author gives ten-steps to go through before planning and implementing PDC. These, according to the author are the core steps in the process to effectively plan the

PDC. While in model three, the author combines the first two. In the 10-steps process - around which the whole book revolves, according to author, first step is pre-implementation of study and research. According to him, collection of preliminary information regarding local community is the first thing to work on. Information regarding basics of community, its value and norms, culture, media, social institutes including health and education, understanding of language, planning meetings with the local leaders - as they are the people who can convince and encourage all people in community to take initiatives and participate. In short, understanding and getting as much information about local community socially, economically, and politically is the first step in developing PDC. Unless a researcher or practitioner develops trust with the local people, next steps will never occur successfully.

For the author, second important step is to involve the community in digging out the problem, and then in decision making process. For him, identification of a problem in the local setting by involving the local people will get more benefit instead of showing them their problem. When, for author, local people of a community think about their own problem only then they can have their solution either with their own initiatives and efforts or with the participation of any outsider or donor. Also, their involvement in decision making regarding a specific problem is more important as they are the people who can take actions and fix a problem through a proper strategy. Discussion of problem, involving experts are also included in second step.

The next step is about identifying and handling community

groups and stakeholders who are concerned with the identified issues, goals, and initiatives. Giving priority to the concerned groups is also among the role of researcher in this step. According to the author who is involved and with whom do they work is a question mark. Specific groups can be consisted of different characteristics like age, gender, background, language, income, education, literacy, traditions, values, beliefs, etc.

The fourth step for author is to identify communication needs, objectives, and activities. In this step particularly, in-depth communication is involved. What strategies, objectives will be involved is decided in this step. Material needs, management, techniques, etc. are added. From communication objectives to communication activities, this step includes all. While in step fifth, effective and appropriate communication tools are planned. For example, selection of media i.e. newspaper, radio, television, photographs, documentary, posters, songs, storytelling or related tools are formed and selected in this planning step. In some community more than these things, inter personal communication can do best work or in other theatre can do well. So the planning of media / communication tool in context with community is planned. It also includes content, form, materials, and usefulness to check the correctness of the information offered to the target audience.

The next step in the PDC process is to facilitate partnerships. Here partnerships mean all those who are contributing and participating in the communication activities. Here, the author developed five types of partnerships, with the groups at community level, local authorities, local technical service providers and with

specialized agencies.

After all these seven steps, now comes the implementation plan. According to the author of the book, establishing the time frame for strategies, roles and tasks, and budget preparing includes in this step.

Monitoring and evaluation of the planned activities through strategy comes in this step. Monitoring and evaluation is as important as planning of the activities. For the determination and identification of achieving the goals and finding out the barriers is important. So that if something is not working properly, a new strategy can be made. An expert or donor is not required but community people themselves and most of all researcher who can do this work of evaluation. As he is involved from the grass root level so he knows the best evaluation indicators. Adding up, documentation through many ways is also mandatory for record. In the book, author explains this through a sample of questions that can be answered for assessment. Last step of this process is to assess and share the results combined by the researcher to the local people.

Third part of the book explains the usage of Tools of communication. Tools may be selected according to the local setting of the community. According to the author, it depends on the researcher and people of community to find what media tool best suits them. Author here describes the use of every media including traditional, electronic, print, inter-personal, group media, and mass media. Selection of media to make PDC effective is the fundamental part.

In conclusion, author beautifully answers the questions that

how researchers can improve communication with local communities and other stakeholders, how can researchers and community members enhance and improve their skills to reach policymakers and how they can make change, how can two-way communication be changed and improve participation of community in research and development, how it can improve the capacity to participate in the utilization of natural resources. The book is about participation of people of a community to start and implement a development project. Author gave the concepts and steps of PDC through grass root to higher level. Few things are neglected including religion barriers. Also, when a paid research is conducted the whole concept of participation in development communication goes away, but overall this guide is a starting point for initiation of PDC through participation and involvement of local people.

My personal remarks on the book are if this ten-step process that is the base for effective development communication be successfully implemented in a country like Pakistan? Where political stability is at stake, and religious differences are on their peak. Regardless of all, this book is a good read for researchers of development communication.