Communication for Development

CONTENTS

Communication and Development
Approaches, Perspectives and Practices

Development communication is many things for many people. One way in which this term is used refers to processes related to 'communication for development,' i.e., communicating to translate public policy imperatives, developmental goals and desirable behavioral transformations on the ground.

For some CSOs working in the field of social development, development communication involves communicating their work to their supporters (including funders) so that they can cultivate relationships and continue to serve the communities they work with. This purportedly helps them differentiate themselves from others, in what seems like a marketplace for ideas in the social sector.

For others, development communication involves appropriate messaging, so that people are better informed and can make effective choices that affect their health, lives and livelihoods. This follows in a tradition of behavioral change communication.

Two important examples in India of this have been in the areas of family planning and AIDS prevention. Not surprisingly, a large part of this action has taken place in the public health arena, in the country and across the world.

There are also some strands of communication done by CSOs and other social actors, including unions, CBOs and other civil society groups, which try to change the status quo by questioning extant common sense. Examples of these include groups working towards environmental protection and the promotion of handicrafts in an increasingly mechanized world.

An important type of development communication is about reporting on violations of rights and safeguards. Traditionally human rights organizations and advocacy groups working on protecting the interests of marginalized social groups such as dalits and adivasis, LGBTQIA communities, and children with disabilities, have foregrounded concerns surrounding the violation of constitutional and legal protection of these communities. They have also tried to build popular pressure for instituting and strengthening these protective frameworks.

One thing must be clear from this discussion. There are two broad aspects of development communication. One refers to communication about the work we might be doing. The other aspect is about communicating and advocating for desirable social change itself as a valid and important form of communication practice.

These days, all of us are generally so caught up with routine project work that it is difficult, more often than not, to pullback, ideate and implement communication strategies that advocate for just, humane and equitable spaces and processes in the domains we work in.

A big part of the challenge is to do with the often-perceived lack of resources that most CSOs struggle with. However, in the same way we try and insulate the core of our activity, that goes beyond our project cycles, and defines who we are, building and executing a communication strategy is an essential component of our work as civil society actors.

We often tend to see communication as externally oriented. More often than

not, we focus on communicating about our work with external stakeholders. However, communication has an important organization building role as well. Communication of the right type and frequency is critical to build our teams, given the collective nature of our work.

The sharing of information and results of decision making processes with everyone in the organization is important. This is critical, both in terms of making everyone feel included, and building the organization's work on the basis of everyone's capabilities. Keeping communication channels open is important for collective meaning making and for fostering internal democracy as well.

Reflexive organizations often realize that channels of internal and external communication draw upon the same processes and elements, and involve little duplication of work, if ever. Both these modes of communication also reinforce each other's effectiveness by helping to better align the organization's vision and mission with its operations. Sometimes we gain clarity about our work by talking about what we are doing with each other, by communicating with others, and then reflecting about both these processes.

Another important, and related, aspect of the externally facing work of communication is to do with creating and sustaining collectives across organizations in the ecosystem. The work that we attempt to do is huge. The external ecosystem is often hostile. We need to talk to other like-minded organizations, communicate with them regularly, and build solidarities and networks. This is also an aspect of communication that we as CSOs need to pay attention to.

We Are the Stories We Tell
A Personal Reflection

Rishabh Lalani

In 2017, I bought a calendar. The calendar had a headline. "We are the stories we tell ourselves", it read. We are the stories we remember. I am the outcome of the stories I have felt in my surroundings. I am the sum of all the stories that I heard from my late grandfather. My imagination is shaped by the outlandish narratives of Goscinny and Uderzo in the Asterix and Obelix comics, and the countless stories that I have heard, felt and read in my life so far. Much like me, I am sure that you too are shaped by the various stories in your life.

The way we communicate and exchange our lives is through stories. Human beings are distinct in the way we communicate. We feel, we give voice to our feelings, and we express them through writing, singing, music, drawing, dance and so much more. And in all of this, we are constantly exchanging our thoughts, building our understanding of the world, and inspiring others around us. It is no surprise then that communicating effectively is critical to our work as members of civil society and change agents.

One-to-one connections sustain based on contact and relationships. But, as individuals turn into organizations, communication moves from one to many. This requires institutionalization of communication practices and storytelling in a way where individuals not only feel connected to a mission, but also become its champions. This is particularly difficult for small and medium sized organizations. And this is where everything falls flat.

Most organizations limit themselves to creating social media pages, asking a few friends to like these and ultimately get tired of the process of posting updates to an audience that doesn't even care about the work. We forget the value of storytelling and we forget that we need an audience for our stories.

Social development is a dreary space – hunger, poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy are not joyful situations. People working in these spaces face despondency daily. And failure is part of the job, possibly much more than success. How then can one communicate in a way that nurtures hope? And what is the value of telling any story?

In my years of mobilizing resources and amplifying voices, I have learnt some first principles of communicating with stakeholders. Through this piece, I reflect on some of these first principles and practical tools.

1. **Whose story is it anyway?** Years ago, a non-profit CEO had told me that it will be easy to raise money for our work because our work is *good*. Some years before that I had gone on a date and the girl on the other side asked me why she should date me? I told her that I was a good person. She retorted that most people are good and that doesn't mean we marry anyone who is good. Well, you get the point.

   Being good is never reason enough for finding support. In saying we do good work, we make ourselves the hero of our stories. It isn't uncommon to see websites, brochures and CEOs speak about how they are reaching the poorest, the USP of their programs and so on. But the hero of your story is the audience you are catering to, not you. What is in it for them to listen to the story? What is the connection they must feel? It is a question nobody asks. Ask this and see your perspective shift.

2. **We live in mistrust.** We ask auditors to certify accounts, lawyers to represent us in courts, doctors to certify our sickness. People really don't trust each other. Our environment promotes it. Non-profits operate in a fragmented ecosystem, where there is no way to differentiate one education project from another. There is no way for a potential donor to quickly build trust.

   The key to solving for mistrust is to enable multiple repeat interactions. If you have identified your audience, ask yourself, where are they present? How do you reach them at a certain periodicity? Keep showing up and let them know that you are here for good.

3. **But where do I show up?** Social media means everyone is online. It also means everyone is online in different places. Each platform offers only a certain kind of reach. Keeping tab of everyone everywhere is both time intensive and costly. It is important to find where most of your audience is and what they most resonate with. This will affect who you hire, the content you create and the ways you enable for your audience to interact with you.

4. **Human beings want connection.** We are wired that way. When thinking of telling a story, think of relatability. If you know your audience well, you know what they will respond to the most. Most people respond to a connection with the people they are supporting directly. Several organizations today conduct quarterly calls, city-based/location-specific gatherings and personalized stories to get the message across. See what suits you best.

5. **Some miscommunication is fine.** People don't always flip if you slip up a little. But only a little. Persistent miscommunication (including absence of communication) leads to high levels of mistrust and can breakdown relationships. People are usually forgiving of some mistakes and in fact, it is often a sign of you being human. In a world dominated by artificial intelligence, let people know that you are personally invested in talking to them.

6. **But what do I say?** The truth is people do not care so much. The content of the story is not as critical as how the story is told. This is called building the narrative. Think of movies that have had opposing stories with the same actors and yet the outcome is the same or even better.

   Your narrative holds the key to how your audience views you. Use tools like storyboarding to organize your narrative and see what resonates deeply with you and your audience. It is hit and trial. However, you will build evidence and intuition over time to know what clicks.

7. **All stories are the same**. What's common between the story of Krishna and Harry Potter? What's common between Star Wars and Lord of the Rings? Think about it. It is the story of a young boy, who poses a threat to another man and is raised by a foster family to ultimately save the world.

   One could juxtapose most stories in the world to say that almost all our stories emerge from a few. Our stories aren't as novel as we think. Where we place them, and how we narrate them, change the way we are received.

8. **There is a power dynamic.** We tell stories to our supporters because they hold power over us. It is an unequal relationship. One in which they command the resources we want to garner. We therefore owe it to them to ensure that they get the most relevant and relatable content. It must also be provided in a manner that is easily consumable for them.

   In a world where everyone gets a dozen newsletters a day, how does yours stand out? And how the supporter feels part of your narrative is an important consideration to keep in mind. Think of building contrast in your stories, using data creatively, personalizing content, and making the story about the audience.

9. **Consistency is the key.** The best content presented incoherently with varying colours, fonts, tonality and periodicities is worse off than average content presented with consistency across. The key is to aim for consistency rather than perfection. Functional is always better than slick.

10. **The world does not need to be on our side.** Our stories don't need to make sense to everyone. This means that some people will never believe in us and sometimes might even question us. But those who do must always be catered to and connected with. A few supporters over a long period of time will stick around only if they feel that we truly communicate with them. Building a strong pipeline that allows significant engagement with this set ensures that they represent us as our champions and mascots.

Recently, I heard the phrase 'creatively maladjusted'. Martin Luther King used it in the context of challenging power to redefine the status quo. I have learnt these first principles within the practice of being a maladjusted fundraiser. I hope you challenge yourself too, to become maladjusted to the status quo of benign storytelling and use the power of your experiences to amplify unheard voices.

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Whose Voice Do I Want to Hear?

Medha Kale

In the summer of 2008, the world yet again marvelled at human imagination and the wonders of structural engineering: The Bird's Nest stadium at Beijing Olympics. An engineering marvel described as "an enormous saddle-shaped elliptic steel structure weighing 42,000 t." The strength, the structure and the steel won many a praise.

Listening to Marginalized Voices

The accolades did not really resonate well with Arjun Velip, though. Arjun is a small farmer and a traditional healer from Kolomb, a remote and picturesque village in Quepem, Goa. Since 2007, Velip could not access pockets of forest around his home to get essential herbs and medicinal plants. His paddy fields were covered in red soil. The natural streams had ceased to flow due to the incessant and unregulated mining of iron ore on the mountains above his village.

This iron ore had helped build the Bird's Nest. The mining barons reaped profits. The Bird's Nest earned praise. Thousands who lived in remote villages of Goa and Karnataka suffered grave damages to their lives and livelihoods.

It was the anti-mining groups in Goa and their work that led me to Kolomb. I talked to Arjun Velip and his cousin Rama Velip, a key figure in the campaign to understand their universe through their lived experience. Bringing forth his story in the time of strife was important to showcase the all-pervasive impact of mining, on not just nature but on people as well.

For field workers like us, it has always been important to listen to these voices.

A woman from a remote village in Marathwada did not utter a single word all through a two-day training program on women and health. A close conversation with her revealed that she was suffering from depression since the birth of her third daughter. She was made to live alone on a farm, with no help or support from her family.

Her story led us to the almost non-existent nature of mental healthcare in both public and private sectors. The field organization started talking about mental illness and reached out to other women. It then built a campaign around mental health and rational care.

With awareness, support from her colleagues and some medication, this woman could deal with her illness. The social structures that did not want a girl child, that too the third one, hardly changed. But she was back in her house.

Numbers or Narratives?

Since 2000, I have worked with many groups at the grassroot level in urban and rural areas of Maharashtra. My work has involved training, resource creation and the designing of community programs around women and health issues. I learnt through the stories of Arjun Velip and countless others. Their stories helped me design programs that respond to people's needs, and to put faces to the numbers that we keep reporting.

Our systems which focus more on numbers, than the stories behind those numbers, do not encourage us to report on people's lived experiences. But these stories, miniscule in terms of numbers, tell us much more than what we know from the loads of data.

They help us put a face to the problem. They give us nuanced understanding of the issues at hand, with all their social, economic and political contexts. It helps us make meaning of the news and reports that we read or watch as well. And sometimes, it also aids us find what is missing in these reports or news.

The PARI Story

In 2015, P. Sainath, a renowned journalist chronicling the countryside for more than thirty years, founded People's Archive of Rural India (PARI). PARI is a living journal, a breathing archive, and a textbook for future generations.

PARI is supported by contributions of many individuals. People donate money, equipment, and contribute their time and volunteering efforts, making PARI the most trusted journal on rural India. PARI does not accept any corporate funds or government grants.

PARI hosts and combines videos, photos, audio and text archives. It records the lives and livelihoods of poor and everyday Indians. And it is in our mandate to search for ways in which the very people we cover, rural Indians, will also have access to, and a say in, the making of this site.

PARI publishes in 15 languages, generating original content in Indian languages, enabling people to write in their own words, idioms and tongues.

Through PARI Education, students as young as 12 are writing about their lives, their villages and neighbourhoods.

To know more, please visit https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/

March 22, 2020. We were in Tuljapur, a small temple town in Maharashtra. The news of a new virus was in the air. The virus itself was yet to arrive. The fear and panic came first. And first, our state went into lockdown. And then followed the nationwide lockdown announced by the PM on 24th of March. And, for the next few weeks and months, Doordarshan and almost all national TV channels, kept on talking about the coronavirus, bombarding us with data on new infections, deaths, tests, and vaccines, etc.

Outside the 'idiot box,' we met people walking from Kanyakumari trying to reach their homes in Madhya Pradesh. People were walking back to Tuljapur from Mumbai and Pune. Where were they on these news channels?

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Independent Media: Ears to the Ground

People's Archive of Rural India (PARI) published close to 200 stories reporting from the ground, almost one everyday, starting from the week the lockdown was imposed. These were people's stories - stories of those who walked, who died, who suffered because of lack of healthcare, who were beaten and sprayed with disinfectants. These were people who were crushed by a moving train, and children who had to work as schools shut, and parents lost their jobs and incomes.

PARI also reported on how the rich became richer during the pandemic. The scathing pieces by P. Sainath, Founder-Editor of PARI, tell us how the number of dollar billionaires in India increased, when most Indians were struggling to eat two square meals.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, PARI reported on the hardships faced by people after the disastrous decision of demonetization. PARI talked to farmers, wage labourers, students and workers. It documented how this decision ruined the rural and agrarian economies. PARI, and similar other independent media outlets, helped us understand what really happened in cities and in the countryside.

The Role of Independent Media

PARI and many independent news channels tell stories that need to be told. Be it Aadhar and the debate on the right to privacy, demonetization and the havoc it played in the countryside, and COVID-19. They continued reporting on Covid-19 throughout the course of the pandemic. They reported on the unseen and invisible aspects of the illness.

For example, a report on Gaon Connection (September 20, 2021) tells us about how Covid-19 has impacted the mental health of women workers from tea gardens in Assam. Reports on Newslaundry, another independent media channel, made us aware of the 'infodemic' and cautioned us on layoffs in newsrooms and media houses. Similar analytical reports on the pandemic and its impact appeared in The Wire and Scroll as well.

Pollinating by Hand: Igniting the Heart

Recently I presented a few PARI stories by Senthalir S. about hand pollinators from Karnataka to a class of MA students at TISS, Tuljapur. The stories talked about these women, their labour and hardships.

A young student in her early twenties, looking very urban, speaking fine English, read these stories and came up to me the next day. Ratnavva, the main character of the story, reminded her of her own grandmother, belonging to the Madiga caste, who was a hand pollinator.

It brought some solace to her that someone shared stories of women like her grandmother and their hard work.

The Wire started in 2015 with the founding premise that if good journalism is to survive and thrive, it can only do so by being both editorially and financially independent. This means relying principally on contributions from readers and concerned citizens who have no interest other than to sustain a space for quality journalism. The Wire has proven time and again how good, old-fashioned reporting can build a platform that gives us authoritative commentaries on issues of national and international interest.

Another independent digital platform Newslaundry is famous for its quirky videos, animated videos and analysis of current affairs. It is a reader-supported and independent media company focusing on news. Through media critique, reportage, podcasts, documentaries, comics and animation, their stories bring to us the latest in current affairs in innovative and engaging formats.

These and other independent digital media spaces are playing a very important role in today's world. Especially when India's ranking in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index has fallen to 150 out of 180 countries, according to the latest report released by the global media watchdog, Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Today, most TV news channels are owned by India's five richest corporate houses. What we consume as news and entertainment is controlled either directly through ownership, or through advertisements, by a handful of corporates.

Corporate control of TV and electronic media on one hand, and increasing control and interference of the state in the independent digital news universe on the other, is curbing free voice and opinions in India.

When more and more mainstream media are owned by corporates, many having abandoned the independent rural beat, it is important that we keep the alternative spaces alive.

When voices against the government get termed as 'anti-national,' when growing number of journalists are arrested or face action for their independent voices, we as citizens, reporters, teachers, students, farmers and workers need to 'occupy' media as the 'ninety-nine per cent'.

How Do We Use These Platforms?

As an occasional teacher, I find these media platforms extremely useful as learning resources. They provide us first hand reports of the people that we seek to know about. The stories and analyses offered by these platforms help students relate what they learn in their textbooks to actual lived experiences. It also helps them connect their own realities to theories, and to create knowledge.

As field activists, social workers and development professionals, we can use these platforms both ways. One of these modes is to access information, analyses and knowledge.

The other is to contribute our own experiences and stories on these platforms. These are spaces where the reporters have their ears to the ground. Field activists or students can be those ears and bring voices from the ground to the world of media.

The reports, news and stories of today told by people, and shared on free and independent platforms, are going to be the textbooks for future generations.

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The Simple Guide to Communication

Learnings of a One-Person Team

Vidhi Bhardwaj

Let's assume in a room full of people, we state the following: "70% of children in India study in Government schools, and they do not receive high-quality learning."

Based on their responses, we can categorize the people in the room into three groups. One of these will comprise of people unfamiliar with the statistic. For them, this is brand new information. Another category will be of people familiar with the statistic. However, they are unsure of what actions they can take to address it. The third may comprise of people who assume the context and cause of this statistic.

As SEF's communications team, we want to address all these three categories of people. We try to build awareness and understanding of the problem. We share stories of change and clear calls to action. We also advocate for the system, challenge people's assumptions and create spaces for them to engage with the challenge.

At SEF, we have realized, our role does not stop at sharing the problem statement or how we are solving it. What follows is a strategic plan to build awareness and knowledge of the 'why,' a shared understanding of the values we lead with, a lens into the lives of the people we serve, and the vision of a better tomorrow.

Throughout the article, we are sharing questions and prompts that have helped us start our journey of building our communications. We hope it helps you too. So, let's begin:

- How do people respond to your problem statement?

- How do you want to address them?

Social media campaigns like Gamechangers are run to educate and inform

Designing Communication

'Engage, Learn and Grow' - SEF's Learning Philosophy: Our communication design process has shifted over the years. We are still in an experimental phase. However, we are committed to engage with different practices, learn from our experiments, and grow with the help of our learnings. Over the last nine years, we have come to anchor our communication on three core questions:

A) What is our purpose?

B) Who is our audience?

C) How do we communicate our purpose to diverse audiences?

SEF | Why
To ensure all children receive high-quality foundational and social-emotional learning inside government schools

Communication Vertical | Why
To be a voice of hope and share the impact of high-quality learning

Communication with a Purpose | Why & What

One of the early mistakes we made in designing our communication plans was seeing our organization's purpose as synonymous with the communication vertical's 'Why'.

This 'why' is not over and above the organization, but a natural extension of the same. It enabled us to identify that we want to show a glimpse of the better tomorrow we envision. This glimpse can often get overwhelming.

Hence, we worked on identifying key areas we wanted to focus on. We call them our 'Pillars of Work.' These are also the pillars of our communication. These pillars of work are outlined in our 'Communications Guide,' a comprehensive document outlining key communication principles and tools at SEF.

This guide caters to internal and external team members. It empowers them to capture stories and insights in alignment with our 'Pillars of Work'.

Pause & Think

• What do you want your communications vertical to do?

• How do you want your organization to sound? This is your organization's voice.

• What are your pillars/core areas of work?

Knowing your Audience | Who

In an ideal scenario identifying our audience would be simple. However, for a successful communications strategy, deep diving into your audience's interests and demographics is a continuous exercise.

We can categorize them into funders, partners and stakeholders. We can also move to nuanced, contextual and personalized categorizations by aligning with their interests and values.

We have built an understanding of our audience through observations and digital media statistics. For example, our audience on LinkedIn likes to learn about educator practices and research, whereas our audience on Instagram likes to stay connected with stories from the ground. However, these audience insights are evolving with continuous data collection. We have kept our communication strategy flexible to respond to these evolving needs.

We cater to unique audiences on digital platforms as well as long-term supporters, partners and government stakeholders. We engage them through diverse channels and facilitate the deepening of understanding and alignment with our pillars of work.

Through conversations and observations, we bucket our audience into four broad categories: a) Skeptics, who need to be invested in our work and aligned to its purpose; b) Learners who want to see ground realities and impact to deepen their understanding; c) Believers who receive consistent updates on our journey to strengthen their belief; d) Champions who are enthusiastic and active advocates of our work.

Our role is to take our audience from where they are to becoming champions of our vision. Hence, we design personalized communication aligned to their journeys.

Adding depth and personalization to communication design is a massive time investment with equal returns to the relevance of your communication.

Pause & Think

- Who is your key audience?

- What do they want to learn?

- What is the best way to enable their learning?

Data Driven Decisions | How

The above two exercises will make us realize that there are multiple ways of sharing our stories and multiple stories to share. Modern media has spoilt us for choices that often depend on algorithms. However, data and gut have both played an important role in our strategy.

Data has been everything from engagement numbers on social media to self-analysis, feedback, and insights we receive from the audience. This quantitative and qualitative data informs small decisions like leveraging videos and carousels instead of static posts to using physical reports and artefacts to communicate with our government stakeholders. And, you can do this without

Here's a well-being activity for you!

Draw your own river of life!
All you need is paper, art supplies and a reflective space of mind!

Here is an "Energy Playlist" of songs curated by our educators from the well-being circles to help you pause and reflect.

Enabling people to experience SEF's well-being practices

Simple Education Foundation

paid software and complicated excels. The sky is blue, pick the metrics you want to track, and practices you want to test in your communications.

For example, we started setting hypotheses on different communications tactics we planned to use in the quarter. At the end of the quarter, we came back, shared our hypothesis analysis, and always learned something new about our purpose and audience.

Commitments for the Future

Development communication is a developing area of expertise, and we are learning with it. There are many gaps in the sector's strategic approach to communications and even more possibilities. Here are some things we are excited to do and see in the future.

Stakeholders at the Centre

Our communication goals may vary from building awareness to shifting mindsets. However, what remains constant is the centrality of the people we serve. Just as we design a lesson plan keeping the student at the center, communication is designed keeping in mind the audience. Instead of sharing the impact of a new language curriculum on children's reading levels, we want to share a child's or teacher's experience with the curriculum. What did they see, think and feel when teaching and learning through this curriculum. Integrating human-centred design into our communications strategy has completely transformed how we look at the field.

Building a Learning Community

Most small to medium sized non-profit organizations today have a small (read one member) team for communication. These individuals come with diverse skillsets of writing, content and visual design, product design, content creation, filmmaking and lot more. And, the field is based on experiential learning, with individuals relying on the organization's financial bandwidth and project priorities to learn and implement new

Hypothesis

Our LinkedIn audience is inclined towards practice and research based learning pieces

Next Steps

Create learning posts on three classroom practices that have shown a positive impact in our classrooms

Learning

Proven right. Given the high volume of educator audience, even text-heavy posts led to high engagement. Including voices of teachers and students made it even more relevant.

Pause & Think

- What are the metrics you consider when planning communications?

- What are the practices you want to test through your communication practices?

Why is student-educator well-being crucial?

"Now that schools are reopening, they must first welcome the return of children, with warmth and reassurance. The classroom must be a safe and non-threatening space where children can shed the anxiety, stress and isolation of the last two years." (Indian Express, March 2022)

Read why student well-being and educator autonomy is the keystone to building back joyful and safe classrooms.

Leveraging Newsletters

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things. Naturally we risk a learning stagnation as professionals and individuals in the field.

Waiting for courses designed to enable our learning in the Indian landscape is an option. However, we see immense potential in the collective of non-profit professionals across the country to tackle this challenge. Therefore, we hope to engage, learn and grow with other professionals in the field.

Balancing Hopes and Challenges

"It's bad, but it's getting better."

Hans Rosling is a renowned physician who wrote 'Factfullness', a book that uses data to share 8 facts about the world, with the hope to make you realize that the world is getting better. This is where the narrative of his book challenges you, because it proves that the world is getting better, but at the same time you can see it's not the best.

As development communication professionals, we face this challenge every day. And we owe it to our teams and stakeholders to always balance challenges

Pause & Think

What is your commitment for the future of development communications in India?

with hope. Celebrate big and small things and highlight challenges to build context. Because it may be bad. But thanks to people we work with every day, it is getting better.

We will be happy to learn and grow with you!

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Connect On:

Development Communication

From the Lens of a Small-scale Organization Working in a Tier-II City

Adwait Dandwate

We started Vardhishnu in 2013. I consider myself as someone who does not speak a lot. I guess that also became the personality of the organization. We worked quietly for the first couple of years, without sharing a lot about our work in newspapers, social media and even with our supporters.

However, one day I met a senior industrialist from Jalgaon. He knew about our work and was a good supporter. He told me, "Adwait, you guys are doing a really good job. It is a one of its kind initiatives for the street children in Jalgaon. But very few people know about it. You need to communicate about it more often and consistently. It will not only help the organization but will also spread the message in society."

Similar feedback by a few friends and supporters made me realize that we need to be louder about the work we do. It is not only for the betterment of the organization. It also helps to create awareness about the cause for which we are working.

Effective communication plays a pivotal role in the development of any organization. But when it comes to an organization like us, which is working in a Tier–II city, it becomes the need of the hour. It requires constant and structured efforts to engage and invest the audience in the work of the organization.

All organizations use communication in different manners for different purposes. But there is a difference in communication and development communication. Development communication is the integration of strategic communication in development projects. It strives for behaviour change and not just information dissemination, education or awareness rising.

In simple words, development communication refers to the use of communication to facilitate social development. Meaningful communication also means getting information out to audiences, listening to their feedback and responding appropriately.

Before we deep-dive into the subject, let me quickly tell you who we are. We are a Jalgaon-based not-for-profit trying to create an ecosystem of learning and support for children from vulnerable backgrounds. We work with child waste-pickers, child laborers, and children of sex workers, sanitary workers and daily wagers.

We run community learning centers called 'Anandghar' (A Home of Happiness) in and around the city. In these spaces we work on nurturing reading and writing comprehension, inculcating age-appropriate life-skills, health and physical well-being. We also engage with parents and communities with an intention to take children out of the vicious cycle of child labour to enrol and sustain them in schools.

I would also like to mention here that I am no expert in communications. Whatever I write in this article has come from the exciting journey of running a not-for-profit for more than nine years. We learned a few things as an organization by talking to experts.

However, most of the things we learned have been from our own experiences. So, you might agree with some of the things mentioned here, you might disagree with the others. But I would love to know your viewpoints, suggestions and feedback, if any.

Development Communication for Us

We started our journey in the not-for-profit space with a good intent but lack of resources, experience and support. We spent lots of time building a good communication strategy. It was a long and evolving journey which is still going on.

When we started working with children, we thought that it would be enough to create safe spaces within the community to give a safe and happy childhood to children. However, very soon we realized that our centers cannot run in isolation. We cannot work in isolation.

The children with whom we work face lot of stigmatization within settlements where they live, in schools from their peers, as well as from the society at large, which holds many biases and prejudices about them. Our role as an organization does not restrict us to create safe spaces within the community. We need to work on creating general awareness about the issue as well.

At Vardhishnu, we look at communication from four lenses. One, internal communication, which involves communicating within the organization. Second, communicating with all the stakeholders, to keep them informed about the on-ground implementation. Third, spreading the word about the organization's work. And, fourth, creating general awareness about the cause for which we are working.

For the article, we are going to focus on external communication. Let's look at all the aspects one by one.

Keeping Stakeholders Informed about On-ground Implementation

Working in a Tier-II city like Jalgaon has its own limitations when it comes to getting funding and support from CSRs. Unfortunately, a majority of them like to support initiatives closer to their working area. So most of our funding comes from individual donors. They say, "It is comparatively easy to get a donor, but very difficult to retain one." We learned it the hard way.

Most donors like to get regular updates about on-ground implementation. It assures them that the organization is making continuous efforts to bring the change. We struggled a lot in the initial days to share regular updates with donors. This resulted in many not willing to contribute again. We soon realized our mistake and decided to make certain modifications.

Parents, community members and supporters of Vardhishnu appreciating children performing on the stage

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We started a quarterly newsletter in Marathi, which is a regional language and a speaking language of most of our supporters, as well as one in English, to reach out to non-Marathi speaking audiences. Apart from this, we asked our donors, whether they would like to receive a short update every 15 days through WhatsApp. We created a broadcast list on WhatsApp (not a group, as most people are fed-up of unwanted and unnecessary messages and groups) and started sharing photographs and updates regularly. We also started regularly posting on social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.

But while doing that, we always make sure not to showcase our children, parents and communities in a disrespectful or derogatory manner. For example, we refrain from clicking photographs of distribution of material.

Today we have repeated donors who are contributing to Vardhishnu for more than 5-6-7 years. This strategy has helped us to build a large base of individual donors, who still contribute close to 40% of our total annual budget. On one hand, this reduces dependency on CSR support and funding agencies. On the other hand, it gives us the freedom to experiment. It has also given us much needed stability.

Spreading the Word about the Work

My conversation with the industrialist I mentioned at the beginning of the article had emphasized a lot about spreading the word about our work locally. Now the question was how to do it? Newspapers are undoubtedly one of the most useful media of communication, as they reach the masses. They have still not lost their credibility. Many people still rely on the newspaper for authentic information. But the most important question for us was, "How much is enough?"

On the other hand, when it encourages the team and the people involved, it is one slippery road. I have seen people getting obsessed with publishing news frequently. Another question was, "What to share?" Things which are news for others, like,

conducting sessions with children, having health camps, distributing nutritional supplements were and still are part of our regular day-to-day operations.

So what to give as a news item was a question for us. We decided to use this medium wisely. We started writing articles about the challenges faced by children from vulnerable backgrounds, different teaching-learning practices, joyful learning experiences, and our most memorable and cherished moments. We did start sharing the news about the work. But we maintained a decent frequency.

We also used online platforms like Your Story, The Better India, Logical Indian, in a similar manner. Similarly, we worked on building a strategy for social media which included figuring out the type of posts and their frequency. We also started regularly writing for Marathi magazines.

As we started to build on our work and began implementing our communication strategy, we were able to attract volunteers, supporters and visitors to our learning center. It was never about the numbers. It has always been about building a movement in support with the people who empathize with the idea of creating safe spaces for children from vulnerable backgrounds.

Creating Awareness about the Cause

Like I mentioned earlier, children with whom we work face lot of stigmatization. If we want to create an equitable and just society where every child has a safe, secure and happy childhood and equal opportunities to flourish, we need to talk about the hardships children from vulnerable backgrounds face. Here we are talking about behavioural and attitudinal shifts. This requires consistent, long-term efforts.

For more than four years we have conducted an annual arts and crafts exhibition of the things made by our children. Since last year we also started a cultural program where children sing songs, dance and perform drama. We ensure that both the events get good coverage in local as well as state level newspapers and news channels.

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Diya Painting Activity

Large number of audiences from diverse background visits and attend the events. They often end up getting mesmerized by the children's creativity. Both of these activities help us communicate the very important message, that given a chance every child can thrive.

Our annual diya (earthen lamp) painting activity also plays a very crucial role in this. The activity helps us to inculcate life-skills such as cooperation and expression. As the children go through the entire process from procurement to dispatching local orders, it gives them an idea about how a small scale business operates.

But most importantly, it helps us to spread the message of equal opportunities for children from vulnerable backgrounds, as well as that of dignified livelihoods.

We created a short documentary on this initiative with the help of our friend and posted it on YouTube. It is a hard hitting film. It talks about the children's challenges, and their parents and communities. It discusses in detail regarding our work and most importantly, 'Why we do, what we do.' As soon as it was posted on YouTube, it started getting widely circulated and our phones started ringing non-stop.

People wanted to know the types of diya we were selling and wanted to place their orders. For some, the delivery charges were more than the actual order. However, they were willing to pay for it. A few placed orders not for themselves but for the women who were involved in the activity. Others placed orders and asked us to distribute the diyas among Anandghar's children. They wanted to know how they could be part of the movement in the long run.

Communication Schedule

Type of Stakeholder	Type of Communication	Frequency
Donors, Supporters	Newsletter	Quarterly
	WhatsApp Message	Once in 15 days
Society at large	Arts & Crafts Exhibition	Once in a year
	Cultural Event	Once in a year
	Diya-Painting Activity	Once in a year

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Arts & Crafts Exhibition

We started taking children out with us to deliver the local orders. Visiting luxurious bungalows, and talking to doctors, industrialists, bankers and bureaucrats was altogether a different experience for them. At the same time, for most of the people who had never tried to break out of their own comfort zones, this was a mesmerizing experience. They were amazed by the children's creativity, confidence and critical thinking.

In the last four years, we have received orders from more than 15 states of the country. Slowly we have started getting orders for corporate gifting as well. In 2022, we got a chance to put up a stall in Grahak Peth, Mumbai. This is an annual exhibition with a rich history of 100 years.

We were invited to put a stall in the District Agriculture Office, one of the industries in Jalgaon. The interactions on these kinds of stalls gives us an opportunity to communicate our work with the larger audience to create awareness. It helps to spread the message that given a fair chance every child can thrive.

How to Implement Best Practices?

But one common question that is usually asked is, there are too many things to do. Small scale organizations do not have a separate budget or human resource to work on communications separately. So, how can we communicate effectively and efficiently with large audiences?

Even at Vardhishnu, I have faced this challenge. So in order to simplify the process, I created a small strategy for myself and for the organization. I created a schedule (as detailed in the table provided in the previous page), which involves the type of stakeholders involved, the type of communication to be used and its frequency.

This has helped us in building and maintaining good communication with all our stakeholders at regular intervals. It has helped people get invested in the cause and has made them feel part of the movement. It has increased their support and has helped to bring transparency in the work of the organization.

Many times after visiting our centers, attending our events, reading our newsletter and watching the documentary on YouTube, many people openly and honestly accept that they have never thought of the challenges faced by the children from vulnerable backgrounds.

They also promise to change their behaviour and treat children from vulnerable backgrounds with more empathy, love and compassion. I think this summarizes the importance of development communication.

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Connect On:

Learning to Communicate, Communicating to Learn
Resources for More Effective Development Communication

Samuhik Pahal Team

As non-profits we are often short on resources. Sometimes this affects our abilities to communicate our stories effectively. In this piece we have brought together two kinds of resources. The first are a set of three courses that help you and your team members learn the basics of development communication. The others are free online resources that you can use to actually implement your communication strategy. We hope you find these resources useful.

Resource Type: Course

Course Title: Communication for Development (C4D)

Mode: Online Course. It is self-paced and involves self-study.

Host Organization: UNICEF

Duration: The course can be completed at a pace preferred by the learner. It will take approximately 20-25 hours to complete the course.

Introduction to the Course: 'Communication for Development' introduces course participants to the field of Communication for Development (C4D). The course envisages C4D as an evidence-based process. It visualizes the course as a journey in which the learners engage with a melange of communication tools, channels and approaches. They are then expected to use these to facilitate social and behaviour change.

The course draws upon a range of fields and disciplines from the social, behavioural and communication sciences. It has been designed by UNICEF and Ohio University. The original objective was to train UNICEF's staff with the knowledge, skills and techniques that they needed to support its work. This course has now been adapted to a format that is online and paced according to the need and convenience of the learners. This makes it accessible to a wider and more general audience.

Methodology: The course has a MOOC format. Participants are expected to read texts and watch videos on their own. The course gives background textual material as well. This is expected to help the learners in navigating the course. In addition to the material provided as a necessary requirement for completing the course, the modules contain suggested and supplemental readings and videos as well.

Course Structure [As provided on the course website]

Module 1 - Principles and Concepts in C4D: Unit 1: Introduction to C4D ᛁ Unit 2: C4D Planning ᛁ Unit 3: C4D Implementation and Management

Module 2 - Behavior and Social Change: Theories in C4D ᛁ Unit 1: Behavior and Social Change Theory in C4D ᛁ Unit 2: Interpersonal-Level Change Theories ᛁ Unit 3: Community-Level Change Theories ᛁ Unit 4: Theory-Led C4D Research and Planning

Module 3 - C4D Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation: Unit 1: Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Concepts ı Unit 2: Participatory Research ı Unit 3: The C4D Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

For more details about the course, you may want to visit the following webpage: https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=11146

Resource Type: Residential training program for grassroots NGOs and CSOs

Name: Video Story-telling for Sharing Impact

Mode: Residential and fee-based.

Host Organization: DRISHTI: Media, Arts and Human Rights

Duration: The 2023 edition of this program to be held between February 8-13, at Sanand, Gujarat is envisaged as a six-day workshop.

Introduction to the Program: Video storytelling is an important contemporary communication tool. Smartphones can potentially democratize video creation by making the process economical and easy. The workshop will help nonprofits to hone their video storytelling abilities and help communicate the impact of their work.

The course facilitates a structured learning process. Participants are envisaged to develop the following skills: research, case studies and scriptwriting; videography and interviewing; sound recording and video editing; video editing software and apps; social media and basic SEO skills.

Course Outcome: Program participants are expected to develop the ability to create video stories. They are also expected to develop the competencies related to audio-visual documentation of projects and events. The program, although focused on skills, also aims to develop and build upon the learners' understanding of fundamental issues and perspectives related to communicating social issues.

More details about the 2023 edition of the training program may be found here. You may want to visit the following webpage: https://www.drishtimedia.org/community-video1 to know more about how Drishti works with CSOs to build their video storytelling capacities.

You may also contact Drishti at drishtimedia1993@gmail.com for exploring more in this space**.**

About the Resource Organization: DRISHTI is a development communication organization based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It was founded in 1993. It works towards capacity building of marginalized communities through various media related interventions that target social change. Drishti has worked with more than 50 partner organizations, and 40 community media units across 11 states in the country have been set up with the organization's support. It has trained 1000+ people in development communication. Drishti has produced over 30 documentary films as well.

Resource Type: Course

Course Title: Storytelling for Change

Mode: It is a free, online course, and operates on a 'pay what you can' model. However, the course website mentions a suggested contribution of 45 USD. Participation in the course is not contingent upon payment, though.

Host Organization: Acumen Academy

Duration: It is an online course that is run over six weeks. The next course starts on March 7, 2023.

Introduction to the Course: This is a practical, hands-on course. It helps the participants develop abilities to create their personal stories and weave these as part of larger communications to effectively connect with various stakeholders and to catalyse change. The course also provides training in a leadership presence framework, storytelling tools and presentation skills.

Methodology: The learning tools in the course include 6 reading guides, 5 workshop guides that help the participants develop their storytelling capabilities, 15 relevant videos, and other supplemental resources.

Course Structure [As provided on the course website]

Section 1: Introduction to Storytelling

Section 2: Storytelling and Leadership Presence

Section 3: Story Content, Form, and Expressiveness

Section 4: Getting Ready to Present

Section 5: Putting it All Together

Section 6: Reflect and Look Forward

For more details about the course, you may want to visit the following webpage: https:// acumenacademy.org/course/storytelling- change/

Content creation in the development sector can be challenging. It often requires communicating complex information in an engaging and accessible way. Fortunately, there are many tools available to help content creators in this field. We share some interesting and useful tools with you here.

Canva is a graphic design platform with readymade templates that you can use to create documents, emailers, websites, videos, social media graphics and presentations. You can also collaborate with your team members, organize your files and folders, and schedule the publication of your content, using this platform. The basic version of the platform is free for all users. It also offers additional functionalities and features in the form of paid subscriptions like Canva Pro and Canva for Enterprise. However, if you are a registered nonprofit, social impact organization or health organization, you can use their 'Canva Pro for Nonprofits' initiative. This allows your team, for up to 10 team members, access to Canva Pro for free,

at no cost at all. Additionally, their website also hosts free tutorials on how to use Canva.
Website: https://www.canva.com/en_in/canva-for-nonprofits/

Piktochart is a tool for creating infographics, reports, and other visual content. It offers a variety of customizable templates and allows you to import your own data and images. Piktochart has a free version and a paid version with nonprofit discount.
Website: https://piktochart.com/

Freedcamp is a cloud-based project management tool that provides users with a range of features to plan, organize, and track their projects. It is designed to help individuals and teams of all sizes manage their tasks and projects, from simple to complex. Freedcamp offers a range of tools, including task management, time tracking, team collaboration, and project reporting. Users can create tasks and subtasks, assign them to team members, and set due dates and priorities. They can also track their time spent on tasks, as well as collaborate with their team members through comments and file sharing.
Website: https://freedcamp.com/

Hemingway Editor is a writing tool that analyzes your text and provides suggestions for making it more readable and concise. It highlights complex sentences, overused words, and other potential issues to help you improve your writing. It can be particularly helpful for non-native English speakers or for those who want to ensure their writing is error-free.
Website: https://hemingwayapp.com

Photopea is a free online image editing tool that offers many of the same features as Photoshop, including layers, masks, and filters. It can open and save files in a variety of formats, including PSD, JPEG, and PNG.
Website: https://www.photopea.com/

OpenShot is a free and open-source video editing tool. It can be used for tasks such as trimming, cutting and adding transitions to videos. It includes a range of video and audio effects, as well as support for multiple tracks and layers.
Website: https://www.openshot.org/

Unsplash is a website for proprietary stock photography. It has been reported as a leading photography website by many publications. It claims that its growing library has over 3.48 million photos. Photos hosted on Unsplash are covered by the Unsplash license, which gives users permission to download images and to copy, modify and use the images under certain conditions specified by the website.
Website: https://unsplash.com

Wikimedia Commons is a project of Wikimedia Foundation. It functions as a repository of free-to-use images, sounds, videos and other media. As of February 2023, it works as a free archive of over 90 million free-to-use media files. Wikimedia Commons only accepts free content. This means that the media files hosted here are not subject to copyright restrictions. However, the website of the archive specifies that it is the reusers who are responsible for using the media according to the license and not violating any laws that are specific to their countries.
Website: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Many communication tools already provide nonprofit pricing or may offer discounted prices upon request. If you contact them through their "Contact Us" page, most will respond to your inquiry.

Communication for Development

Aastha Maggu

Development communication aims to enable stakeholders to challenge deep-rooted stigma against certain groups and encourage adoption of positive norms and behaviors. The organizations we spoke with leverage development communication to capacitate stakeholders to meaningfully engage with their world and work towards social change by altering attitudes and enabling learning. These partners collaborate with stakeholders across the board – individuals, communities and institutions. They also use communication to garner more supporters and resources for their cause.

Latika Roy Foundation

Established in 1994, Latika Roy Foundation (LRF) is a voluntary organization based in Dehradun, India, working with children and adults with developmental disabilities. As a resource center for people with special needs, they provide early intervention services, livelihoods development, education, training and awareness.

LRF sees development communication as one way to encourage positive norms and behavior that accords respect and recognizes the agency of people with disabilities.

Jo Chopra, Executive Director of LRF, shared that she grew up in a progressive family. Yet she admits that it was only after she had adopted Moy Moy, a girl with special needs and became a disability professional that she started reflecting on how typical people communicate about people with disabilities.

Jo shared that at LRF they are constantly refining how the organization communicates about people with disabilities. Jo said, "In our

Latika Roy Foundation

communication, we focus on ensuring that disabled people are portrayed as people with agency, and we constantly remind ourselves that it is not ours to give, it's already theirs."

LRF tries to not solely focus on the disability but on the individual, seeing disability as a feature, a part of who someone is, but not the sole defining factor. Their team communicates in a way that does not necessarily refer to someone's disability. The team encourages children and people with disabilities to talk about their interests and share their opinions. The LRF team also understands that some disabled people prefer to highlight their disability.

Latika Roy Foundation

She shared, "I find that wherever there is a perceived difference, people feel it's important to highlight it. So if you have a friend who's a different religion or race or gender identity to you, you always want to somehow bring it into the conversation. Same with disability. As part of our development communication, we keep challenging people to ask themselves: what are these versions of 'normality' that I've adopted? And we start with ourselves, because we can only change ourselves."

When communicating about rights, LRF stresses that they are not doing anybody any favors. "For example, the word inclusion. It's a passive word which implies that one side has the power to include or not. Disabled people, on the other hand, ask: "Who are you to include us? We're already here." I think when we take those words we think

we've agreed on, when we pull them out and argue about them, we have to pause and question our assumptions. That is what this communication is all about."

Jo highlighted that the way in which we communicate is evidence of our own limited understanding of disabilities. Terms like symptoms, red flags, challenging behavior need to be reexamined in the light of what we now know about ableism. In typical child development, for example, parents and teachers often speak of temper tantrums, a well accepted term for those emotional outbursts when 2 and 3-year-olds are beginning to push back against authority, especially their parents' control.

When we call it a temper tantrum, Jo says, we give it a negative spin. Now that child development is better understood, we have realized how important it is for a child's growth and future independence that they assert themselves, separate from their parents and become their own persons. However, we also realize how hard it is for very young children to cope with all the stress that entails. When we change the words, we start to change the way we think about it.

Since 1997, the team has also released an annual calendar. Jo noted that in pictures, children with disabilities are often shown in wheelchairs, looking glum and pitiful. In the LRF calendar, the photographs are upbeat, funny and interesting, a deliberate pushback against the prevailing stereotypes people have about disabled kids.

Jo shared, "We consciously decided that we will not make our kids look pathetic to get people to donate or understand our work. All our photographs reflect the reality we live with and that has been our watchword for 30 years. I think one of our big contributions to disability in India is to give it an authentic, positive look."

Jo is a writer and communicator, and does a lot of public speaking. For years, she has

also been writing for a blog hosted on the organization's website. Her blog posts cover a myriad of themes such as reflections and insights from her life and as a practitioner in the field of disabilities.

The LRF team sees development communication as a means to question our deeply internalized stereotypes. It aims to educate people to communicate in a manner that recognizes and respects the agency of people and children with disabilities.

Apni Shala Foundation

Apni Shala works with children and educators to build social and emotional skills and to strengthen educational institutions for promotive and preventive mental health. They collaborate with the government and low-fee schools.

Rohit, CEO of Apni Shala shares, "Two very critical aspects of social-emotional learning (SEL) is to, one, create opportunities for students to learn and practice social emotional competencies, and two, for the ecosystem of stakeholders to become caring and compassionate for which it is very critical that they understand what this means."

The Apni Shala team is aware that the vocabulary surrounding SEL is complex and may discourage people from understanding the cause. They try to consciously use terms that are used by the stakeholders themselves. For instance, when the Apni Shala facilitators start engaging with educators and caregivers on what SEL is, they do not straight away jump in with terminologies.

Rohit adds, "Our facilitators try to understand what their level of understanding is. They consciously try to not bring in terms that confuse them. In some schools, we see educators are already familiar with value education or life-skills education. We try to use that thread to start discussing SEL. Similarly, with parents, we check with them what are the problems their child faces in school. For instance, if someone says bullying, then we try asking them the impact of bullying among students and how we can build social-emotional competencies in children."

Rohit also added that they believe their understanding of SEL is growing and evolving over the years. The Apni Shala team is inspired from the constructivist theory where learners are considered to be active participants in their learning journeys and knowledge is continuously constructed based on experiences. It is believed that new ideas get incorporated with their prior knowledge. The team, thus, sees that their learning, vocabulary and communication on SEL thereby cannot be static.

Apni Shala Foundation

Apni Shala Foundation

The Apni Shala team sees that there is a dearth of resource material on SEL. They produce **resources** informed by practice. These include articles, blogs, videos, etc. to advocate for SEL and SEL-integrated education by engaging with the audience online. The team believes that it also gives them an avenue to reflect on varied aspects of their work and learnings at Apni Shala.

Team members are encouraged to work on the content. There are guidelines laid down to help each contributor navigate conceptualization of theme, development of content and the process of multi-staged reviewing. The team reviews if the content, language and narrative styles are aligned with their communications guidelines, values of mindfulness, diversity, equity and inclusion, and constructivist learning theory.

The team, in streamlining their communication efforts, have also adopted brand guidelines. These guidelines are the set of rules that define the overall look of the brand. They help build a brand identity that the audience can recognize across all platforms. It outlines everything from typography and color palette to the tone of voice and mission statement.

The Apni Shala team strategically uses development communication to empower stakeholders to engage with children and understand SEL.

Makkala Jagriti

Set up in 2003, Makkala Jagriti (MJ) strives to create safe and friendly spaces for children from marginalized communities facilitating opportunities for their holistic development. The organization has focused programs for early childhood care and education, primary school children and youth.

MJ has been facilitating children and youth to overcome their socio-economic roadblocks and embrace their true potential by creating conducive learning environments and using a holistic approach. They work with public institutions such as anganwadis, government schools and government children's homes. They commit to involving key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, department functionaries and community members to improve learning opportunities for children.

Sunayana Chatrapathy, CEO of Makkala Jagriti, shared that for many years, the external communications strategy of MJ was neglected. She said, "We realized that a lot of people asked us how come we have been working in the space for 20 years and they had never heard about us. It is because we did not spend time on external communications and building visibility. We realized that it is a disservice to our purpose itself, if we are not talking about our work. Since we stand for building a social movement and getting more people involved towards that cause, it is important that we talk about our purpose and work to the world."

The team follows an ecosystem approach across all programs. It works with all the stakeholders around the child. These include parents, communities, teachers, and government functionaries. Similarly in their communication strategy, MJ focuses on providing information about their programs, vision, purpose, etc. to all the relevant stakeholders.

Sunayana shared that in their communication with parents, they focus on it being non-

Makkala Jagriti

threatening and dialogic. Sunayana shared, "In communication with parents, there can be a tendency to go with an attitude that I am here to tell you something or to often talk them down. I think Makkala Jagriti's success so far has been because of the non-threatening approach we follow, where the stakeholders are made to feel equal. Our approach to communication is embedded in the principles we follow for our programs."

The MJ team, through WhatsApp groups, remains in close contact with parents and teachers. With other stakeholders, it periodically shares reports for updates.

In their communication, the focus is also on advocating the practices and approaches that they believe are working well on the ground. Sunayana added that "Sometimes it takes a turn of advocacy where we are trying to advocate for an aspect of something, such as the importance of teacher training in early childhood care and education. In our communication, we will try to showcase both the impact of our own work on the ground and shed light on why the training works."

The team also feels documentation is closely interwoven with communication. At MJ, they are constantly trying to capacitate team members to capture their insights and learnings better in different mediums such as writing or photography.

Sunayana added, "Our program director is very good at writing. He tries to mentor other team members by encouraging them to write down their reflections. He also shares his feedback when they write something."

MJ has set up a communications team. However, Sunayana shared that it has been a challenge in finding candidates who are able to gain a nuanced understanding of the programs, be equally passionate about the cause and communicate effectively.

Despite the challenges, the MJ team has become more adept at translating their communications strategy on the ground. They have started leveraging social media channels to reach out to volunteers and donors, etc. They have revamped their website and periodically post on social

media. Sunayana shared that after revamping the website, there are more people expressing interest in partnering with them and learning more about their work. They have noted that there are donors who, as a part of the due diligence process, also visit and look at all the social media channels and websites.

The MJ team sees development communication as a means to remain connected with all stakeholders. It also sees it as an important aspect of conveying about the cause and garnering support.

Ayang Trust

Since 2017, Ayang Trust has been working towards enabling quality education and dignified livelihood for marginalized communities in Majuli, a riverine island in Assam. The island is frequently ravaged by floods, and the remoteness exacerbates problems of access to quality education and healthcare.

Ayang runs a model school called the Hummingbird School. They are working towards the systemic transformation of public schools through direct interventions, and knowledge and process partnering.

For Ayang Trust, development communication primarily involves apprising communities, team members, mentors, volunteers, donors and prospective job applicants of their work, exploring avenues for collaboration and garnering resources. They periodically share updates on their social media channels and newsletter.

The team believes that it is important to engage the local communities in their communication. The updates shared on their Facebook page are often posted in Assamese, one of the languages majorly spoken by the people in the region. They have noted that the engagement from the locals on posts covering matters related to their work and status of education in Assamese has been better.

Nikita and Imkum from the Ayang team shared that being in Majuli, the remoteness of the location does not make it accessible for people to visit and gain a socio-cultural understanding of the region. In their objectives for communication, the team tries to present the lived realities of the people living here and their work with them.

Nikita added, "We believe disseminating information on the culture and traditional

Ayang Trust

practices of the people is also an important part of our communication." Through their communication, they also wish to highlight not only the challenges and complexities but the richness of cultural traditions of local tribal communities such as the Mising and the Deori.

For instance, the Ali Ai Ligang festival is celebrated with much fanfare by the Misings in February. The Ayang team, through their social media channels, have in the past shared the cultural significance of the festival and the practices people observe during the celebrations.

Nikita and Imkum from the team shared, "A major goal for us has been to encourage the creation of replicable models. Through communicating about our work, we would love it if organizations doing similar work could get ideas for projects in their own communities. When other organizations communicate about their inspiring work, we are open to learning from, and collaborating with, them. These collaborations haven't materialized yet. But we are excited about the possibilities."

The Ayang team shared that they add images and videos in their communication collaterals. For the team to capture images that represent their work and the people, the members need to be decently skilled.

Nikita and Imkum recounted that recently on their annual team retreat, Deekshith, one of the team members, conducted a photography session for everyone involved on how to check for the right angles, lighting, disturbances, etc. They shared that many team members have started to photograph and share

documentation which is often used for their communications channels.

The Ayang team, through their social media campaigns, have been able to meaningfully convey their work and garner resources for the Hummingbird School. For instance, when the team had called for support for the school, people reached out to purchase beds for the hostel and sponsor higher education for children.

During floods, the Ayang team reached out to supporters through various channels, and they received monetary and volunteering support. Their communication has helped them garner support during difficult times.

Nikita and Imkum are optimistic about leveraging communication to share more about their work, the community and the cause. They say they will continue to experiment with their strategy and see how they can reach out to more people.

In Conclusion

Development communication serves different purposes for organizations. These include capacitating people with knowledge about their cause and encouraging positive norms and attitudes for vulnerable groups. It also helps in garnering resources for the organization's work. This field holds numerous possibilities in making social change.

You may reach out to the organizations featured in the story at: Latika Roy Foundation - jo@latikaroy.org; Makkala Jagriti - headoffice@makkalajagriti.org; Apni Shala Foundation - contact@apnishala.org; and Ayang Trust - connect@ayang.org.in.
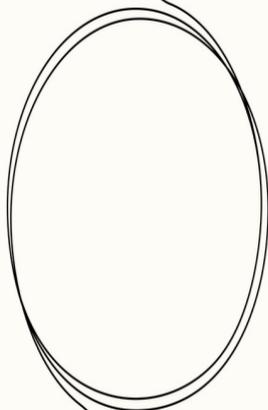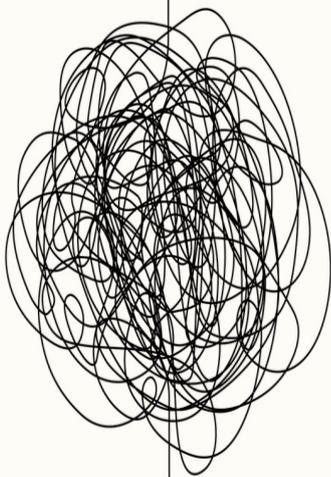
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