

# Communication strategy for community development: a case study of the *Heifer project* - South Africa

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this qualitative pilot study was to develop a model to be used by a development agency in formulating communication strategy for community development, providing direction to development communication (DC) specialists/facilitators to play a more strategic role in the development process. Based on the findings of a literature study on communication strategy for development, as well as a case study on The Heifer Project - South Africa, the researchers suggest that an existing model for developing corporate communication strategy (Steyn 2000a) can be used for this purpose.*

*A major insight that emerged from the study was that the existing model for developing corporate communication strategy might also be applied in another context (with slight adaptations in terminology), namely to formulate 'corporate' communication strategy for the community I action group involved in the development project - more aptly to be called 'development' communication strategy. Such a strategy would make the participatory approach to development, and especially the participatory communication approach, even more 'participatory', since the strategic information on issues and stakeholders will be provided by the community and its designated communicator (s) themselves.*

## **OPSOMMING**

*Die doelwit van hierdie kwalitatiewe loodsstudie was om 'n model te ontwikkel wat deur 'n ontwikkelingsagentskap gebruik kan word om kommunikasie-strategie vir gemeenskapsontwikkeling te formuleer, en daardeur rigting te gee aan ontwikkelingskommunikasiespesialiste/-fasiliteerders om 'n meer strategiese rol in die ontwikkelingsproses te speel. Gebaseer op die bevindings van 'n literatuurstudie oor kommunikasie-strategie vir ontwikkeling, sowel as 'n gevallestudie oor Heifer Projek - Suid-Afrika, stel die navorsers voor dat 'n bestaande model vir die ontwikkeling van korporatiewe kommunikasie-strategie (Steyn 2000a) vir hierdie doel gebruik kan word.*

*'n Belangrike insig wat deur die studie na vore gekom het, is dat die bestaande model vir die ontwikkeling van korporatiewe kommunikasie-strategie ook moontlik in 'n ander konteks toegepas kan word (met geringe aanpassings in terminologie), naamlik om 'korporatiewe' kommunikasie-strategie vir die gemeenskap/aksiegroep betrokke in die ontwikkelingsprojek te ontwikkel - wat meer gepas 'ontwikkelingskommunikasie'-strategie genoem kan word. So 'n strategie sou die deelnemende benadering tot ontwikkeling, en veral die deelnemende kommunikasie-benadering, nog meer 'deelnemend' maak, aangesien die strategiese inligting oor vraagstukke en belangegroep deur die gemeenskap en sy aangewese kommunikator(s) self voorsien sal word.*

## **1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Many development projects are conceptualised and planned - far from where they will be implemented - by development agencies who fail to understand the complex power relationships and unique communication processes existing in local settings (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada in Servaes 2000). Furthermore, these projects are often being planned in a top-down manner without involving the specific community in the needs analysis, the decision-making or the planning process.

Although communication has shown its usefulness and impact in change and development situations, its role in development is still not appreciated or understood by many. Communication often does not form a central part of a development project, which is surprising given that *"there can not be development without participation and it is almost impossible to have participation without communication. Yet communication is hardly present in the strategies and policies of most donor agencies"* (Williams in Agunga 1998:36).

In general, there is a feeling that the communication function in development is being poorly handled by project managers and policy administrators. This is not

surprising when taken into consideration that, until recently, communication has often been left to extension workers without any communication training (Hayward in Agunga 1998). These technical specialists neither have the communication skills to promote behavioural change or help communities reach development goals, nor do they understand the complexities of the development process. Development is about perceptions of 'what should be', and great frustration is experienced if people feel their perceptions are not being taken into account (Agunga 1998). In view of its importance in the development process, Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (*in Servaes 2000:84*) is of the opinion that communication can "*no longer be treated like the fifth wheel on a car - nice to have, but something of a luxury. Communication needs to be converted into the steering wheel to help guide the enormous changes necessary by those responsible for national policies, by institutions, societies, communities, and groups*".

Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (*in Servaes 2000:85*) argue for a holistic approach to development which includes strategic planning, multi-media and the mobilisation and participation of the people. Communication for development has become a specialised field of work, whose practitioners have the responsibility of creating awareness amongst policy makers of its importance so that they can provide the necessary resources for it to be "*the catalyst without which other development inputs are often wasted*".

However, Adhikarya (*in Servaes 2000:89*) sees two problems which limit the effectiveness of development communication specialists in contributing towards the achievement of development goals. *Firstly*, they are usually expected to produce mainly publicity or other public relations activities and/or multi-media materials without much involvement at the information needs assessment, communication strategy and planning, and message positioning phases. *Secondly*, they lack a holistic, integrated, multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral approach in analysing communication problems and designing communication strategies in support of broader development goals.

Whereas Adhikarya agrees with Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (*in Servaes 2000*) that development communication specialists should play a more strategic role in development projects, he questions whether they are equipped to do so. Quebral (*in Servaes 2000*) sees development communicators not only as informers' or interpreters of events, but also being skilled at mediating, facilitating, building consensus and invoking participation - whether through the media or in face-to-face situations. However, if they want to play a more strategic role in steering development policy, they will need guidelines and the necessary knowledge and skills to do so.

## 2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

**Primary objective:** To develop a model to be used by a development agency in formulating communication strategy for community development, providing direction to development communication specialists/

facilitators on playing a more strategic role in the development process.

**Secondary objectives:** To adapt an existing model for developing *corporate* communication strategy, to community development by:

- considering the lessons presented in the literature on communication strategy for development.
- considering the lessons for communication strategy presented by the case study on The Heifer Project - South Africa.

## 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Clarifying terminology

#### 3.1.1 Communication

Communication is a process of "*negotiation and exchange of meaning, in which messages, 'people-in-cultures' and 'reality' interact so as to enable meaning to be produced or understanding to occur*" (O'Sullivan *et al* 1994:50). Communication is part of the very fabric of society and serves as the web that holds together the individuals, groups and institutions that a society is made up of. Because communication is at the core of every social system, it influences all aspects of development work. Without communication no society can exist, develop or survive (Ayee 1993).

#### 3.1.2 Development communication

Development communication (DC) is communication that is specifically designed to support a particular development programme. It is "*all forms of communication that are used for the improvement of an individual, community or country's material, cultural, spiritual, social and other conditions*" (Malan 1998:52). The task of development communication is to inform and motivate at national and local levels, and to advance development in general. It can be said that the function of development communication is development itself (Rensburg undated).

#### 3.1.3 Community development

Community development is a collective activity where a group of people that share mutual interests and concerns become aware of their needs and resources, and act together to improve their situation. It refers to development at the micro level, is therefore situational and community based, cannot be generalised or applied on a national base, and is not suited to large-scale modernisation efforts such as creating sophisticated infrastructure (Swanepoel 1996).

### 3.2 Development theories and the role of communication

Narula & Pearce (1986) categorised the development theories and models that have influenced Third World development projects into four types.

### 3.2.1 Modernisation theory

The modernisation paradigm consists of both an earlier phase - the dominant paradigm - and its revised version - the new paradigm. Within the dominant or old paradigm that emerged after the Second World War, underdevelopment was equated with poverty and a lack of material goods (Narula & Pearce 1986), while development was based on industrialisation and economic growth (Agunga 1998). The underdeveloped nations therefore had to change their values and imitate Western ways in order to develop. The new paradigm developed in recognition of the failures of the dominant paradigm, and encompassed decentralisation in planning, both domestic and international factors, and the importance of local social structures and traditional values.

Communication during the modernisation paradigm was "a process by which A sends a message to B upon whom it has an effect" (O'Sullivan *et al* 1994). It was a very one-way, top-down process of message transmission from source to receiver. It was thought that people could be persuaded through information to change their attitudes, values and beliefs, mainly through popular or mass education through the media. Traditional values and culture were regarded as an impediment to development, and traditional communication media were not considered suitable to convey development messages - it would therefore eventually be replaced by Western type mass communication systems (Aye 1993).

Since development theories were rooted in Western civilisation, their communication approaches had major limitations (Melkote 1991). Development communication during this era was seen to take place between a developer (a facilitator or change agent) and a community, who were the recipients of a development project - therefore between a benefactor and a beneficiary, and mostly in a rural context (Malan 1998:51). It could be said that most projects undertaken were *for* the people, rather than *by* the people (Servaes 2000:85).

Although the modernisation paradigm was ethno-centric and flawed in many respects, it was an honest attempt to provide some guidance on how development should take place. It also drew attention to the complexity of the process of development and communication (Aye 1993).

### 3.2.2 Interdependence / dependency model

This model was a critique of modernisation's focus on domestic development being the stumbling block to development. It lay the blame for underdevelopment on Western imperialism and the international socio-political system.

### 3.2.3 Basic needs approach

This theory developed in the mid 1970s, and was a commitment to meet the basic needs of the poor through decentralisation and integration. Local autonomy was considered crucial in planning development projects and for communicating with the poor. Agunga (1998) called it the growth-with-equity

theory (GWE), which rested on four pillars: meeting the basic needs of the poor, people participation, an integrated approach to development, and the need to consider each country or people as unique.

While this approach improved understanding of why development failed, it provided little insight on how it should be done. Ascroft & Masilela (1994) warned that it is not enough to say that there must be participation and integration. More important was the question of who was responsible for facilitating it and whether they had the expertise to do so. Rondinelli (1987) found that 88% of projects funded by USAID in Sub-Saharan Africa encountered human resource management problems. Whereas development projects seemed to have no scarcity of technical subject matter specialists, there were few people trained in communicating the knowledge and skills that would enable Third World communities to benefit from them.

### 3.2.4 The communication approach

The participatory communication approach focused development strategists and practitioners on interactions with their environment (other stakeholders). Melkote (1991:270) refers to this as 'another development' in which communication models "allow for know/edge-sharing on a co-equal basis rather than a top-down transmission of information and persuasion". The participatory approaches - of which Development Support Communication (DSC) and Participatory Communication (PC) - are the most notable, share the common intent of actively involving people who were the 'subjects' of development in shaping the process (Yoon 1997:3).

Development support communication (DSC) grew out of a need to meet professional communication roles in development. Its primary emphasis is 'problem solving' development issues, beginning with a systematic understanding of the local condition (Agunga 1998:37) - a micro level approach. DSC supports the premise that community-centered development will ultimately lead to sustainable development (Swane-poel & De Beer 1997). It is interactive, participatory, goal-oriented, concerned with effects, time bound, message-oriented, and uses a whole range of culture-based media (Malan 1998). One of its aims is assisting policy makers at the government and donor level to make decisions that will improve the lives of the poor. However, it remains an agency-centred and agency-driven communication model.

The central purpose of participatory development is to inspire people to use their potential by offering them choices to fully develop their abilities. "Unless local people are involved in the 'conception' and 'birth' of a development programme, they will not be bothered with nursing it as their own 'baby' " (Bhasin in Aye 1993:167). Client participation in development thus spawned the participatory communication approach to rural community development which "places a high premium on listening to people and enabling them to actively participate in development initiatives. The essence of involving the local people in the process is the sharing of information in order to build common

*understanding which is essential for effective action"* (Ayee 1993:iii).

This approach attempts to move away from oneway transmission of information to two-way sharing of information, ideas and experiences with the objective of arriving at a common understanding on issues and possible solutions. It is characterised by an emphasis on self-reliance, people participation and faith in the peoples' ability to learn to change (Ayee 1993:170). Instead of thinking of development mainly in economic terms, the importance of traditional media, interpersonal communication channels and horizontal information flows are also taken into account. Peoples' values, beliefs, attitudes and opinions and their societal needs are also considered to be components of development (Lent *in* Ayee 1993:170).

### **3.3 The role of the development communication specialist**

Various authors assign different responsibilities to development communication specialists/facilitators. Coldvein (*in* Agunga 1998:37) sees it as one of their tasks to make development agencies aware of the necessity of the participatory approach, involving communities in decision-making and action, and helping them to acquire the new knowledge and skills needed. Appropriate communication channels and techniques are to be utilised to increase peoples' participation in development and to inform, motivate, and train rural populations, mainly at the grassroots level. Communication should also be used to promote teamwork, cooperation and coordination between the various role players, often being governmental or non-governmental organisations involved in development projects.

The role assigned by Dissanayake, and also by Servaes (*in* Ayee 1993:35) is to disseminate new knowledge and impart new skills; to introduce, stimulate and diffuse new values favourable to the achievement of development goals; to raise the aspirations of the people involved; and to promote a sense of nationhood. Malan & Agunga (1998) see the role of outsiders (ie development communication facilitators) as helping people to develop an understanding of their situation and taking action to improve it. Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (*in* Servaes 2000) see the DC specialist as using communication processes, techniques and media to help people to understand their options for change; to resolve conflicts; to work towards consensus; to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development; to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and that of society; and to improve the effectiveness of the institutions involved.

Malan & Agunga (1998:v) suggest that the DC facilitator/specialist should promote a cultural approach to development by linking development agencies to the community, ie relating basic messages and knowledge to the community's way of life. Malan notes that "*of vital importance to the communication*

*function is the process of negotiating the context-specific meaning of development itself"*.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (1987) identified nine communication functions in development projects and programmes. In addition to campaigns and multimedia production, the functions include advising on communication for development policy; communication training for field workers; promoting mobilisation and participation of beneficiaries; promoting networking, coordination and linkage among development agencies and development professionals. These activities point to a dual role: Development communication specialists must counsel management on the role of communication in development. At the field level, the DC facilitator must show a willingness to listen to, and learn from, the local people.

Many development agencies have not adopted these functions, nor have DC specialists shown themselves to be capable of these tasks (Agunga 1998). It is, however, of vital importance that they should do so. Many of the problems facing development today are communication concerns that can be addressed with communication input by knowledgeable DC specialists. In considering the role spelt out above, this input seems to consist of more than providing technical DC skills. Advising management on policy matters, linking development agencies to professionals in the field, and mobilising project beneficiaries by means of a participatory communication approach, points to a managerial/strategic role for the DC specialist.

## **4 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following investigation of the literature on community development will provide the criteria for evaluating the case study on The Heifer Project - South Africa, to be reported later.

### **4.1 Community development**

Community development is but one of several theories of the practice of development, focusing on basic needs at the grassroots level. It addresses the specific needs of a certain community as identified by the community members themselves. This process is facilitated by the development agency, using a participatory communication approach. Although the objectives of a community development project is always concrete eg building a clinic, other abstract needs such as self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and human dignity are met in the process (Swanepoel 1996).

Community development is a learning process, but only if the beneficiaries themselves participate right from the start, and help to identify their needs. If a need is not perceived by the community to exist, then there can be no development. The community might join the project, but will not sustain it after the development agency has left. Ideally, the community should play the leading role, with the development agency or government being the facilitator (Swanepoel 1996:4).

The larger the role of the government or any other external institution, the less the ordinary people will take initiative, or feel involved and responsible (Swanepoel 1996:7). People should therefore be involved and participate in decision making and setting objectives for the project, as well as in its implementation, evaluation, and sharing in its benefits (Uphoff *in* Yoon 1997:3). This approach gives people control over their lives and environment, and provides them with problem solving skills. In acquiring full ownership of projects, people secure sustained development of their community (Yoon 1997:3). *"No development project or programme can succeed without the full participation of the local people or client community in the identification of needs, project planning and involvement in the implementation of the plan to meet those needs"* (Ayee 1993:161).

All over the Third World, community workers are 'helping the community to help themselves'. The communities they assist are often referred to as 'less developed', 'poor', or 'left behind'. These community workers are important actors in the development process, since they usually start the project - community development is seldom a spontaneous process. They are often employed by government or donor agencies, churches, or other interest groups. Many community workers are specialists in their various fields (agriculture, health, education, religion), who must now apply their knowledge and skills according to principles they do not fully understand, or have not been trained in. Some community workers are not technical specialists, but belong to groups with an interest in development, tasked with getting the projects going (Swanepoel 1996:1).

Community workers have a daunting task. Not only must they play the role of expert, guide, enabler, advocate and mediator, but they must also facilitate the people's involvement in the projects. In this, they face many attitudinal obstacles such as lack of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, illiteracy, different customs and traditions, dependency and apathy. Since the attitude of a community worker often determines the success of a project, it should be one of respect towards the local people and their interests, values and norms (Swanepoel 1996:15). A community worker's primary concern is to help beneficiaries to make rational decisions, to enable them to participate fully in the project, to assist them in taking the initiative, and to help them discover their resources, plan and act.

## **4.2 Community development programmes**

Yoon (1997:7) suggests a number of steps followed by many NGOs to successfully plan and implement community development projects:

### **4.2.1 Pre-planning**

#### *4.2.1.1 Entering the community*

The first step focuses on the identification of the community that will be the partner in the project.

Many development agencies prefer to work with communities they have worked with before, since a working relationship already exists and they have a feel for the needs and aspirations of the people. The initial visit by the development agency is to introduce the community worker(s) or field staff to the group and to meet members of the community. The success of this crucial step depends partly on the community worker and partly on the reputation of the development agency in the community. It is always beneficial if the agency briefs the group on who they are and what their goals are as an organisation.

According to Yoon (1997:7), the basic task of the community worker is to listen to the people. Ayee (1993:182) contends that *"there is no substitute for seeking to know and understand the people by getting involved with them, listening to them and carefully identifying communication patterns and structures in the community. The development workers must participate in community life as a learner; learn about how best to communicate with the people in order to facilitate real change"*.

#### *4.2.1.2 Preparing for action*

Before formal meetings are scheduled, the action group (a smaller grouping within the larger community with common interests/needs) and their leaders are identified. This facilitates the identification of different roles and the responsibilities that are to be allocated to each role. As much time as possible should be given to informal consultations and discussions, always keeping the culture of the community in mind.

#### *4.2.1.3 Situational Analysis*

This step requires that the action group and the community worker reflect upon the current conditions, problems, aspirations and resources of the community. Traditional and folk media, as well as local theatre groups can be used as catalysts to play out existing situations in the community. New technology such as video can be used as a 'mirror' to reflect the issues and aspirations of people living in isolated communities. However, it is important that community members be taught to use the new media themselves so as to keep them involved in the process (Yoon 1997:7).

Research should also be done in the community, preferably by training community members (by using the local dialect) to participate in the collection and analysis of data (Yoon 1997:7). Once the people have understood the findings of the research, they prioritise problems and start to develop an action plan to address them.

#### *4.2.1.4 Supporting Action - The Communicator(s)*

It is likely at this stage that a group would have evolved within the community taking charge of the communication activities. Such a group would probably be comprised of opinion leaders (religious leaders, traditional birth attendants, musicians, actors)

or others with a flair for communication and interaction (Yoon 1997:7). The community itself should ideally elect the communicator(s) and spell out their duties. Training in communication methods, principles of participation and the supportive role of communication therein should be offered. Presentation and management skills should also be introduced to the communicators.

## **4.2.2 Planning**

### **4.2.2.1 Needs identification**

Needs are already identified during the first contact (informal phase) with the community and also during the more formal phase when the project has started. In the first instance, the community worker identifies different groups with different needs and different perceptions. He/she then identifies the groups that will act as the action groups in different projects. In the second instance, an informal discussion will try to resolve conflicting perceptions. A meeting is then scheduled where issues are thrashed out - consensus must be reached as the project should be confined to a single need. Formal needs identification should preferably not take place in a general public meeting (Swanepoel 1996:51).

The most important aspect of needs identification is the absolute necessity that the people forming the action group should regard the need as a matter of urgency and/or grave concern (Swanepoel 1996:53). If they do not, they will not easily be moved to action. Many times, however, large organisations decide what kind of need they can help people address and then approach a community with an offer to help. The danger with this approach is that people start the project, but do not see it through - or even see themselves as a 'client', letting the community-worker do all the work.

### **4.2.2.2 Action Planning**

Action planning follows from needs definition, as the action group and community worker now focus on how they are going to achieve the need. The key issue that has been identified should be conceptualised into a model that defines the activities to be carried out in order for the plans to become a reality.

## **4.2.3 Implementation**

Implementation is the operationalising of the plan (Swanepoel 1996:89). Since plans differ, implementation is specific to the situation. Because circumstances change, implementation should take place as soon as possible after planning. In the case of development projects, it is suggested that planning is done for only one month in advance, so that implementation can soon follow.

### **4.2.3.1 Participation in implementation**

The action group should participate in both planning and implementation. Others outside the community can also be asked to participate in certain tasks (or can even be hired). Participation will build the action

group's self esteem as they achieve what they previously saw as being impossible.

### **4.2.3.2 The community worker's involvement**

A fine balance should be achieved around the community worker's involvement. If he/she is too involved, it might appear that the community is not trusted. However, the community worker should be visible from time to time to boost morale, or to demonstrate how plans are to be put into action (Swanepoel 1996:91).

## **4.2.4 Evaluation**

*"Evaluation is not a luxury but an absolute necessity"* (Swanepoel 1996:95). Without evaluation the action group cannot learn from the process. Community development workers and beneficiaries therefore need to identify and analyse mistakes made in the past or during the project to make future efforts more effective.

## **4.2.5 Withdrawing from the community**

Community workers who help set up participatory communication projects should plan their withdrawal as soon as community members are ready to take complete control of the project. The withdrawal should be a gradual process where the role and tasks performed by the community worker is increasingly assigned to community members. The community worker can relocate, but should occasionally visit the project: *firstly*, to keep track of the community and their progress so as to learn from them (Yoon 1997:8); and *secondly*, to boost morale and provide moral support.

## **4.3 The literature on communication strategy for development**

Malan & Grossberg's (1998:163) discussion of the role of communication in South African case studies on development indicated that the important aspects of consultation, information-sharing and participatory communication were already incorporated into the strategic planning phase of successful projects. They further contended that *"if communication planning is not treated as a strategy on its own, it could result in serious communication problems"*.

Communication lessons identified by Malan & Grossberg (1998), and also by the researchers, from the various local community development projects the former had analysed, are the following:

- A holistic and endogenous communication approach is essential.
- Communication should not be taken for granted and should be strategically planned for each project.
- Consultation with, and involvement of, community representatives, as well as self-surveys and self-analysis to determine strengths and weaknesses were found to be important in all projects.

- Initial top down communication processes are difficult to turn around. Informal and interpersonal communication flows should initially be studied to use them to full benefit of the development process.
- A vision of growth and hope for the future should constantly be conveyed in all interactions with the community involved in the project. The mission and strategic direction of the project should also be conveyed.
- Feedback should constantly be provided, especially to strategic stakeholders such as community leaders and members of action groups.
- The community's feelings, wishes, etc should be interpreted and conveyed to decision makers.
- Providing information is no substitute for intensive and sustained two-way communication with all strategic stakeholders.
- Dialogue should be centered on problem analysis - people should be communicating with each other to find solutions to problems. Especially important is bottom up communication that raises the awareness of decision makers to problems experienced at the grassroots level.
- Trusting relationships should be built with all strategic stakeholders.
- Formal and informal communication should be balanced.
- Measures to encourage participatory communication should be developed and constantly monitored.
- The pattern of stimulus-response transmission of information should be broken by having no agenda for a meeting, thereby 'forcing' the community to decide themselves how to proceed.
- South Africa's eleven official languages and diverse cultures make it vital that facilitators should place the project in the socio-cultural context of the specific community.
- The crucial role of culture should be recognised and all other environmental/contextual factors should be taken into account in the communication between the development agency and the community.
- Existing indigenous knowledge, socio-cultural symbolic forms, popular and ethnic culture should be used in communication.
- Development communication planning should take political realities into account such as local authorities, power politics and the need for lobbying.
- Plan to benefit from information and communication technologies (ICTs) in advance.
- Multi-directional and multi-voiced communication is best to obtain democratic participation and a free flow of information. Messages should focus on ownership by the people and local media should be explored.
- Written communication should be complemented by visual communication, eg comic strips. Architect drawings and scale models could be used for illustration.
- The communication roles of the various role players in the project should be plotted. If necessary, communication training should be provided to

important role players. DC specialists should act as advocates and facilitators for capacity training.

- Budgets and planning should be aimed at sustainable, long-term development communication activities.
- There is a great need for more local development communication case studies. Guidelines on how to proceed should be written up from 'best practices'.

The guidelines for communication in development as reported above, will be taken into consideration in the development of a model for formulating communication strategy for development.

#### **4.4 The literature on strategic management roles of the corporate communication function**

Since the discussion on '*the role of development communication specialists*' (see 3.3) indicated the need for a more strategic communication role than presently seems to be played in most development agencies/institutions, normative theory on strategic management roles of the corporate communication function was investigated in order to determine its applicability to the context of development communication.

- Steyn (2000a) conceptualised three roles for the corporate communication practitioner. These roles were confirmed in a quantitative study in South Africa, according to the expectations of 103 chief executives who participated (Steyn 2000b). These three roles were the following:
- the *strategist*, a role at the top management level of an organisation. This role entails scanning the environment to detect relevant issues/developments and anticipating their consequences for the organisation's strategies and policies. Also, to determine the consequences of organisational policies and strategies on the stakeholders. In this role, the corporate communication practitioner is a source of intelligence regarding issues in the environment, as well as on strategic stakeholders - providing a clear understanding of their concerns, sensitivities, needs and preconceptions. The *strategist* thus assists top management in gathering, interpreting, disseminating, and using this strategic information in developing organisational strategy.
- the *manager*, a role at the functional or departmental level. This entails interpreting the philosophies, policies, programmes and practices of top management to their stakeholders, by developing a corporate communication strategy and policy for the organisation, and overseeing the communication planning and implementation process.
- the *technician*, a role played at the implementation or programme level - implementing communication plans/campaigns directed at the organisation's stakeholders. The technician is a traditional role, played most often by communication practitioners.

In the opinion of the researchers, these roles should apply to development communication specialists/

facilitators as much as they do to corporate communication practitioners. The historic role of the corporate communication *technician* is in fact the current role of the development communication specialist/facilitator - developing and implementing communication plans and campaigns, producing multimedia and/or folk media to communicate with stakeholders in the development process.

The role of the *strategist* is the normative role that was spelled out in the theoretical discussion on development communication (see 3.3), notably the communication functions as identified by FAO (1987) - with the exception of campaigns and multimedia production, which is the role of the *technician*. Further activities of a DC specialist that refer to the role of the *strategist* (pointed out by other authors in the theoretical discussion - see brackets below), are the following:

- Interpreting the development agency's environment - especially issues referring to the communities involved - to the agency's management (*helping them to make better decisions*); explaining the consequences of the agency's policies and strategies on the stakeholders, especially on the community (*providing feedback from the community to management*); identifying strategic issues in the development process and their consequences for the stakeholders; identifying strategic stakeholders and their needs/concerns/sensitivities (*listening to the community*), bringing it to management's attention as strategic intelligence to be used in the agency's strategy formulation and planning processes.
- Bringing the different role players (stakeholders) in the development agency's environment together in a holistic approach to development - promoting teamwork, cooperation and co-ordination (as identified by Coldvein *in* Agunga 1998:37).
- Counselling the development agency on the importance of the participatory approach to development and to communication (Coldvein *in* Agunga 1998:37).
- Introducing, stimulating and diffusing new values favourable to the achievement of development goals (*inspiring community members to use their potential by offering them choices*); raising the aspirations of the people involved; and promoting a sense of nationhood (as identified by Dissanayake, and also by Servaes *in* Aye 1993:35).
- Helping people to resolve conflict; to work towards consensus; to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to develop themselves (*enabling them to actively participate in development initiatives*); to improve the effectiveness of institutions involved in development by getting them to work together (as identified by Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada *in* Servaes 2000).

The role of the *manager* is the normative role that was also spelled out by various authors in the theoretical discussion on development communication (see 3.3). Applied in the context of a *manager*, the DC facilitator:

develops a communication strategy and policy for community development.

- uses appropriate communication channels and techniques to increase peoples' participation in development; and to inform, motivate and train rural populations (Coldvein *in* Agunga 1998).
- to disseminate new knowledge (Dissanayake and also Servaes *in* Aye 1993).
- to help people understand their situation and what actions they might take to improve it (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada *in* Servaes 2000).

It is acknowledged that in the context of development agencies, the corporate communication roles of *strategist* and *manager* (and even the role of the *technician*) might have to be played by one person, because of financial and human resource constraints. However, much use can be made by the DC specialist of community members identified by their own people to play the role of communicator amongst the project participants.

#### 4.5 The literature on corporate communication strategy

In order to obtain insight on the primary research objective (*'To develop a model to be used by a development agency in formulating communication strategy for community development, providing direction to development communication specialists/facilitators on playing a more strategic role in the development process'*), the literature on corporate communication strategy was investigated.

According to Tibbie (1997), an effective communication strategy should provide:

- *leadership of thought* and *activity* processes for all communication programmes.
- the context, and a *guiding principle*, for all communication activities.
- the *link* between the 'why' and the 'how' - the logic that binds objectives and tactics together.

The corporate communication strategy produces a profile that can be used to identify the right problems to solve and to prioritise issues for which communication programmes are to be developed. It is the *framework* for the strategic communication plan and the operational communication plans/programmes/campaigns. While the corporate communication strategy determines *what* the corporate communication function should be doing in support of the enterprise and corporate strategies, the strategic and operational communication planning helps to choose *how* the strategy is to be implemented (Steyn & Puth 2000:53).

Before developing the corporate communication strategy, the practitioner must be thoroughly familiar with the organisation's *internal environment* - the corporate profile, vision, values, philosophy, mission, corporate culture, corporate policies and the management/employee component. Stakeholders and other influences in the *external environment* which has an impact on the organisation (eg political, economic,



Figure 1

*A typology for differentiating between the types of strategic issues*

<b>Organisational issues Type 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is not the cause of the problem, but can provide a solution.</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational issues Type 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is not the cause of the problem, cannot provide a solution but can explain the issue to the stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate communication issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where too little or no communication with external stakeholders is the cause of the problem.</li> </ul>
<b>Management communication issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where too little or no (internal) communication between managers and employees is the cause of the problem – not telling employees <i>what</i> they want to hear (eg about the organisation's vision).</li> </ul>
<b>(Tactical) communication issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where messages are not reaching the target groups (eg because of inappropriate communication channels such as television to reach a rural population); or target groups are not understanding the message (eg not communicating in the mother tongue of a rural population).</li> </ul>

social, technological, ecological and judicial issues), should also be identified, analysed and prioritised (Steyn & Puth 2000:54). In this process, it is useful to apply the following typology (see Figure 1) to differentiate between the types of strategic issues, in order to determine whether they are organisational or communication issues, and in which way communication can be used to solve the problem (Steyn 2000a; Steyn & Puth 2000:67-68).

Once the strategic issues, as well as the stakeholders and their issues/concerns have been identified, the implications of these issues for the stakeholders become the subject that has to be addressed by the organisation in its communication with strategic stakeholders. (Not only should the implications of key strategic issues on the stakeholders be determined, but also the effect that corporate strategies or the behaviour/decisions of top management might have on them). A corporate communication strategy should support the enterprise, corporate and business strategies, thereby contributing to organisational effectiveness by identifying *what should be communicated* to stakeholders to solve organisational and communication problems (eg improve productivity); or to capitalise on opportunities that are presented by the strategic issues.

Based on the corporate communication strategy, communication goals are formulated to indicate what the organisation wants to achieve with its communication regarding the situation described. The step of goal setting is the *link* between the corporate communication strategy and the communication plan (Steyn & Puth 2000:69-70).

In a later section, the existing model presented below will provide the basis for formulating communication strategy for community development, but will be adapted according to the guidelines obtained from the literature on communication strategy for development, as well as the findings of the case study on the The Heifer development agency.

## 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Research strategy

According to Marshall & Rossman (1995:40), the research strategy is an overall approach for undertaking a systematic exploration of the phenomenon of interest. In this study, an *ideographic* understanding (Windelband 1980; Babbie 2001) is sought of the particular case under investigation. Mouton (1996:133) calls this a *contextual* strategy, followed where phenomena are studied because of their intrinsic and immediate contextual significance. Du Plooy (1995:33) refers to a research approach that is *"analytic and interpretative - it attempts to examine phenomena in a holistic manner"* and where the purpose is to capture the normal flow of events, as *qualitative* research.

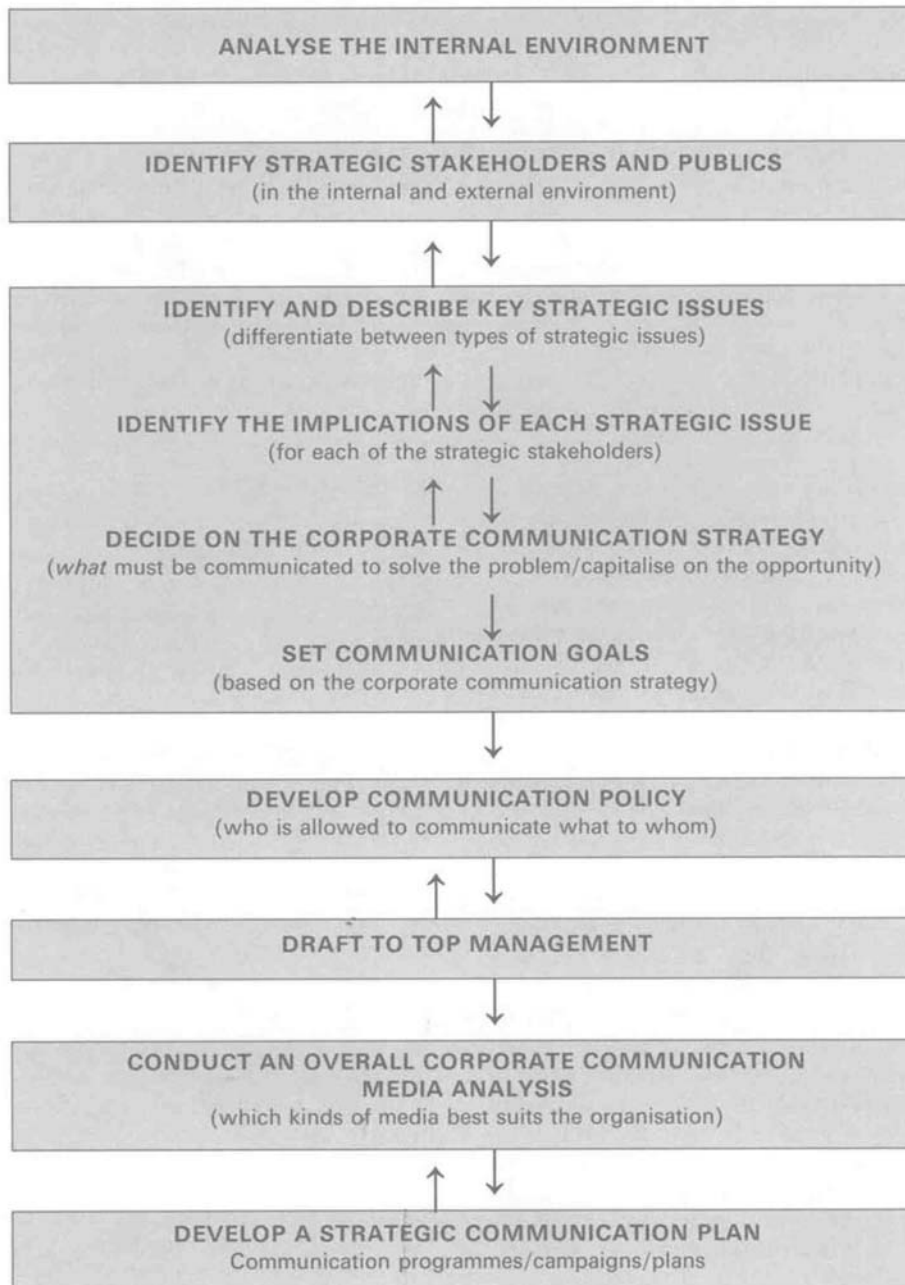
### 5.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is *exploratory* (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:41), used when too little is known about a certain area - in this case communication strategy for community development. A certain amount of background information is needed on whether, and how, communication strategy is formulated by development agencies. This pilot study has been carried out to hypothesise a model, to assess the correctness of its constructs and its adequacy as a measuring instrument (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:41), and to identify/discover important variables (Marshall & Rossman 1995:41) before it is tested empirically in a multicase follow-up study.

In achieving the research objective, the means of exploration was a secondary data investigation: *firstly* of the body of knowledge on development communication; *secondly* on community development, and *thirdly* on strategic management roles of the corporate communication function and corporate communication strategy. Further exploration was undertaken by obtaining primary data by means of a case study on The Heifer Project - South Africa. The conceptual

Figure 2

*Model for developing corporate communication strategy*



Source: Steyn (2000a); Steyn & Puth (2000:63).

framework therefore emerged empirically from the field during the exploration (Miles & Huberman 1984). Based on the identified constructs, an existing model for developing corporate communication strategy will be adapted, and displayed graphically in the form of a hypothesised model for formulating communication strategy for community development.

### 5.3 Research design

The design of this study can be classified as research that is *naturalistic*, *participatory*, *overt*, and taking place in a *field setting*. It is *basic* research in that (i) it is conducted to increase the body of knowledge in the field (to build theory); (ii) it is abstract and conceptual; (iii) it focuses on the processes underlying

the develop communication field; and (iv) it is intended to increase understanding of the field. It can also be seen as *applied* research in that it will help decision-makers make practical decisions-the results are applied to practical problems (Smith 1988:179-181).

The unit of analysis (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:86) or element of the study (Smith 1988:76) about which information was collected, is the *communicative outputs* of individuals involved in community development work - specifically *what* they were communicating about (corporate communication *strategy*) and *how* they were communicating (communication *plans*). Purposive sampling was used to select a case study of the group of interest, namely NGOs involved in developmental work (Smith 1988:85). A three stage process was used to select the case (Smith 1988:76):

- The initial sampling units were NGOs involved in development work.
- The secondary sampling units were individuals employed by the NGO selected for the research (Heifer Project - South Africa), involved in communication for development.
- The tertiary sampling units were the communicative outputs of these individuals.

Excluded from the study were the communicative outputs of community members themselves who were involved in the specific development project, although the communication (including face-to-face) of HPI's employees/associates with these individuals were observed. The research objective was to develop a model to be used by DC specialists/other individuals responsible for development communication on behalf of role players such as development agencies, government departments, non-governmental organisations or other interest groups such as churches, etc).

#### 5.4 Case study as research method

Case studies are a type of qualitative research in which the researcher explores "*a single entity or phenomenon ('the case') bounded by time and activity, and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time*" (Creswell, in Leedy, 1997:157). This study is classified firstly, as a *single case* (sample of one) and secondly, as an *appraisal case* (in contrast to an issue or analytical case), on grounds of the SACRA (1996) criteria.

In this instance, the focus is on the study of one case because it is an exploratory pilot study. The purpose is to shed light on the process of developing a communication strategy for community development, by observing the people involved, in their own territory, and interacting with them on their own terms. Fieldwork is part of the data collection because it enabled the researchers to engage in informal conversation with the participants and to observe and understand the phenomenon as experienced by them (Leedy 1997:157-158).

#### 5.4.1 Data generation

According to Mason (1996), it is more accurate to speak of *data generation* than data collection, because most qualitative perspectives would reject the idea that a researcher can be a completely neutral collector of information about the social world. Instead the researcher is seen as actively *constructing* knowledge about that world according to certain principles. This qualitative study combined three data generation methods (Marshall & Rossman, 1995):

##### 5.4.1.1 Participant observation

In this study, participant observation was used as a data gathering technique (and not as an overall research approach), requiring immersion in the community chosen for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:5). Employees of The Heifer Project - South Africa, community members who participated in the project, and other associates such as the donor group for the specific project, were observed. The time spent thus enabled the researchers to hear, see and experience the reality of the NGO and the community members who participated in the project.

##### 5.4.1.2 In-depth interviewing

This method is described by Kahn & Cannel (*in* Marshall & Rossman 1995:80) as "*a conversation with a purpose*". Data was generated during focused in-depth interviews, both personal and electronic. To promote discussion and share as much information as possible, an interview schedule with a set of unstructured questions was used (Cooper & Emory 1995). Data was obtained in this manner from a researcher at Onderstepoort involved in the The Heifer project, the manager/fundraiser and other employees of The Heifer Project - South Africa, and the leader of a Bible study group who was the liaison with the donor group (members of a church engaged by The Heifer's fundraiser).

##### 5.4.1.3 Review of documents

The analysis of documentary sources is a major data generation method used in social research, referring to the gathering and analysis of documents produced in the course of every day events. Text-based documents are used by researchers because aspects of the social world can be traced or read through them (Mason, 1996). In some instances the documents are viewed in a literal sense - as data itself. In other cases they need to be read and integrated for evidence. Researchers must be forearmed with a good sense of what they are looking for - what the documents should be able to tell them about, ie what part of the intellectual puzzle they might help to address (Mason 1996). This *unobtrusive* method provided an alternative angle on the data generated through the interviewing process. The method was used because the documents existed, they were relevant to the research question and it was easy to gain access to them (Mason 1996). In this project, the most important document reviewed was The Heifer Project International's manual on values-based planning and

management (Aaker & Shumaker 1996), as well as the Website.

### 5.5 The data analysis process

Marshall & Rossman (1995:111) see data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of data collected (*generated*). According to Miles & Huberman (1984), data analysis actually consists of three concurrent flows of activity:

- *Data reduction* refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that have been written up in field notes. This occurred continuously throughout the life of the research project.
- *Data display* is an organised assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action taking. The literature investigation is displayed in narrative form, and the resulting hypothesised model in graphic form.
- *Conclusion drawing / verification* took place from the beginning of data generation, when the researchers started to decide what things mean - noting patterns, explanations, regularities, etc.

Qualitative researchers are in the business of producing social explanations, or addressing intellectual puzzles. Social explanation can do different things: *compare, develop and trace, describe, predict, and theorise*. A researcher should decide which kinds of explanations are developed by the study: whether the data is an explanation in itself, or provides a way into an explanation, or represents/signifies an explanation - does the data need to be interpreted, and must the researcher read behind or beyond the data (Mason 1996).

The explanations provided by the secondary literature investigation as well as by the interviews and review of documents were *developing and tracing*. Developmental explanations are those which attempt to trace and account for the development of social phenomena, social processes, social change, etc (Mason 1996). The data generated enabled the researchers to trace and chart relevant developmental stages in the formulation of communication strategy for development. The data did therefore not present an explanation in itself, but provided a way into an explanation of what communication strategy for community development might constitute.

### 5.6 reliability, generalisability and validity

In quantitative research, reliability is often measured by observing the consistency with which the same methods of data collection produce the same results. It was not possible for the researchers to perform reliability tests of this type because the data that was generated did not take the form of a clearly standardised set of measurements. However, the data generation and analysis is considered to be appropriate to the research objective, and also thorough, careful, honest and accurate (Mason 1996) - important criteria in qualitative studies.

Mason (1996) is of the opinion that generalisation can be thought of in two ways: *empirical* as well as *theoretical* generalisation. Although the researchers are unable to make empirical generalisations, they do claim a *theoretical* generalisation. At the very least, it can be said that, although analysis had not been based on data derived from a representative sample, there is no reason to believe that the empirical case as well as the cases that produced the research findings in the literature study were atypical - and that communication lessons can indeed be learnt from the study to serve as a guideline for the descriptive study to follow, as well as to other non-profit organisations in their communication for development.

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985:290), the constructs of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity are inappropriate for naturalistic or qualitative inquiry. They propose the following four alternative constructs that more accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm:

- *credibility*, in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. Within the parameters of the setting, population and theoretical framework, the research is deemed credible by the researchers.
- *transferability*, in which demonstrating applicability of one set of findings to another context rests more with the researcher who makes the transfer than with the original researcher. In this study, the researchers established the theoretical parameters of the research by constantly referring back to the original theoretical framework and literature review to show how data generation, analysis and interpretation was guided by these constructs.
- *dependability* and *confirmability* cannot be claimed from this pilot study of one case.

## 6 CASE STUDY: FINDINGS ON THE HEIFER PROJECT - SOUTH AFRICA

### 6.1 Introduction to the Heifer project international

#### 6.1.1 Background

The Heifer Project-South Africa is affiliated to The Heifer Project International (HPI), a non-governmental organisation with an impressive track record in development over the past 60 years. HPI is operational in 40 poverty stricken nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Although HPI offers the Heifer Project-South Africa institutional support and vast international development experience, the South African operation has been planned and developed locally. The Heifer SA develops a strategic plan for three years, in which staff, board and community members all participate. The director and the two deputy directors do yearly and month-to-month based planning.

Heifer works in partnership with churches, civic/ other groups, and individual donors. Their projects consist of giving an income-producing animal to a

providing some form of short term relief. Intensive training in animal husbandry, environmentally sound farming techniques and community development also form part of the programme. The gift of a goat, a cow, a flock of chickens (or any other of the 24 kinds of animals provided across the world) might seem to be a simple one. However, receiving a farm animal as well as training in its care is an important step toward ending a family's poverty. The Heifer Project's animals offer hungry families a way of feeding themselves and becoming self-reliant. Children receive nutritious milk or eggs; and families earn income to pay for schooling, health care and better housing. In the process, communities can go beyond meeting their immediate needs to taking the first step in fulfilling their dreams. The manager/fundraiser of the Heifer Project -South Africa was initially observed as he came to address a church group in Pretoria to solicit contributions for the project. One of the researchers participated in a donor group that formed at the church. The donors provided the sum of R500, in exchange for which HPI engaged a suitable family in a disadvantaged community in Mpumalanga, and provided them with the animal of their choice - a flock of chickens.

### **6.1.2 Mission, values and philosophy**

The Heifer Project - SA's mission is to alleviate hunger, poverty and environmental degradation through:

- education and training in sustainable animal production;
- providing livestock and related services to poverty stricken families;
- raising public awareness and concern for poverty and environmental degradation.

The Heifer Project offers their services to whomever invites them. In line with Heifer's mission, the host community determines their need (within the confines of the project) and develop a plan for achieving their goals. They prepare for planting fodder, building pens, learning how to care for the animals, and how to work together as a team. Women play a central role in The Heifer's projects, since in many countries they are the farmers. Husbands often seek employment in the city, while wives stay home to care for the children and to raise crops.

Upon obtaining an animal from HPI, husbands can now work alongside their wives on their own small farms rather than seeking low-paying seasonal labour elsewhere. By providing training and resources to rural women, the Heifer Project strengthens families. They also help curb the stream of rural youth migrating to the cities by providing them with work and educational opportunities at home. Communities are strengthened as families join together to define needs, set goals and manage their projects.

### **6.1.3 Heifer Principles: The Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development**

Heifer Project International has developed a set of essential principles (also adopted by Heifer Project-South Africa) called the HPI Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development. This model is the foundation in the planning and implementation of all Heifer projects. All interested communities/families or other groups are screened, monitored and evaluated according to these principles, and plans are based on them:

- *Passing on the gift* - This principle embodies HPI's philosophy of practical sharing and caring. Every family/group who receives an animal signs a contract to pass on the first female offspring to another family in need, as well as the training and skills they have acquired.
- *Accountability* - Groups define their own needs, set goals, and plan appropriate strategies to achieve them. HPI provides guidelines for planning the project (including the pass-on process), screening recipients, monitoring progress and conducting self-evaluations. Project groups are responsible for submitting semi-annual monitoring reports to HPI.
- *Sharing and caring* - HPI believes that global problems can be solved if all people are committed to sharing what they have and caring about others.
- *Sustainability and self-reliance* - Project groups must plan to support themselves eventually because- HPI funds a project for a limited time only.
- *Improved animal management* - Feed, water, shelter, reproductive efficiency and health care is important in keeping the livestock healthy and productive.
- *Livestock must contribute to a family's nutrition and income.*
- *Gender and family focus* - Women and men are encouraged to share in decision-making, ownership of the HPI animals, labour, and the benefits of projects.
- *Genuine need and justice* - HPI is a partner to people who truly need an opportunity to improve the quality of their lives, and who can benefit from modest support.
- *Improving the environment* - The introduction of HPI livestock should improve, and not destroy, the environment.
- *Full participation* - HPI works with grassroots groups or intermediary organisations representing grassroots groups.
- *Training and education* - A group decides on their own training needs and local people are involved as trainers.
- *Spirituality* is common to all people and groups, regardless of their religion or beliefs, and often creates a strong bond amongst group members.

### **6.2 Defining the situation - the pre-project phase**

An interested group applies for assistance in becoming self-sufficient and self-reliant in terms of income and nutrition. The first phase of the Cornerstones Model entails getting to know and understand as much as possible about the people, place and productive resources of the community/group

interested. A committee is formed for the purpose of evaluating and screening the group based on the following criteria:

- Cohesiveness of the group.
- An equal representation of gender in the group ie the number of males and females.
- Equal representation of gender in leadership positions, roles and functions.
- Whether the group has a constitution; whether it is up to date; who formulated it; whether all members subscribe to it; and the reasons for the group having formed.
- The genuine need within the group - assessing whether they are really poor and deserving.

The action group is briefed on the Heifer Project and important cornerstones are explained to them. As their foundation, they identify skills amongst themselves such as interpersonal communication, leadership and group facilitation. Consensus needs to be reached between them on how they are to work together before planning can begin. Screening helps to determine the feasibility/credibility of the group and their proposed programme. The group is informed that they will need to accept certain of Heifer's important development principles should they want to continue with the programme. If they do, the first formal meeting is scheduled. (Initially, it might be necessary for the development agency and the action group to get together several times in order to gather information and build initial relationships of trust between them).

During the first formal meeting training requirements are identified. If the action group does not have a constitution, if their leadership is weak, or if they lack the financial skills required for participation, training is provided. In the latter case, a partnership has been formed with the Valley Trust (a non-governmental organisation) who trains communities in financial principles, in their own surroundings. If, however, all of the above are adequate, the first training session will be in the Cornerstones based planning and management model. This will take the form of the Heifer staff spending a week living amongst the action group in their homes. Workshops are conducted to determine why the current situation is not the way they would like it to be.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) workshops are also conducted to help the group assess their current situation in terms of place, people and production resources. Action groups are enabled to realise the potential of their environment and the sustainability of their project within the community as a whole. Brainstorming is used to get feedback on ideas presented and group members are encouraged to think of alternate approaches during training. Aspects covered during this stage are defining the situation and envisioning the future.

The next step is to think of how the situation can be improved. Heifer's projects, which result in improved nutrition and income, are now discussed. Current projects include a household egg production unit, a zero grazing dairy project in which a family receives a

dairy cow and has to pass on the first female calf to another family, and the crossbreeding of goats for the production of milk products. Members within a group decide which project they would like to participate in whilst the staff points out the work involved, eg planting fodder. The action group is provided with training, eg in cage building and chicken management, before receiving their farm animals. Up till now, the majority of the action groups in South Africa have chosen the Household Egg Production unit.

### **6.3 Planning**

After the situation has been defined, the action group elected and training provided for a specific project, the planning phase begins. The purpose is to see that all resources are optimally used to obtain the maximum in desired results. As the Cornerstones Model is used, the approaches used in planning needs to be holistic - all needs expressed and information obtained are considered worthy of attention. Heifer assumes the following elements to be present in the planning process:

- Planners need a process to follow and to know where they are in that process.
- Planners need to consider many different strategies and points of view.
- Planners need principles and values to give guidance during the planning process.
- Planners need a way to do 'reality checks' as they proceed.

Heifer believes that planning can be done by one person, but that involvement of all members of the action group is essential in goal setting and strategy design. Planning assists group members in recognising priorities and brings order to the individual tasks that must be performed in order for the purpose to be accomplished. There is no step-by-step planning process as suggestions are made based on past experience and logic. HPI does however use a planning form to give guidance in writing up a specific project proposal. Heifer staff helps the group to think realistically about the long-term effects of any proposed activities, and a dialogue about sustainability is initiated.

#### **6.3.1 Setting objectives**

Staff assists the action group to set objectives and determine a time period for its accomplishment. Resources and situational weaknesses are taken into account in this process. In Cornerstones-based planning, strategies describe the approaches that will be used to achieve objectives.

#### **6.3.2 Resources, timelines and responsibility assignment**

This involves estimating the costs of the project and drawing up a draft budget. Objectives and strategies are revised according to the reality of known resources and other limitations. All activities for the project are listed and accountability assigned, eg what will be

done; by whom; and by when. A planning check list ensures that the planning process can easily be modified throughout the project.

#### 6.4 Management

In managing an NGO field office, Heifer's Cornerstones Model emphasises key principles of good leadership such as partnership, collaboration, training, and participatory monitoring. These are not achieved through top-down management, or within an autocratic and domineering style of leadership - rather, it is the responsibility of the action group leader to keep participation and motivation high.

Another key principle of Heifer's people-centered management style is building trusting relationships between those who decide to work together to achieve a shared vision. Heifer believes that interpersonal contact and good communication can make the difference between doing an adequate job, and doing an excellent job. The essence of their communication policy is the following:

- **Be participatory**, by involving others in setting the agenda.
- **Hold regular meetings** that address the most important issues.
- **Communicate** how important the other person's opinions are.
- **Build the team** by getting people together, both spontaneously and in regularly scheduled meetings, to avoid feelings of isolation on the part of individuals.

As part of the project, the donor group who provides the funding for the gift, visits the community/action group and interacts with them in their own environment. The action group shows the donors the fruits of their labour, discusses their progress and problems with them. In this way, the donors are kept up to date on how their money was spent. On the other hand, the action group is made to realise that the donors are ordinary working people who have also passed on a gift by sharing part of their own income with the action group. Donors are invited to come back as often as they want, and to stay over/live in the community should they wish to do so.

#### 6.5 Monitoring and evaluating

Monitoring is used to check the progress of the project, while evaluation looks more deeply at the effectiveness of the project. Monitoring is therefore a continuous assessment and essential for day-to-day management. Evaluation is done periodically and looks at efficiency, relevance as well as impact in relation to the stated objective, and also provides project reports to the organisation. Ongoing self-evaluation is a participatory learning process continuing throughout the life of the project, not only at the beginning and/or end. Special emphasis is placed on collaboration between the development agency and the action group/community, obtaining outsider assistance as needed.

A participatory evaluation system is one that involves everyone responsible for or interested in the project. The action group evaluates themselves with the assistance of the staff. Their evaluation is based on what they decided was important to them whilst doing the cornerstone training. Each participant decides whether the project that they were involved in was worthwhile (a success) or not. They then make the decision whether they wish to continue with the project or do something else. However, before leaving the project, they have to pass on the gift ie pay back the costs of the chicken unit or pass on the calf they raised. The group themselves decides which group/family is to receive their gift. The relationship between Heifer and the action group is maintained for at least five years, during which time the project is monitored.

#### 6.6 Project Impact

The Household Chicken production unit is the most popular. Groups that received chickens have already benefited. Each family's chickens produce 10-12 eggs per day. Six eggs are for family consumption and the rest are sold to cover the cost of the food. Visits and meetings amongst the action groups are of the utmost importance because members share what works for them and what to avoid. During the donor group's visit one woman shared with the group how she treated a sick chicken with what she had in her house.

### 7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON HEIFER PROJECT-SOUTH AFRICA

The planning, implementation and evaluation process was determined from information provided by the Heifer organisation's manager/fundraiser, other employees of Heifer - South Africa, a researcher at Onderstepoort Veterinary Faculty, the church group leader who acted as the liaison between the donor group and the project, the review of Heifer documents and their Web-site, and researcher observation of the development agency staff, the action group and significant others.

#### 7.1 General findings

As in any development effort where the process is agency based, Heifer's management determines the development agenda, and extension and community workers take many of the decisions being the experts. Also, identification of the community's needs has to take place within the parameters of the Heifer Cornerstones Model. Nevertheless, the researchers consider the development and communication approaches used by Heifer Project-South Africa to be most participatory. This conclusion has been reached after evaluating the Heifer project according to the communication guidelines summarised under *'The literature on communication strategy for development'* (see 4.3).

As suggested by Malan & Grossberg (1998:170), a holistic communication approach is used. The Heifer Project is primarily concerned with human resource development, empowerment, affirmation of identity,

environmental protection and, above all, sustainability. Heifer-SA moves through the phases of consultation and negotiation with the community in their projects. They do strategic development planning and interact with the community by means of knowledge sharing and participation. Commitment is obtained and involvement takes place, although it is acknowledged that it may take years to get full participation and acceptance of ownership.

The Cornerstones principles are introduced to the group during the first contact. The model is explained and serves as an essential contractual agreement between the community and the development agency. Community members involved have to commit themselves to the Heifer principles, and reach consensus on working together before planning for the project begins. Groups involved have a leadership structure which normally includes a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and various representative members. There must be a balance between male and female leadership positions.

Heifer gets to know and understand as much as possible about the community/action group, before accepting them as partners in the project. In the initial stage, staff members spend a week living in the community to gather as much information as possible, and try to understand their problems. All needs expressed and information obtained is considered worthy of attention. Action groups identify their own training needs, and group members are involved as trainers.

Although Heifer screens, monitors and evaluates project participants based on their Cornerstones principles, communities can invite them to be their partners in development. Once accepted, communities define their needs, set their goals and manage their own projects, but Heifer staff provides them with guidelines if needed. Objectives are set each month, previous objectives are analysed, and their success or failure is assessed. Involvement of the action group in goal setting and strategy design is considered essential to make the community self-reliant and team-oriented. Group members are involved at every level of decision making affecting the community directly, such as the type of animals they want to care for, and to whom they will pass their gift. An ongoing process of monitoring is employed, and ongoing self-evaluation is a participatory learning process. If problems such as sustainability is found, the process starts over again.

Heifer constantly communicates with community members by holding regular meetings to obtain feedback, to provide information, and to facilitate in-depth discussions. A meeting date is usually scheduled at the previous meeting. Each action group has a leader - should there be problems or questions at other times, leaders can contact the community worker and vice versa via predetermined arrangements. The local language is spoken at all meetings and training sessions. Minutes of meetings are recorded and available should a stakeholder, the community worker or a group member require it. Group members are informed about new develop-

ments on the science front via radio, newspapers, Heifer staff themselves, and extension staff at the University of Pretoria's Veterinary and Agricultural Faculties.

Trusting relationships are built with project participants by means of interpersonal contact and regular communication. Special emphasis is placed on collaboration. Heifer shows respect for community members' opinions, and constantly builds a team feeling to avoid feelings of isolation. The leader of the project (a community member) is expected to keep participation and motivation high.

Individuals from different institutions are invited to become involved in different projects, either personally or through financial contributions. Since Heifer Project-SA has experienced professional staff members, financial contributions are preferred. However, Heifer still wants some kind of personal contact between individual donors and the community to which they contribute. Once donors have selected the project they wish to support (chickens, goats or dairy cows), they are invited to meet the members of the action group/community.

At the present time, Heifer Project-South Africa is financially supported by Heifer Project International, based in the USA. HPI fundraises in different countries for different projects. Heifer Project-SA agreed that their initial approach would be to educate people about poverty, and to highlight how individuals can get involved in addressing their own problems. The focus of Heifer Project-SA is therefore on education, and not on fundraising. Heifer Project-SA is very fortunate to be in such a situation.

## **7.2 Problems encountered by Heifer Project - SA**

After having analysed the difficulties encountered by Heifer, as set out below, the researchers are of the opinion that these problems can be considered strategic issues for Heifer, according to the typology for differentiating strategic and communication issues, mentioned earlier (Steyn & Puth, 2000):

- *Heifer's most crucial cornerstone is the passing of the gift to another family. This has been found to be a very sensitive issue, difficult for action groups to understand and implement. This can be classified as an Organisational issue Type 1, where communication is not the cause of the problem, but can provide a solution. The corporate communication strategy could be to spend more time in the initial stage communicating to action groups, explaining the cornerstone, making them understand that the whole project rests on this principle, to encourage individual members to explain their feelings about the matter, and even ask for advice' on how this important problem could be overcome or managed.*
- *It takes a considerable amount of time to train action groups in the Cornerstones Planning Model before the arrival of the animals. This can be classified as an Organisational issue Type 2, where communication is not the cause of the problem, cannot provide a solution but can explain the issue.*



The corporate communication strategy in this instance could be to keep morale and motivation high during this time so that action groups do not lose interest - explaining the importance of the training in empowering the action groups so that they can be successful with the project, and introduce them to other groups who have successfully completed the project.

- *Communities in the different regions hear about Heifer's projects and want to participate. In some instances these communities/groups are economically more privileged than the communities that Heifer - SA aims to assist.* This can be classified as a corporate communication issue, where too little or no communication with external stakeholders is the problem. The corporate communication strategy could be to communicate the purpose of the project widely - especially in the regions where projects are already in progress. Negative perceptions could easily be created when more affluent groups feel that they are being discriminated against, not being accepted for the project. To prevent such a situation, these groups might even be engaged in conversation as to ascertain their exact needs and seek other solutions (such as to pay a small membership fee in addition to a thorough assessment of the genuine need of the applicant community).
- *Heifer schedules appointments/meetings with communities on certain days. Sometimes they do not know beforehand that these meetings coincide with other community events, such as pension days.* This results in meetings being missed or appointments not being kept by action groups. This issue could be seen as either a management communication issue (not communicating well enough with project participants, not asking for feedback on dates scheduled); or as a corporate communication issue (not communicating to external stakeholders such as government institutions involved in scheduling pension days). A staff member should be made responsible to obtain the necessary feedback from community members on the suitability of the appointment dates, and to obtain information on other events taking place in the community.
- *No traditional or folk media is evident in Heifer's communication programmes.* This probably points to the fact that no development communication specialist is involved. This could result in a technical communication issue - where messages are not getting through to illiterate stakeholders. It is recommended that advice be sought from a DC specialist as to how the communication programmes can be enhanced by using traditional media.
- *Heifer admits to not being well known in South Africa.* This is a corporate communication issue, where lack of communication causes the problem. The corporate communication strategy could be to create awareness of their project in order to obtain more financial contributions and also more participants.

### **7.3 Recommendations regarding Heifer Project - SA**

The major recommendation is that Heifer - SA should develop a corporate communication strategy for their organisation. Although they have identified and implemented the participative approach to community development in an exemplary manner, the researchers are of the opinion that they do not seem to follow a holistic, integrated, multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral approach in analysing organisational and communication issues, ie designing corporate communication strategies to assist in solving organisational problems - as pointed out by Adhikarya (*in Servaes 2000:89*).

The lack of a well-formulated corporate communication strategy contributes to the problems and misunderstandings experienced by them in their communication with strategic stakeholders. This is attested to by the types of issues they are facing, indicated in the previous section. Although they are almost a text book case in their communication with project participants (their most strategic stakeholder), their major problems seem to lie with other stakeholders. The latter are ignored to a large extent, but can assist them in achieving their development goals. Since their strategic issues fit perfectly into the typology developed by Steyn (2000a), it appears that Heifer can use the model for developing corporate communication strategy with good effect in its existing form.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

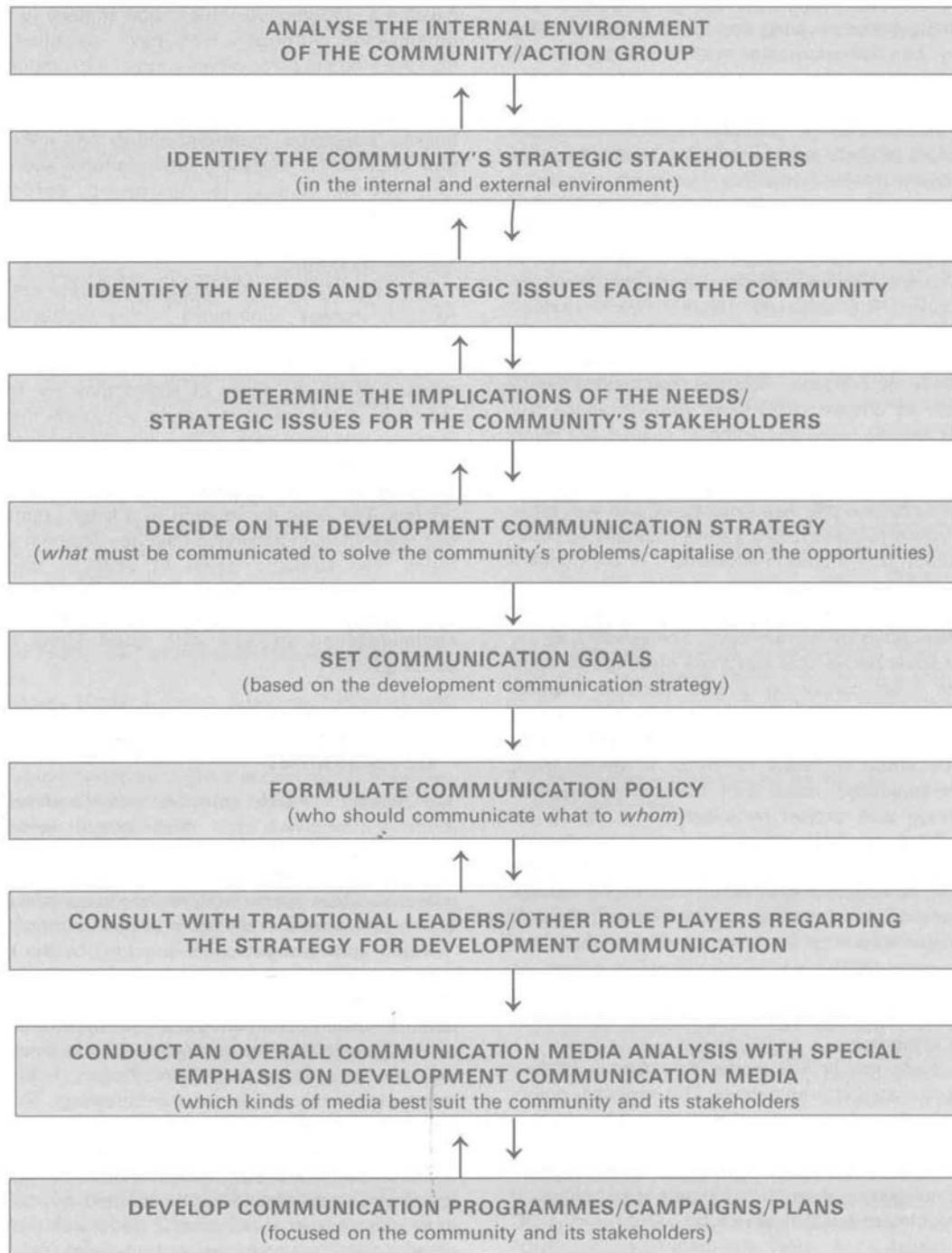
The primary research objective was *To develop a model to be used by a development agency in formulating communication strategy for community development, providing direction to development communication specialists/facilitators on playing a more strategic role in the development process*.

Based upon the guidelines provided by the literature study on communication strategy, the applicability of the three roles of the corporate communication practitioner to a development agency setting (especially the *strategist* and the *manager*), and the case study on Heifer Project - SA, the researchers have concluded the following: That the model for developing corporate communication strategy is also applicable to formulating 'corporate' communication strategy for a development agency, ie that the model should not be adapted, but be used in its present form (see Figure 2, under point 4.5) by development agencies as a framework for their communication planning. This will ensure two-way communication with their whole range of strategic stakeholders, as well as a strategic role for development communication specialists/facilitators in policy making and strategy formulation in the agency.

The major insight that emerged from this pilot study is that the existing model (with slight adaptations in terminology) might also be applied in another context, namely to formulate 'corporate' communication

Figure 3

Guidelines for 'development' communication strategy (developed by the community)



strategy for the community/action group itself, more aptly to be called 'development' communication strategy. Such a strategy would make the participatory approach to development, and especially the participatory communication approach, even more 'participatory', since the strategic information on issues and

stakeholders will be provided by the community and its designated communicator(s) themselves.

However, since a 'development' communication strategy to be formulated by the community itself was not the focus of the present study (it only emerged during the findings stage), the researchers do not lay

claim to a new model for development communication strategy. The adaptations in terminology suggested in Figure 3 below, should be seen as guidelines only - they are not constructs that emerged from the field.

The insight for such a model was obtained mainly from the finding that a communicator should be identified by the community itself to take responsibility for its communication, and also because of the fact that the community is considered to be the major role player in the development process, with the agency being a facilitator. If this is the approach to development, it should also be the approach to communication for community development. The philosophy of participation by the people can only be strengthened by having the community involved in the identification of strategic issues (which would probably focus on developmental needs and problems), determining their implications for the community's stakeholders, deciding *what* should be communicated to solve those problems (development communication *strategy*), and deciding *how* it should be communicated to stakeholders (communication plans).

"... there cannot be development without participation and it is almost impossible to have participation without communication". Williams (*in* Agunga 1998:36)

## 9 FURTHER RESEARCH

(1) It is suggested that 'corporate' communication strategy be developed empirically for organisations falling within the realm of development (eg development agencies, government institutions, other non-governmental organisations involved in development activities, etc) by means of action research - using the existing model for developing

corporate communication strategy as a *pre-existing* conceptual framework, determining the applicability of its constructs. In practice, developing such a strategy would be the responsibility of the development communication specialist/facilitator or corporate communication practitioner trained in development communication.

- (2) The possibility should be explored of developing 'corporate' communication strategy for the community/action group by means of action research - also by using the existing model for developing corporate communication strategy (with its terminology adapted for community development) as a *pre-existing* conceptual framework, to determine the applicability of its constructs and the feasibility of its development/use within the community. Developing such a strategy (and the communication plans that would be based on it) would become the responsibility of the community/action group member(s) that have been identified as their communicator(s) - supported and trained by the development communication specialist/facilitator involved in the project.
- (3) The applicability of the three roles of the corporate communication practitioner to the community/action group communicator should be explored, ie whether the latter plays the role of the *strategist* in providing strategic information regarding the community's internal and external environment, needs and stakeholders; the role of the *manager* in formulation development communication strategy together with the DC facilitator; and the role of the *technician* in implementing communication activities (based on the strategy) in the community, using mainly folk media and possibly information and communication technologies (ICTs), if available.

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