

Chapter 5.2

The Role of Information Communication Technologies Within the Field of Communication for Social Change

Jan Servaes

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA

ABSTRACT

There is a lot of talk about the ‘newness’ of mobile and wireless Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) these days. What is so ‘new’ about them? And in what way will they solve the still unresolved problems of poverty, inequality and information divides in the world? This chapter takes a bird’s eye perspective and presents a number of observations regarding the role of ICTs within the field of Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC). All those involved in the analysis and application of Communication for Development and Social Change would probably agree that in essence communication for social change is the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned. It is thus a social process, which has as its ultimate objective sustainable development at distinct levels of society. Communication media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are important tools in achieving social change but their use is not an aim in itself—interpersonal communication and traditional group media must also play a fundamental role. This basic consensus on development communication has been interpreted and applied in different ways throughout the past century. Both at theory and research levels, as well as at the levels of policy and planning-making and implementation, divergent perspectives are on offer. In this chapter, the author presents a brief overview of the field of Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC) and elaborates on the role and impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Development and Social Change.

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SUMMARIZING THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

There are at least three levels at which we can summarize the field of Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC): by identifying the different theoretical (1) development and (2) communication paradigms, and (3) by looking at the research priorities in different time periods:

(1) Development Paradigms

1. After the Second World War, the founding of the United Nations stimulated relations among sovereign states, especially the North Atlantic Nations and the developing nations, including the new states emerging out of a colonial past. During the cold war period the superpowers—the United States and the former Soviet Union—tried to expand their own interests to the so-called Third World or developing countries. In fact, the USA was defining development and social change as the replica of its own political-economic system and opening the way for the transnational corporations. At the same time, the developing countries saw the ‘welfare state’ of the North Atlantic Nations as the ultimate goal of development. These nations were attracted by the new technology transfer and the model of a centralized state with careful economic planning and centrally directed development bureaucracies for agriculture, education and health as the most effective strategies to catch up with those industrialized countries. This mainly economic-oriented view, characterized by endogenism and evolutionism, ultimately resulted in the *modernization and growth* theory. It sees development as an unilinear, evolutionary process and defines the state of underdevelopment in terms of observable quantitative differences between so-called poor and rich countries on the one hand, and traditional and modern societies

on the other hand (for more details, see Servaes, 1999, 2003, 2008).

2. As a result of the general intellectual ‘revolution’ that took place in the mid 60s, this Euro- or ethnocentric perspective on development was challenged by Latin American social scientists, and a theory dealing with *dependency and underdevelopment* was born. The dependency approach formed part of a general structuralist re-orientation in the social sciences. The ‘dependistas’ were primarily concerned with the effects of dependency in peripheral countries, but implicit in their analysis was the idea that development and underdevelopment must be understood in the context of the world system. This dependency paradigm played an important role in the movement for a New World Information and Communication Order from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. At that time, the new states in Africa, Asia and the success of socialist and popular movements in Cuba, China, Chile and other countries provided the goals for political, economic and cultural self-determination within the international community of nations. These new nations shared the ideas of being independent from the superpowers and moved to form the Non-Aligned Nations. The Non-Aligned Movement defined development as political struggle.

3. Since the demarcation of the First, Second and Third Worlds has broken down and the cross-over centre-periphery can be found in every region, there is a need for a new concept of development which emphasizes *cultural identity and multidimensionality* (further discussed in De Cuellar, 1995; Robertson, 1992; Sen, 2004; Servaes, 1999, 2008, Tomlinson, 1999). The present-day ‘global’ world, in general as well as in its distinct regional and national entities, is confronted with multifaceted crises. In other words, the previously held dependency perspective has become more difficult to support because of the growing interdependency of regions, nations and communities in our globalized world.

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