



SUMMARY RESULTS OF  
GKP CONSULTATION  
WITH PRACTITIONERS FOR  
THE 10<sup>th</sup> INTER-AGENCY ROUND TABLE ON  
COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

# **SUMMARY RESULTS OF GKP CONSULTATION WITH PRACTITIONERS FOR THE 10<sup>th</sup> INTER-AGENCY ROUND TABLE ON COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT UNDERTAKEN IN JANUARY 2007**

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# SUMMARY RESULTS OF GKP CONSULTATION WITH PRACTITIONERS FOR

## THE 10TH INTER-AGENCY ROUND TABLE ON COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

### Introduction

In advance of the 10th United Nations Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development, a limited consultation exercise was undertaken to obtain practitioner, civil society and other external perspectives on the issues highlighted in the Round Table agenda. The consultation was carried out by Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and was extended to other network organisations involved in the C4D arena over a period of 17 days.

The Communication for Social Change Consortium was asked to amalgamate the conclusions of the consultation. These summary results were presented at the Round Table, which took place on 12-14 February 2007 in Addis Ababa, by Rinalia Abdul Rahim, Executive Director of Global Knowledge Partnership.

### Consultation Process

A detailed questionnaire, with an accompanying explanation of the issues to be discussed at the Round Table, was compiled. This was circulated to three main partnerships - **Global Knowledge Partnership** through its Media and Communication for Development (Media & C4D) Thematic Cluster, the **Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) Alliance** and **The Communication Initiative**. These partnerships were asked to distribute the questionnaire to their members and/or main partners, but not to all the people within their networks (The Communication Initiative has 28 main partners, but several thousand people on its email network). It was also circulated to **Internews**, one of the main instigators of the Global Forum for Media Development.



Pictures: GKP Secretariat

Approximately 40 non-United Nations (UN) organisations are estimated to have been asked to complete the questionnaire, including:

- ANDI (Brazil);
- Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC);
- BBC World Service Trust;
- Bernard van Leer Foundation;
- Calandria (Peru);
- Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS);
- Communication for Social Change Consortium;
- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA);
- Department for International Development (DFID);
- Ecole Supérieure de Management et des Technologies de l'Information (DIDACTICA);
- Ford Foundation;
- Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano;
- Healthlink Worldwide;
- Inter-American Development Bank;
- Center for Communication Programs, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health;
- Latin American and Caribbean Federation for Internet and Electronic Commerce (eCOM-LAC);
- Media Institute of Southern Africa;
- OneWorld International;
- Orbicom;
- Panos Institute;
- the Rockefeller Foundation;
- SafAIDS;
- Sesame Workshop;
- Soul City;
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC);
- TVE Asia Pacific;
- UNESCO;
- World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC);
- Young Asia Television (YATV); and
- the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Respondents were asked to use the questionnaire as a guide for feedback, rather than a rigorous framework. The principal aim was to get feedback from respondents on issues they felt were most important to them with reference to the Round Table.

## **Qualification on Limited Feedback**

A total of seven completed questionnaires were received from DIDACTICA, Internews, Latin America and Caribbean Federation for Internet and Electronic Commerce (eCOM-LAC), OneWorld South Asia, Panos London, Panos South Asia and Warren Feek (of The Communication Initiative but who responded in his personal capacity).

The Communication for Social Change Consortium did not fill in the questionnaire since it had already written a detailed background paper for the Round Table, had prepared much of the questionnaire, and had been asked to amalgamate the responses from the consultation. In the author's opinion, this feedback represents a substantive and useful set of conclusions for input to the Communication for Development Round Table. While it should be noted that the limited responses received may not allow the results to be considered as fully representative of the field as a whole, many of the responses were consistent with each other, which implies some degree of consensus over some of the main issues.

Some speculative explanations and conclusions should be considered concerning why there was limited feedback to this process through the questionnaire:

1. The principal explanation is probably that most respondents asked felt that the deadline suggested for completion of the questionnaire was too tight. The questionnaire was distributed on 16 January 2007, and limited time before the Round Table led the distributors to ask for the return of the questionnaires in less than a week. The questionnaire was a detailed one focusing on a complex set of issues. The deadline was later extended twice, but still provided limited time for responses.
2. A second, more pertinent explanation is that it is likely that respondents find the issues being discussed at the Round Table difficult to engage with. Informal feedback from some respondents confirms this. The recent World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) – attended by more than 700 people – demonstrated a strong degree of the coherence and common values of people working in the Communication for Development community. Despite this, there are no existing mechanisms for coordinating this work at country level, which consequently raises significant difficulty in determining how and whether new coordination mechanisms will impact on an organisation's work. A few respondents informally suggested the issues were technocratic or not relevant, or simply that they did not feel sufficiently equipped to answer the questions usefully. This suggests that further consultation and clarification after the Round Table is highly recommended.

3. Informal feedback also suggests a degree of skepticism from some organisations on several of the assumptions underpinning the Round Table agenda, particularly in terms of how much increased coordination will take place within the UN and broader development community. These and other issues are elaborated further in the next section.



Pictures: GKP Secretariat

## Summary of Feedback

Following is an aggregation of responses which, for the sake of brevity and ease of interpretation, is not structured according to the original questionnaire. An emphasis has been placed on issues that are not already covered in the background documents to the Round Table.

### *A Strong Welcome for this Initiative*

Nearly all respondents felt that the issues being discussed at the Round Table were important and timely and that they addressed very real and urgent challenges. There was a clear understanding that the Communication for Development sector needed to respond rapidly to the aid harmonisation agenda, and to UN reform. Several organisations which reviewed the background papers to the Round Table – supplied by UNESCO and highlighted by GKP to respondents – felt they gave a good analysis of the issues and that their recommendations were timely, relevant and, in many cases, urgent.

### *Increasing Coordination of Communication for Development Action: Yes, great but ...*

All respondents argued that greater engagement and coordination at country level from the UN on Communication for Development would be very welcome; coordination at the international level also remained important.

It was universally felt that lack of coordination on Communication for Development is real, damaging and leading to waste. Investment in Communication for Development initiatives are currently not strategic, focusing mainly on very sector-specific initiatives rather than on a systemic approach that can build information and communication capacities throughout society and across sectors. This, it was felt, increases the need for greater coordination and transparency of Communication for Development at the national level.

However, while there was a strong agreement that greater coordination was necessary, the precise mechanisms for such coordination were more open to question.

### *Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: Key for Success*

There was a strong consensus that involvement of civil society, private sector, academic, funding and other organisations needed to be secured through **multi-sector or multi-stakeholder partnerships**.



While a stronger UN coordination role in this area would be welcomed at the country level, it should be implemented through a multi-stakeholder partnership approach.

There are differing views on what constitutes a multi-stakeholder partnership but widespread agreement that some form of multi-stakeholder mechanism is necessary. Several models of good multi-stakeholder partnerships were cited (such as the Mission 2007 initiative in India). Some organisations stressed that such planning processes needed to involve the private sector, as well as civil society, the academic community, government and the UN and that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) was not necessarily well suited to that need.

One organisation proposed considering two sets of coordination mechanisms: firstly, an internal UN equivalent of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) on Communication for Development; and secondly, a broader forum representing the interests of other stakeholders.

There is a broad understanding that such partnerships often need a mechanism to “hold the ring” between competing interests and some felt the UN was well positioned to do that. It is widely acknowledged that effective Communication for Development cannot always be the product of consensus. It was pointed out, for example, that private sector media organisations are often those that lobby against community media legislation; and that media and communication is often highly politicised and the arena where different interests (both internal and external to a country) compete for advantage, voice or power.

Regardless of these issues, it was widely felt that coordination needed to bring, at a minimum, much greater transparency and clarity of what Communication for Development initiatives were taking place or were proposed at the country level, and who was implementing them.



Pictures: GKP Secretariat

A typical statement of the role of the UN (or governmental structures) in multi-sector partnerships was that they can “retain their role as ‘chairs’ of multi-stakeholder organisms, but should not be in exclusive control or ‘veto’ position, otherwise the whole issue of ‘two-way communication’ becomes compromised.”

### ***Incorporating Communication for Development into Planning Systems: The Value, Scale and Diversity of Current Initiatives***

There is a clear understanding and need for Communication for Development to be better integrated into national level assessment and planning systems. There is a strong consensus that unless this happens, Communication for Development will not be prioritised in development and that prospects for meeting of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be severely compromised.

A consistent theme of the feedback was that most multilateral (as well as bilateral) development organisations are insufficiently in touch or aware of the dynamism, innovation and scale of Communication for Development at country level. There was a concern that new mechanisms would lead to new systems being developed in isolation and without the input from existing initiatives. There was a strong sense that it was important to be aware of, and to build on and support, what already exists in many countries.

### ***The UN Working Together to Achieve Policy Impact: A Serious and Necessary Contribution***

There was a universal consensus that a more coordinated UN system could play an extremely positive role in engaging governments in policy debates to secure more enabling policy environments for Communication for Development (examples given included community media, public service broadcasting, ICT policy and freedom of expression). It was widely felt that current media and communication policy often lacks a strong development perspective, and this should be rectified.

However, as one organisation argued,

*“greater coordination amongst UN agencies alone is unlikely to have a real impact on national policy in areas such as media regulation, unless some form of incentivisation is developed with linkage to other support packages, along with rigorous presentation of the case for how improved policy in C4D will improve outcomes in other support areas. Impact will be far greater if the UN coordination is informed by the input of a broader group of stakeholders. Moreover, it is important that C4D policy coherence and coordination mechanisms exist to influence the in-country policy responses of important actors beyond the UN, namely i) those donor governments that remain sceptical of aid harmonisation, but active in C4D (notably the USA); ii) the non-governmental actors in C4D and, increasingly, the international NGO community.”*

There are some well developed strategic agendas that have been formulated through independent, often southern driven processes on media and communication related issues, and these should provide a framework for action in this area (the Strengthening African Media process (STREAM) and the complementary African Media Development Initiative (AMDI) as well as the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) are cited as examples).

### ***Questions of Capacity: Systematic Thinking***

The lack of capacity and expertise within the UN and broader development system on Communication for Development is a key factor in the fragmented and non-strategic character of most initiatives. Respondents felt that planning is often carried out in silos without developing capacity for establishing links across sectors in Communication for Development.

Respondents also expressed the need to employ, as facilitators or advisers, experts who can take a very holistic view – ICTs, media, DevComm, public goods approach, and a need to recognise that there are overarching “public goods” aspects of communication that need to be financed, managed and included in national policy and visions, in addition to sector and institution-specific questions.



Pictures: GKP Secretariat

## ***The Role of the UN: Doubts Among Practitioners***

While the Round Table agenda and initiative are widely welcomed, there are some concerns over whether the UN family is currently sufficiently equipped to play a leadership role in this area. Five main reasons for these concerns are:

- Some UN organisations appear to be downgrading their commitment to Communication for Development (recent closures of Communication for Development departments are cited as recent examples), at a time when the field seems ever more vibrant, substantial and relevant to meeting the MDGs;
- Much of the UN (particularly at senior management level) is still perceived as conflating Communication for Development – a concept rooted in the role of communication in enabling participation and exercising voice – with external communication and advocacy, a concept focused on promoting the organisation’s own brand or agenda
- There is some skepticism about whether the High Level panel recommendations will lead to the kind of substantial increase in coordination as envisaged;
- There are concerns that the UN system works principally in support of and in partnership with government, and that the independence and capacity of Communication for Development to hold authorities to account might be compromised if coordination at country level becomes too focused on the UN system; and
- There are concerns that increased coordination will, rather than deliver coherence, transparency and efficiency, lead to a bureaucratic and technocratic framework for Communication for Development that could stifle innovation, empowerment and pluralism.

## ***Data Collection, Monitoring and Evaluation***

Several organisations remarked on the insufficiency of data in this area and the importance of incorporating Communication for Development issues into national country assessment programmes. There is in particular a serious lack of investment to date in research that is needed in some areas of C4D to develop robust baselines. There was also significant potential for gaining a greater understanding of the information and communication needs of vulnerable groups, and of information and communication capacities, if existing data from different agencies was better aggregated, and definitions made more consistent across agencies.

There was also at least one comment that monitoring and evaluation indicators needed to reflect long term and non-quantitative nature of the impact that C4D initiatives bring. This is recognised as presenting challenges to traditional monitoring and evaluation, and project planning models.

### ***Other Issues to Consider for International Coordination***

One concrete suggestion was the establishment of a UN Trust Fund to support international coordination and initiatives that cannot be funded from country level budgets because of their political significance. Coordination and cross referencing with other UN funds, initiatives or processes could be encouraged; and the UN Democracy Fund and an annual Human Development Report were cited as examples.

THE END



Pictures: GKP Secretariat

Communication for Development, a socio-cultural process which puts the people most affected at the centre of decision-making around their own development, can play an important role in fostering dialogue, facilitating information and knowledge sharing, building understanding and consensus around collective action, and amplifying the voice and influence of people in policy processes (Servaes et al 2006).

*[Source: "Towards a Common UN System Approach, Harnessing Communication to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals — Background Papers prepared for the 10th UN Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 12-14 February 2007]*



Picture: IDRC/CRDI

## Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP)

GKP is the leading international multi-stakeholder network committed to harnessing the potential of knowledge, and information and communication technologies for sustainable and equitable development. GKP brings together public sector, private sector and civil society organisations with the goal of Sharing Knowledge and Building Partnerships to promote innovation and advancement in Knowledge for Development (K4D) and Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D).

Through GKP, governments, business and civil society organisations share their experience, ideas and solutions to unleash the potential of knowledge and ICT to improve lives, reduce poverty and empower people. GKP activities and programmes propagate innovative and practical solutions to development problems within four strategic themes – Access to Knowledge, Education, Poverty Reduction and Resource Mobilisation.

With over 100 members on all continents, GKP is a network of networks with a global and regional dimension, spread across 7 regions: Africa; Central and Eastern Europe; East Asia; Latin America & the Caribbean; Middle East and North Africa; Oceania and South Asia. Working together, GKP members increase their organisational prominence to influence policy at a global level as well as to secure more opportunities for spreading the benefits of up-scaled K4D and ICT4D initiatives.

GKP activities focus on:

- Convening knowledge sharing events with products and innovative solutions;
- Brokering multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) for knowledge sharing and increasing effectiveness of ICT for development initiatives;
- Promoting innovation in the use and appropriation of ICT for development initiatives and knowledge sharing;
- Facilitating mobilisation of investments in ICT for Development at local, national, and global levels; and
- Influencing policy, regulatory frameworks and public opinion.

Founded in 1997, GKP is governed by an Executive Committee (EXCOMM) which comprises representatives elected by and from members from the developing and developed world across all sectors. The EXCOMM provides overall strategic guidance for the network, which is supported by a Secretariat based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

For more information, please visit [www.globalknowledge.org](http://www.globalknowledge.org).

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