Criminal Justice and Communication – a Key Component in Social Change

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This paper looks at the role of communication which enables social change and is critical in developing countries. Key elements need to be in place for effective communication strategies to achieve results such as the inclusion of intended beneficiaries within the planning and ownership and relevant and appropriate content designed with a participatory approach.

Some core lessons learned working primarily in health, governance and humanitarian aid during a 25-year career are shared below. These have a practical application to working in criminal justice for long term change.

While working in both national and localised communication strategies around the world, irrespective of the sector (health, agriculture, governance, Violence Against Women and Girls etc.) this element of access is critical to the success or failure of national communication campaigns.

Currently, due to family commitments, I work for a small charity which supports women in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, Britain's only all-female facility of this kind. It's been interesting to note that during lockdown we have been supporting women around the country who have been released from Yarl's Wood. Many do not have enough money for smart phones and Wi-Fi and therefore they have had no access to information on food banks, local services, legal advice, shelter or accommodation and so on. In supporting them their number one priority is access to mobile phone credit and data credit - both considered a higher priority than food.

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Covid-19 has made a number of things much clearer. The value of our health, the value of our family and friends, and the value of communication tools. The latter has enabled remote working, remote health care provision, remote education and generally kept the world abreast of risk and responses during this pandemic.

Communication has played a central role on the world stage. We have witnessed media ignite citizens' awareness of the coronavirus and drive change in behaviour in remote and urban environments. In just a few months, while some remote tribes have headed back into the Amazon basin, others in their millions stood 2m apart wearing face masks around the world.

History has witnessed how effective a mix of media can be galvanising populations in movements for change. From the propaganda of war from WWII through to RTLM's hate radio in the Rwandan genocide to the marketing messages of the private sector or the Arab Spring, the power of media to incite dramatic change, political protests such as BLM and ultimately lead to change but the critical question is what makes the communication effective. What role does it play that is relevant to changing human behaviour which is a core component of national and international development?

One critical question is how to move from awareness of new information to challenging entrenched beliefs and practicing recommended changes which alter behaviour over the medium to long term.

Below I outline a few core considerations when working with communication for social development these may seem obvious but often the obvious are easily taken for granted.

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Ownership

Latest advances in smart phone technology, with access to Wi-Fi and/or broadband and virtual collaborative communication technologies have been a significant factor in being able to work remotely, educate our children and access shopping, health professionals and advice throughout the coronavirus lockdown. Without ownership those streams of knowledge and learning are not available.

When considering the facts behind global statistics of ownership it reminds us that those who own tend to be men, they tend to be in urban settings and women tend to own significantly less communication devices.

Source: ITU (International Telecoms Union 2019 Global Stats

Fixed Line Subscriptions		Mobiles
.4%	Africa	34%
8.1%	Arab / Middle East	67.3%
14.4%	Asia / Pacific	89%
31.9%	Europe	97.4%

Ownership of technology can frequently be overlooked, whether it is mobiles or broadcast, print or traditional media yet as a generalization, it is safe to say women have less access to communication technologies. Take mobiles for instance, there are 313M fewer women than men using mobile internet[1]. Women's mobile phone ownership has increased significantly since 2014, but there is a persistent mobile gender gap with women at least 10% less likely than men to own a mobile. Affordability, literacy and digital skills and a perceived lack of relevance and safety and security concerns are the most important barriers for women's ownership of mobiles and mobile internet.

There is a persistent problem with media ownership which I first came across in Zimbabwe in the early '90s. UNFPA had supported a significant piece of work with the criminal justice system to enable the law to be changed permitting women to inherit land after the death of their husbands. A national campaign was commissioned explaining inheritance rights for women.   Very few citizens knew that the law had been changed or how this would impact their livelihoods. Women had very limited access to communication technologies such as radios and televisions which were owned primarily by the men – so a nationwide communication campaign which relied solely on these technologies was destined to fail without the intended beneficiaries having ownership and access to the medium of communication. The result was very poor uptake of the law and a continuation of the status quo.

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[1] https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2019.pdf

In Sierra Leone in 2015 I saw the same error being made on a communication campaign to end corruption launched by the Anti Corruption Commission. The £14m programme relied on a phone in process to report corruption endemic throughout society and the basic consideration of very limited rural and remote urban access to phones was not included in the planning process.

In addition to the ownership of the communication device, consider the ownership of the communication initiative. The most effective interventions are those where local populations participate and took ownership of the projects, ensuring that the media initiatives were culturally relevant and demand driven. The impact of projects can be sustained after international assistance is over only if they are wholly owned by the people, professions, and communities that they were designed to help.

After the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, a huge task faced the Rwandese to rebuild their country. Peace and reconciliation seemed a far cry from the devastation that those four months had left behind. In 1998 a small British NGO set up a radio soap opera to address the challenges faced by the aftermath of genocide, the rapid increase in HIV/AIDS, the recent memories of rape and torture and the extreme levels of distrust across the country. The programme, called *Urunana* meaning 'hand-in hand' focused explicitly on building story lines which tackled the core issues of peace and reconciliation left after the genocide and was broadcast both locally and on the BBC Great Lakes Service. The research, writing, actors and production teams were a mix of Hutus and Tutsis and, over the course of the next 10 years they learned the production cycle of the soap opera and created a sense of community that galvanised the country. Still today they are an independent organisation specialising in behavioural and social change communication on a multitude of issues in the region.

The role of peace building includes politics, persuasion and consensus building and for this reaching the local audience is the main priority. Local professionals, civil society and communities all play a part to ensure the content of message is relevant. In order to be effective, listening to the community needs is more important than top down information provision. In order to ensure the audience has access and the content is relevant two-way grass roots communication is essential to build local support and participation.

Communicating to the grassroots requires an understanding of who has access, how information is transmitted across society and perceived and the way traditional networks are used and the relevance of the content is rooted in local concerns.

Access and Relevance

Whether the community is small and local or national, access to the media tool is critical for the intended beneficiary to take on board the content of the communication.

Radio has traditionally been the medium which reaches the most people in the rural areas of developing countries. It's the lowest cost and can reach inaccessible areas where mobile phone and television penetration is poor. This element of which media is used to reach the intended beneficiaries / audiences is critical in any communication work and needs to be central to the design. If it is done well it can have a significant impact as seen for example in Sierra Leone's incredibly effective Get to Zero campaign on Ebola which utilised 47 community radio stations around the country to curb the epidemic in 2015.

But access can be complicated by barriers of language, literacy, gender and jargon which reduce access just as much as the ownership of the technology. Keeping in mind women and girls generally

have less access to education, and less money these barriers can be significantly more difficult to climb for them. But barriers can be in place for the most educated as well.

While working in Bangladesh, evaluating a £60m DFID research to policy uptake initiative, this aspect of access and relevance was made critically clear. The programme of work funded research from a multitude of UK and USA based Ivy League and Oxbridge universities to implement rigorous in-depth research into key issues in 12 Less Developed Countries countries. The researchers implemented their field work, the funders paid and the findings were presented to the policy makers. However two critical weaknesses became apparent; first that the language, graphical representation and high level of academic jargon was not accessible to the policy makers and second, that much of the research had been decided in the UK and the USA and not enough consultation had been done with the policy makers in the 12 countries. They found much of the findings irrelevant to their policy needs and much of the research fell short of influencing policy.

These two critical components of access and relevance can be seen making a significant difference even in the poorest and most remote communities if there is access to the communication medium and when content is relevant. The role that participation plays in empowering people to act is critical.

In Somaliland a £350k project on FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) took the message to the people through radio, ensuring that access was supported through focus group discussions and a wide range of women's groups and civil society were encouraged to participate across the region. While radios were owned by the men the programmes were rebroadcast at times when research had shown women had access to the radios. The programme content was shaped by Somalis, broadcast in Somali and written, researched and presented by Somalis. In addition, men and women around the region were continuously consulted about the relevance and the appropriateness of the content of the programmes and their participation encouraged. The programme ran over 5 years and in that time the levels of stage 3 and 4 [2]FGM reduced by 26% and 34% respectively. Extensive research put the success down to the women and men having separate but equivalent access, the project being owned, researched and produced by local people so the content was relevant and appropriate[3].

Within this is the development of the messages and the research required to ensure that messages within the communication platform are relevant and appropriate to the audience needs. When programmes are localized, context specific or relevant and driven by the beneficiaries they are more effective given language, nuance, colloquialisms. The participation of the intended beneficiaries in the process is critical.

Participation

 The role of participation in communication for social change and development cannot be emphasised enough.

In the past 25 years of experience, the one element that is paramount to success of a project or programme is the inclusion of participation with the intended audience/beneficiaries. Delivering top down information has negligible effect and can turn the audience off message. Participatory approaches from the design and development to the implementation of research and delivery of

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[2] Stage 3 FGM is the full removal of the labia major and the labia minor as well as the clitoris; Stage 4 includes pricking, burning, cutting scraping and piercing of the area
[3] Considerable impact was also attributed to men understanding the consequence of FGM and pressurising the women to reduce cutting due to economic impact on the family.

communication activities can spur discussion and engagement, empower individuals and groups, strengthen leadership and advocacy skills, and promote alternatives to norms and practices. The role of interaction and participation bring active engagement with the subject matter and change the audience from passive recipients of information to actively engaged proactive beneficiaries of the learning process.

This is particularly important when facing societal norms that challenge the core of the family and the fabric of local social interactions , particularly those that result in gender inequities and violence. WHO estimates that over 35% of the worlds women experience gender-based violence.[4]

While working in Myanmar, on the border with China in the area that used to be the Golden Triangle, I was confronted with one of the worst entrenched domestic violence scenarios of my 25-year career in development. There was no concept of questioning the ownership of the woman on whom any sort of punishment could be dealt. If she produced girls, she was beaten; if he had an STD from multiple encounters, it was her fault, if she worked or didn't work or had an opinion it was her fault and if the children cried or chickens died, the violence was quick.

In designing a MCHN (Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition) programme we encouraged men first to discuss the impact of children on their lives and we began to unpick the total lack of awareness of human rights. Women too had limited awareness that VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) was not the norm everywhere. Gradually we began to tackle these misconceptions through working with public health officials, the church and civil society and constantly supporting communication initiatives at grass roots level. Community theatre, comics and discussion began to unravel the consequences of VAWG within the community and discussion and debate became accepted. It is this element of discussion and debate, this participation in the process of considering how new information fits into the norms of both the individual and a community that enables and empowers both the individual and the collective consciousness of the community to sow the seed of change. In time, communities in their own right began to challenge the norm of severe beatings. Their participation was critical in the embryonic stages of empowerment of women to discuss and debate using their own voice and their own ability to challenge societal norms.

In the urban areas of Myanmar the 'She Can' initiative targeting safety, mobility and access to justice through training paralegals to provide direct advice to women in the community again where participation was critical and work with local politicians to advocate for change such as the provision of street lights locally and at national level. Like minded groups of women were brought together in solidarity to bring their combined stories to politicians through advocacy and public campaigns to raise awareness amongst women in Myanmar.

At the same time the capacity of police, prosecutors, judges and other members of the criminal justice system was being built to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The participation and uptake were unexpectedly high with police forces keen to join the initiative having recognised the demand from their own communities. This led the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to support the first Inter-Agency initiative[5] with criminal justice agencies coordinating a multi sector approach with the police and justice agencies working with the Ministry of Health and Department of Social

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[4]www.worldbank.org/en/progrms/development-marketplace-innovations-to-address-gender-based-violence
[5]https://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/en/myanmar/2018/11/gender-based-violence/story.html

Welfare to meet the challenges of VAWG. Sadly, this initiative had no budget for communication and the great work getting this in place was not shared through a communication strategy to show and share the institutional support more widely. Had there been, the influence could have been more profound. This highlights a perennial problem of thinking not extending to the role communication can plan and initiatives being underfunded in the area of communication for social change.

Funding

Traditionally in international development initiatives, communication has been significantly underfunded. Rather than recognised for its merit communication for social change has been overshadowed by top down dissemination strategies, or been perceived as a public relations or its impact being questioned due to difficult methods of providing rigor in monitoring and evaluation.

Media has been traditionally funded by building the capacity of the technical staff and institutions of media, primarily state owned. Outreach is therefore hampered by political will and by huge air time transmission costs. Private sector media has had to rely on advertising to support its development and content is created at the will of the editorial staff and owners, primarily for advertising revenue. Independent content providers need to make their products attractive to the audience - usually through entertainment and not educational content. This has meant that content relevant to social development has largely remained under the domain of sectors in development and has been funded as add-ons to health, justice, agriculture and governance programmes. Social change or development communication budgets invariably fall far short of the required amounts to make a significant change.

With HIV/AIDS, communication was funded independently and began to make inroads into providing evidence of behaviour change which linked access to relevant and appropriate communication projects and a reduction in HIV transmission.   However, measuring the impact of communication has been notoriously difficult to isolate and therefore providing an algorithm for economists has proven elusive. Nevertheless, the impact and influence that communication can make is significant and needs to be incorporated into the planning of international development initiatives.

Enabling Environment

Governments and regulators need to be onside to support an enabling environment for communication to be truly effective. People are less likely to speak out if they may get arrested, raped, imprisoned or tortured. The regulatory environments and media laws need to be in place to protect citizens and journalists alike. The power of voice to hold leadership to account needs to be acknowledged and planned for and the consequences of voice need to be acknowledged during the planning process.

In Conclusion

Effective communication for development provides new information in a way that people can access new ideas that can encourage positive behaviour for social change. Certain aspects need to be in place for it to be effective such as ownership, access and relevance, participation and appropriate

and relevant messages. And it needs a budget. With these elements in place, communication strategies can be created and, with good partners on the ground and a receptive enabling environment at grass roots and nationally, communication can make a significant change in the human rights and justice arena.

Where there is more challenge to the structures of a society and topics are more culturally sensitive, communication for development can play a central role in opening up discussion and debate and empowering women through participation. This is particularly challenging in Violence Against Women and Girls, Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare and Maternal Newborn and Child Health as new information and approaches and much of the content relates to the power dynamic of men and woman and challenges societal norms. Initiatives that are well planned, incorporate the necessary component parts and well budgeted can make a significant change when they are included into projects from the start.