

Colecc. LR Beltrán
PP-AI-065

Cultural Expression in the Global Village

EDITORS: DAVID NOSTBAKKEN & CHARLES MORROW

Beltrán S., Luis Ramiro (1993) **Communication for development in Latin America: a forty-year appraisal.** In: Nostbakken, David and Morrow, Charles, Eds. **Cultural expression in the global village.** Ottawa, Canada, International Development Research Centre and Penang, Malaysia, Southbound Sdn. Bhd. pp. 9-38.



SOUTHBOUND

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

Communication For Development In Latin America: A Forty-Year Appraisal¹

Luis Ramiro Beltrán S.

Three major conceptualizations of the relationship between social communication and national development have prevailed in Latin America: development communication; development support communication; and alternative communication for democratic development.

Development communication is, in essence, the notion that mass media are capable of creating a public atmosphere favourable to change, which is assumed indispensable for modernizing traditional societies through technological advancement and economic growth. Development support communication is the notion that planned and organized communication — massive or not — is a key instrument for the accomplishment of the practical goals of specific development-seeking institutions and projects.

Alternative communication for democratic development is the notion that, by expanding and balancing people's access to, and participation in, the communication process — at both mass-media and interpersonal grassroots levels — development should secure, in addition to material gains, social justice, freedom for all, and the majority's rule.

There may, of course, be other conceptualizations of the communication-development relationship. Nevertheless, these three are pervasive in the pertinent literature and correspond well to practice.

Differences do exist between them, and using them indistinctly can cause undesirable confusion. However, for convenience, all three will be subsumed

1. Also presented as keynote speech at IV Roundtable on Development Communication, Instituto para America Latina, Lima, Peru, 23-26 February 1993.

into the broader label of “communication for development”. This is not equivalent to a single all-enhancing definition, but is necessary to facilitate discussion.

What has been the record of communication for development in Latin America? Has this region made significant contributions to it? For almost 45 years, Latin America has been remarkably active, imaginative, and productive in using communication in the service of development. It started practicing communication for development long before any theories were proposed.

Radio for Peasants

Two of the most significant and long-lasting experiences with communication for development started in 1948 in Colombia and Bolivia.

In Colombia, a parish priest, Joaquin Salcedo, established a rudimentary broadcasting station for peasants in an Andean village. Radio Sutatenza had the modest purposes of expanding Catholic indoctrination and helping reduce illiteracy in its immediate sphere of influence. In a few years, however, this individual initiative evolved to become *Accion Cultural Popular* (ACPO), one of the largest, most complex, and highly influential multimedia institutions of nonformal distance education for rural development in the world.

ACPO’s “radiophonic school” strategy — group listening and discussion of special programs assisted by a local trainer and print materials — was soon adopted by equivalent organizations in most countries of the region. Supported by the government, and later substantially subsidized by foreign aid, ACPO-Radio Sutatenza constituted the first successful case of institutionalized development support communication in Latin America.

Workers’ Radio

In Bolivia, mining workers’ unions established a number of radio stations through contributions from their meagre salaries and rapidly learned to operate the stations by themselves. In spite of having elementary transmission equipment and a short range, the stations allowed these workers — mostly former autochthonous peasants — to become protagonists of mass communication. Until then, they had been passive receivers of messages from big city

commercial or official stations, which ignored their existence except for condemning them when they went on strike. Now, they were key participants in a process of revolution that was to make the vote universal, conduct land reform, and nationalize the tin extracting industry, from which the country earned much of its livelihood.

Within such a climate of overall social transformation for democratization, the new broadcasters did their job in a truly participatory fashion. They gave their audience almost unrestricted access by taking their microphones to streets, markets, schools, sports fields, and the interior of the mines themselves. They let the people speak out, express their needs and views, and criticize not only the government officers but the union leaders themselves. Their stations also served as community gathering places for all grassroots organizations to discuss matters of public interest, especially in times of emergencies. Such times were not infrequent because the politically militant unions were constantly repressed through military aggression, which on occasions seized, or even blew up, some of the stations and jailed or exiled their operators.

Self-financed, non-partisan, self-managed, advertising-free, and effectively practising democracy in communication, the Bolivian miners unknowingly established themselves as the precursors of alternative communication for development about a decade before the theoretical bases for it were proposed.

Agricultural Extension and Audiovisual Education

Early in the 1950s, the United States established a program of technical and financial assistance to national development in Latin America that placed emphasis on agriculture, education, and health. Along with the program came the application of the communication expertise gained during World War II. The application followed two main lines — agricultural information and audiovisual education. There was still no formal theory behind this endeavour but it clearly constituted the practice of what later was to be called development support communication. Through bilateral services operating in the countries, international activities held within the region, and training in the United States itself, hundreds of Latin Americans learned how to apply principles and techniques of social communication to national development demands. They

shared this knowledge with thousands of development agency employees, especially agricultural extension agents and primary school teachers.

The Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences (IICA), an affiliate of the Organization of American States, played a leading role in the rural communication aspect of this movement. Its Costa Rica headquarters became, as of the mid-1950s, a centre of excellence and a source of adapted training materials. FAO contributed substantially to efforts to build modern farming systems based on nonformal education, which was meant to include mass media. For education, the United States Agency for International Development built and ran sophisticated audiovisual centres and helped many other countries establish their own.

Private institutions, such as the Rockefeller, Kellogg, and Ford Foundations, also made significant contributions, with the latter paying some special attention to family planning communication. UNESCO supported the Latin American Institute for Educational Cinema (ILCE) and the Regional Center for Fundamental Education (CREFAL), which both provided training for the production of audiovisual aids for educational purposes.

Mass Media do not Reach the Mass?

The 1960s opened with the publication by UNESCO of an inventory of mass media availability in the developing countries. The differences with the developed nations were so huge that, in 1962, the United Nations General Assembly recommended that member states include in their plans for economic growth, resources to significantly expand and improve communication for development. The study gave room to think that the mass media hardly reached the masses in Latin America because access was restricted mostly to urban upper-strata minorities.

The Creed of Development Communication

Sponsored by UNESCO, the Director of Communication Research at Stanford University, Wilbur Schramm, published a book in 1964 that was to become the universal bible of communication for development. It embraced the concerns of both development communication and development support communica-

tion. Together with Daniel Lerner's research on "the passing of traditional society", and contributions of other scholars such as Lucien Pye and Ithiel De Sola Pool, the Schramm book articulated the theoretical bases for the uses of social communication in the service of development.

Through these fundamental works, the belief was spread across the world that the mass media could assist Third World countries to do in decades what the Western world had done in centuries: move from backward traditionalism into prosperous modernity. Without much delay, this creed was wholeheartedly embraced by a number of Latin American specialists in communication for development. Their faith in the excellence of mass media as agents of change was bolstered when Everett Rogers' "Theory of Diffusion of Innovations" arrived at the end of the decade. Several of those specialists appeared to perceive their trade as a sort of highly efficient "social engineering" that was endowed with close to magical powers to persuade the underdeveloped masses to become modern.

Development Support Communication Expands

This enthusiastic position was shared by international development funding agencies and led to the inception of hundreds of projects involving millions of dollars in the 1960s and 1970s. Funded by United States and European sources, as well as by the United Nations, most projects pertained to agriculture, education, health, and population.

Through the creative work of Manuel Calvelo, the FAO established in Chile, and later in Peru, a pioneering experience in the use of video for nonformal peasant education about land reform. UNESCO-UNDP supported the Ministries of Education of the Andean countries to design and cost a very ambitious project to use satellite-transported television programs to massively spread and improve their in-school and distance education programs. USAID provided substantive support to a complex experiment to use television as a tool for far-reaching educational reform in El Salvador, and helped Nicaragua improve the quality of mathematics teaching by using interactive radio. Later, USAID applied this strategy to other educational needs in the Dominican Republic. The German Adenauer Foundation supported the establishment of a Latin Ameri-

can Association for University Television (ALATU) in Lima. Mexico used television for high school training. Colombia applied television to primary level education and to teacher upgrading, but used radio for high school. USAID also supported several projects that used radio for health and nutrition programs, especially in Honduras, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Brazil. In Costa Rica, the Ford Foundation, allied with the International Planned Parenthood Federation, helped establish and operate CIACOP, a regional centre to train family planning communication specialists. IICA sought to apply communication to land reform and to university agricultural training programs.

Regional Training and Early Research

A new regional communication institution was born in Ecuador to address training and research in journalism. CIESPAL, an Ecuadorian initiative lead by Jorge Fernández, was assisted by UNESCO, the Organization of American States, the West German Ebert Foundation, and Holland's Radio Nederland International. CIESPAL became the region's best-known communication centre and embraced the cause of communication for development.

In 1963, a pioneer of communication research in the region, Antonio Pasquali, published an insightful book in Venezuela that criticized commercial mass communication in Latin America and recommended reforms that would contribute to democratic national development. By the end of the decade, some doubts were expressed that communication would bring about development. For the most part, however, communication specialists did not seem to perceive the problems of trying to apply a general theory originated abroad to the realities of their countries.

Development Fails

The decade of the 1970s was one of failure in development and confrontation in communications. Latin America was a part of both. The oil crisis that shook the developed nations had grave consequences for this part of the world, and showed the fragility of its development strategies and its structural vulnerability. By the middle of the decade, growth rates collapsed and foreign debt started to grow quickly. By 1978, about 40% of the families in the region had fallen into levels of critical poverty.

The blind application of the imported model had led to this disastrous situation. No benefit for the majorities was obtained from 20 years of attempts and millions of dollars spent. These people were still plagued by low salaries (if not increased unemployment), high prices, and acute inflation. The minorities grew richer while the masses crowded into cities flooded with migrants expelled from the countryside by misery.

Understandably, this development model came under heavy and open criticism in Latin America. The perceptions advanced in the previous decade by the "dependency theory" came to the foreground. The terms of international trade exchange were such that Latin American countries were increasingly selling their raw materials at low prices while buying expensive manufactured goods. The resulting deficits were covered by further foreign debts at growing interest rates and shorter repayment periods.

Needed: Another Development

Because this situation of imbalance affected most of the Third World, a proposal for "another development" was submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in 1975 by a group sponsored by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation. A Latin American economist, Juan Somavía, made an important contribution to this proposal. The model proposed a development based on: the satisfaction of needs of the majorities; endogenous and self-reliant approaches; and harmony with the environment.

In 1976, a team of development scholars coordinated by Amílcar Herrera, hosted by Argentina's Fundación Bariloche,⁴¹ and supported by the International Development Research Centre, proposed a "Latin American World Model". This model claimed that there were no insurmountable limits to growth and that production should be determined by social needs, not by profit motives. Property, private or public, as a means for concentrating power and privilege, would no longer exist, and management would be truly democratic and decentralized. The material feasibility of this conceptual model was demonstrated using a mathematical model built with pertinent world data. But, the ultimate test of its viability, noted the proponents, would be to eliminate power concentration at the national and international levels.

The gross failure of the classic development model was soon acknowledged

everywhere — not only by economists and development planners, but also by some of the very proponents of the old paradigm, such as Everett Rogers. There was now ample recognition that without major structural changes securing equity — within nations and between nations — genuine, democratic, and widespread development was impossible.

Toward Democratic Communication Models

The classic model of communication — the Aristotelian formula of Lasswell — also came under scrutiny. A Brazilian Catholic pedagogue, Paulo Freire, who was in exile in Chile, started the diffusion of his daring new ideas about education. Condemning traditional education as manipulatory of human beings for the perpetuation of the status quo, he proposed a “pedagogy of the oppressed” for self-discovery through free dialogue and “conscientization” addressed at emancipation and democracy.

Added to the critiques advanced by Antonio Pasquali, Freire’s thinking inspired the revision of the classic communication model. Frank Gerace, an American working in Bolivia and Peru, was the first to suggest a model of “horizontal communication”. Juan Diaz Bordenave, Joao Bosco Pinto, and Francisco Gutierrez were also among the early proponents of creative applications of Freire’s ideas about education to communication. Others joined the search, especially Chilean journalist Fernando Reyes Matta, who proposed a participatory model for “alternative communication”.

These new ideas soon reached the United States, where the main theoreticians of communication for development, Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner, and Everett Rogers, came to acknowledge them and even share them. Meanwhile, however, the practice of development support communication apparently went ahead with little change — as if the theoretical reformulations had not affected it. In contrast, the practice of alternative communication for democratic development was sustained and enriched throughout the 1970s by efforts in many parts of the region.

The Practice of Alternative Communication

In Uruguay, Mario Kaplun designed and tested a new strategy: rural cassette

forums, a simple and low-cost procedure for dialogue at a distance among members of peasant cooperatives.

Michel Azcueta, and others, built a whole system of remarkable grassroots communications in a huge Lima slum populated by migrant native peasants. Villa El Salvador was based on elementary technologies that were used with imagination, and in conjunction with an active community organization.

In Brazil, dozens of small, rustic newspapers came to constitute what was called "prensa nanica" (midget press), the only vehicle for expressing the people's opposition to the violent military dictatorships that oppressed them.

Throughout the region, but especially in Mexico, The Dominican Republic, Honduras, Peru, and Ecuador, people's radio was expanded and improved. In Ecuador, a Catholic priest led small, isolated Indian communities to participate in broadcasting by recording news messages and brief programs in their own villages and sending them to a central station. In Bolivia, peasants rented the early morning hours of commercial broadcast stations in the capital city, and in Aymara, undertook an unusual and pioneering exercise of alternative democratic communication based on the private initiative of "mini entrepreneurs". For very low rates, they provided through radio (along with news and entertainment) the equivalent to the postal, telegraph, and telephone services that were not available to them in the countryside. Furthermore, these broadcasters established an association of communicators in native languages and persuaded the Catholic University to upgrade their skills through a 2-year diploma course. Field volunteers were also trained as "people's reporters". Cuba refined the strategy it had developed in the previous decade. Radio broadcasts were combined with thousands of volunteers organized in small teaching "brigades" to conduct mass mobilization campaigns for education and health.

Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador turned to mass media for distance education of school children, provincial teachers, and university students. The Mexican government built a special television network to support rural development. Brazil established the region's largest network of educational television channels. Attempts were made in Mexico to use the very popular "telenovela" (soap opera) to stimulate family planning

and to teach health care and nutrition. In Chile, the organization of the Movement of the New Latin American Cinema was formalized in a convention attended by leading directors of famous critical and documentary films such as Glauber Rocha (Brazil), Fernando Solanas (Argentina), and Jorge Sanjinés (Bolivia). Several of these experiences began to reflect the quest for democratic communication.

Institution Building

Another important activity of the 1970s was the establishment of some region-wide organizations of communication professionals. One was the Latin American Association of Radio Schools (ALER), which came to coordinate and support some 40 pertinent organizations in 15 countries. Another was the Latin American Federation of Journalists (FELAP), which claimed to embrace thousands of newspaper workers across the region. A third, much smaller but no less significant organization, was the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIC). All three joined the struggle for democratic communication and development.

A few new institutions also appeared. The Latin American Institute for the Study of Transnationals (ILET) began to play a leading role in the critical analysis of international communications affecting the region. ILET was established in Mexico by Juan Somavía, a key proponent of “another development”, and Fernando Reyes Matta, a leading theoretician of “alternative communication”.

Near the end of the 1970s, professionals working in several institutions — especially in Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and Argentina — began a new area of activity: education, production, and research on mass media messages, mainly television.

Science Aids Protest

During the mid-1980s, communication research grew quickly and changed its orientation in line with the trend toward democratization. Among the early contributors to this movement were Eliseo Veron and Hector Schmucler in Argentina, Patricio Biedma and Armand Mattelart in Chile, and Oswaldo

Capriles, Luis Aníbal Gomez, Eleazar Diaz Rangel, Eduardo Santoro, and Elizabeth Safar in Venezuela, and José Marques de Melo in Brazil. Mattelart, a Belgian residing in Santiago in the days of Allende, was to become the most prolific and influential communication writer of the period.

Much of the literature that was produced centred on verifying the strong dependence of the region on international information, and on denouncing internal cultural domination channelled through the privately owned and commercially oriented mass media. The situation so disfavoured the lower strata of society that it was regarded by researchers as one of virtual non-communication for the masses, especially those people in rural areas.

A few studies criticized the very conduct of inquiry—its basic assumptions, objectives, and methods. Other studies criticized communication legislation and, going beyond traditional studies on press censorship, proposed new definitions for information freedom and a broader set of communication rights in line with the drive for democratization.

Perhaps for the first time in the history of the social sciences, European and North American professional journals started publishing articles on communication by Latin American authors. International organizations, such as UNESCO, and worldwide associations, such as AIERI (IMCR), also began to include Latin American researchers and practitioners in their memberships and activities and even to hold some of their meetings in the countries of the region.

Conflict Around a Dream: Policies

The most resounding and controversial activity in the 1980s proved to be the movement to establish national communication policies that would bring a measure of rationality to national communication systems, which were dominated by private, commercial activity.

At the international level, UNESCO held a meeting of Latin American experts in Bogota in 1974. This meeting was the basis for a future intergovernmental meeting on national communications policies. These experts recommended that the policies should include provisions to stimulate access to mass media messages and to increase and improve use of these messages for educational and cultural programs. The meeting criticized the private sector,

but it did not suggest its elimination or propose its substitution with state media monopolies. Nevertheless, the international associations of media owners and directors took the recommendations as a grave threat to press freedom and private enterprise. Therefore, they launched an intense international campaign to discredit the movement and discourage the holding of the inter-ministerial gathering.

UNESCO overcame many barriers and held the meeting in 1976 in Costa Rica. Under harsh attacks from the mass media, the high level government representatives discussed the situation in detail and signed a declaration equivalent to a creed of democratization of communication. They also approved about 30 recommendations that would allow each country to formulate and apply an overall policy that was most suitable to its particular circumstances.

However, not even Venezuela, the country leading the movement, was able to apply the recommendations because of militant and persistent business opposition. In Peru, instead, a de facto military regime made various substantive changes in the communication situation akin to the Bogota and San Jose recommendations and, in some cases, above and beyond them. For example, it seized all Lima dailies and announced its intention to create social property by handing them over to organized labour (e.g., peasants, industrial workers, and teachers). On the other hand, it reorganized and tried to bolster and improve state communication capabilities.

New International Information Order: Fire on Deck!

In 1976 the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries proclaimed its desire to promote the establishment of a New International Information Order, which it deemed was as necessary as the already proposed New International Economic Order. Soon, this proposal was endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which instructed UNESCO to provide all possible technical support.

This was not a Latin American initiative, but it did coincide in spirit with the on-going events in the region. A few governments were sympathetic and scholars participated in international gatherings to discuss the nature of the intended new order and the strategies that it would require.

The controversy between proponents and opponents of the initiative set communication at the middle of an unprecedented and heated worldwide conflict. The discussions about the gross imbalance of communication resources between developed and underdeveloped countries and about information freedom were complicated by a Soviet Union proposal for a UNESCO declaration on racism. This proposal caused much tension between 1972 and 1978 and was finally approved with changes in 1978.

Seeking compromise, UNESCO established an international pluralistic group of high-level specialists for the study of communication. Known as the MacBride Commission, the group — which included two Latin Americans (economist Juan Somavia and writer Gabriel García Márquez) — worked under frequent fire from the media. It managed, however, to submit by 1980 its insightful final report, which was a careful piece of conciliation and balance. Its main propositions, all favourable to equity, freedom, and democracy in communication at national and international levels, were condensed in a recommendation approved by the UNESCO General Conference held that year in Belgrade. The decade thus closed with a feeling of appeasement.

The Dramatic Collapse of the 1980s

Far from being alleviated, the Latin American situation experienced a terrible deterioration during the 1980s. The region suffered the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Exports grew at less than half the rate of imports, which seriously curtailed Latin America's participation in the world market. High interest rates, major decreases in private loans and investments, protectionist barriers, and a considerable reduction of foreign aid were concurrent aggravating factors.

Activated by inflation, capital flight from the region reached a great magnitude in this decade. Under such a combination of negative factors, the region's foreign debt, which had been only 67 million USD in 1975, grew by 1982 to 300,000 million USD. Most countries could not afford to honour this obligation even by committing exaggerated proportions of their foreign income to service the debt. The growth rate of the gross domestic product collapsed from 5.5% for 1950-1980 to minus 0.9% in 1982. Per capita product decreased by more than 3%

in 1982 alone. By the end of the decade, many countries saw their per capita income fall below levels reached 20 years earlier.

Not only did the region's aspirations for development come to a halt, regression led in some situations to even more acute underdevelopment. The drastic adjustments required from the governments by the international financial organizations were applied at the expense of social investments and the exacerbation of poverty. No wonder this was called "the lost decade" in Latin America. Yet, changes to the old paradigm are not apparent in foreign aid, although "development with a human face" is talked about and the United Nations now advocates — at long last — "development with social equity".

Communication for Development Survives

What could communication do for development under such dreadful circumstances? Perhaps not much, but Latin Americans nevertheless kept working hard. International agencies, such as UNICEF and USAID, continued to make considerable investments in communication support to health and nutrition programs. OPS (PAHO) reorganized its communication services. Qualified contractors, such as the Academy for Educational Development and Johns Hopkins University, shared with Latin Americans their expertise in the rigorous planning and evaluation of health, population, and education operations such as Guatemala's Basic Village Education Project and Bolivia's National Program for Reproductive Health. "Social marketing" was added to the set of strategies of communication for development in Honduras and The Dominican Republic. Communication campaigns for prevention against AIDS and cholera were carried out in some countries. Several countries also received technical and financial assistance for programs seeking to use educational communication to prevent the use of narcotics.

UNESCO began to operate the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC), which was presided by an international council that granted modest sums to small projects, mostly in the area of development support communication. Latin American leadership was present in IPDC's Council through its experienced and able Vice-President José Antonio Mayobre of Venezuela.

Radio Nederland International established a regional branch of its training centre in Costa Rica, which greatly expanded the learning opportunities available for alternative communication through broadcasting.

The Foundation for New Latin American Cinema established an international school in Cuba for film production, and the Cuban government sponsored and held yearly regional film and video festivals in Havana. Mostly assisted by German funding and expertise, CIESPAL began to offer regional workshops to improve television production.

Headquartered in Costa Rica, ILPEC worked across Central America in the area of alternative communication (especially radio) for democratic development. In Bolivia, ERBOL consolidated the region's oldest and largest network of Catholic radio stations for nonformal education, which operated across the country in four languages. Nicaraguan Sandinistas struggled to build a participatory radio network, new forms of democratic print journalism, and community video.

CENECA in Chile became the centre of excellence for media education, especially for training in the critic of television. Assisted by FAO, Mexico recorded stimulating accomplishments with the PRODERITH projects.

Throughout the decade, two information services derived from the 1976 San Jose recommendations, ASIN (a cooperative of governments) and ALASEI (German Carnero's creative obsession), bravely struggled to survive. They were supported by UNESCO and a few governments and assisted by the International Press Service (IPS), the only international news agency to favour the alternative communication approach. Brazil was the first country to create a workers' television channel and a national association for the use of video by grassroots organizations.

More Institutions Are Born

Several other very significant institutional creations took place in the 1980s. One was FELAFACS, the Latin American Federation of Communication Schools, which embraced most of the 200-plus schools in an active program of training, research, exchange, and publications, and was supported by the Adenauer

Foundation and by UNESCO. Born in 1982 under the leadership of Joaquín Sánchez and Walter Neira, FELAFACS recently celebrated its first decade of work with a professional gathering in Mexico that was attended by some 4000 Latin American professionals.

The establishment in Peru of Instituto para América Latina (IPAL) endowed the region with an institution born under the creed of democratic communication for development. Led by Rafael Roncagliolo, it has been very productive in research, training, exchange, and publications. IPAL has paid special attention to communication policies, to new communication technologies, and to audiovisual media, film, television, and video. IPAL now operates a regional audiovisual network and publishes a news bulletin, as well as studies and manuals. Furthermore, it has developed links with regional development and integration agencies such as SELA, the Andean Pact, and CEPAL-ILPES. IPAL rapidly earned an international reputation and has been supported by several international funding sources. Inspired and assisted by UNESCO, and hosted by the government of Costa Rica, the Latin American and Caribbean Association for Radio and Television, ULCRA, was born in San Jose. It promotes cooperative activities among public-broadcasting and private-nonprofit stations.

Another institution was created by bringing together the work of three long-existing Catholic communication associations — UCLAP (press), OCIC (cinema), and UNDAL-AL (radio and television). Headquartered in Ecuador, the three organizations share a joint secretariat and tightly coordinate their resources and programs in the service of their numerous affiliates, which all subscribe to the ideals of alternative communication for democratic development.

Theory Building Advances

In another field of endeavour, the theoretical construction of models of democratic communication had numerous and talented contributors during the 1980s. Maximo Simpson and Maria Cristina Matta, of Argentina, and Mario Kaplun, of Uruguay, were outstanding. So were Rafael Roncagliolo, Juan

Gargurevich, Luis Peirano, and Rosa Maria Alfaro in Peru, and Luis Gonzaga Motta and Regina Festa in Brazil.

There were considerable variations in their approaches and therefore several adjectives were used to characterize communication, e.g., "alternative", "dialogic", "group", and "participatory". One school of thought gained precedence in Colombia and soon became quite influential in other parts of the region. It was "comunicación popular", an innovative conceptualization of Jesús Martín Barbero, which together with insightful work by analysts of "cultura popular" such as Nestor García Canclini, generated a fruitful new trend in communication research in the region.

Contrary to what is often assumed in North America and Western Europe, most Latin American authors advocating democratization of communication were not radical activists belonging to left-wing organizations. Theirs was a broad, loose reform-minded movement, not a conspiratorial communist organization. If any organization was behind some of them, it was the Catholic Church.

The End of Policies and of the New Order?

Early in the 1980s, the Mexican government engaged in a most comprehensive, well researched, and daring plan to democratize communication through an overall policy that was to be implemented by means of a general law and some 30 instrumental projects. However, in 1982, President José López Portillo suddenly dismissed his Secretary of Social Communication, Luis Javier Solana, and cancelled the ambitious initiative. The reason? Once again, stern opposition from the private sector, which no politician in Latin America can afford to ignore.

Such opposition is applied against any form of government planning for the development of communication, even when it is restricted to state media facilities seeking to make rational use of their resources. Venezuela provided a clear example when two different governments included brief chapters on communications in their overall national development strategies. Even if they were not withdrawn, they had to be forgotten. Meanwhile, highly advanced

communication technologies have arrived in the region, and constitute a promise or a threat depending on how they are to be used. However, because it was impossible to develop policies for the old technologies of the mass media, how can policies be formulated for these new technologies, which are often handled from abroad?

Early in the 1980s, a meeting was held in Talloires, France, of editors, publishers, and writers of 60 media institutions from 24 countries of Western Europe and North America. They pledged cooperation among themselves to consolidate, expand, and protect the free flow of information; asked UNESCO to cease any attempts at press regulation; and served the Third World notice of open war against its reform intentions. In Latin America, and in most of the rest of the developing countries, the ideal of building a New International Information Order appeared to have virtually vanished by the end of the 1980s.

Performance Evaluation

It is time to briefly assess our performance over the last 40 years of communications for development in Latin America.

Our activity has been intense, diverse, sustained, and sophisticated to degrees higher than those in other Third World regions. The Latin American contributions to communication for development have been numerous and creative, especially in the area of alternative communication for democratic development. Some contributions were made to the theory and some to the practice.

Latin Americans were the earliest contestants of the classic concept of communication derived from unilinear Aristotelian thinking, which prevailed across the world unchallenged until the late 1960s. It was these researchers who, digging beyond the apparent simplicity of the paradigm, discovered its undemocratic implications. They were among the first to propose new visions of communication — new models that promoted genuine democracy. This intellectual innovation received broad acceptance in the region and was eventually acknowledged, and even adopted, by some of the most prestigious theoreticians of our trade, e.g., Schramm and Rogers.

Another accomplishment of Latin Americans was the conceptualization of overall communication policies for national development. This contribution

was made in the early 1970s in response to a UNESCO challenge. Embraced or condemned, the definition that was produced has survived time and gone around the world. The ideas of the Bogota experts — adopted by the region's government officers in San José and later refined and expanded by others — have ignited debate, inspired research, permeated training, and stimulated action not only in the region, but in Asia and Africa as well.

Latin Americans also made contributions to two other areas of academic reflection. They have sought to revise the legal principles of communication in search of broader, more equitable formulations that would ensure information freedom. The other area of innovative reflection has been in communication research. Its orientation and practice were found lacking in relation to Latin America. Therefore, the prevailing assumptions, objects of study, and procedures were criticized and new approaches were sought. The revision went as far as attempting to reconsider the role of science in underdeveloped societies. Participatory and action-oriented research were recommended as desirable alternatives. The influence of this fresh thinking reached beyond the shores of the region and into the academic circles of the United States and Western Europe.

The rich and imaginative practice of alternative communication in Latin America provides more satisfaction than theorization. The invention of strategies to help the poorest people become full participants in the communication process, and thus in the conduct of society, has had remarkable results in several countries. This has been especially true of radio, which has been used with unparalleled imagination and tenacity. The initial experiences may have started in the traditional pattern of benevolent outsider doing something for the poor and forgotten; however, the approach soon became one of stimulating and enabling the downtrodden to do alternative communication by themselves and for themselves. This change unleashed the people's capabilities to become protagonists in communication rather than passive receivers of messages. Broadcasting was fostered as a self-managed tool that could help grassroots organizations freely meet their objectives.

Another area of regional achievement was the creation of reform-minded and people-oriented communication institutions. These professional communication agencies and associations (both private and public) are found through-

out the region. Apparently, no other part of the Third World has as large or as productive a group of institutions.

For all its merits, however, alternative communication is questioned at times, especially in terms of its scope and impact. Usually confined to involving small segments of the lower strata (forgotten peasants, oppressed workers, and slum dwellers), does it have an impact on all of society? If democratization involves only minimedia at local levels, often without interconnection, how will change ever occur in the decisive domain of the large media? Could it be that alternative communication can provide partial alleviation, but no real and global solutions? Is there perhaps even the danger that alleviatory measures may help detour the people's attention and energies from the crucial problem of power concentration? These are some of the questions posed by concerned observers. In view of these questions, while we celebrate the legitimate accomplishments, we should avoid "triumphalism" if alternative communication is to be consolidated and further improved.

How did development support communication fare over the same period? In terms of building a base of human resources for the discipline, it did very well. It trained, in a rather short period, a large number of people in the principles and skills of communication for development. Support by USAID and the United Nations in the late 1950s and early 1960s, especially in the service of rural development, was decisive in establishing communication for development as a professional endeavour in Latin America. In the 1970s and 1980s, the passion for efficacy derived from research, planning, and evaluation techniques gave the region a valuable lesson in the rational conduct of development support communication.

In terms of final impact, however, there seems to have been little success at too high a cost. Referring to the many projects sponsored by the United States from the 1950s to the 1970s, Robert Hornik, an outstanding development communication specialist, had this to say: "Given the available data about audiences reached, practices changed, benefits achieved, and long-term institutional survival, we can assume that most of them fail; they have not reached even a small part of their apparent goals." Another American colleague of comparable expertise, John Mayo, shared this view in these terms: "Many, if not

most, have been terminated after a few months or years, often in anonymity. Others were able to stay afloat longer, but appeared to lose direction and to drift aimlessly without ever accomplishing what they set out to do.”

Why did this happen? Hornik identifies three categories of explanations: theory failures (resulting from an incorrect assumption that a particular development problem is amenable to a communication-based solution); program failures (resulting from inadequacies in the design or implementation of a project); and political failures (resulting from a lack of acknowledgment of the negative influence of such structural factors as the concentration of power).

In the early years of our professional exercise (the 1950s and much of the 1960s) we came to reify the mass media as being capable of doing much good to our people — to the point of being able to cause the modernization of our nations in a short time almost all by themselves. In the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, we attributed to the mass media intentions and capabilities to ignore national development needs, if not to oppose them. In both cases, we exaggerated the actual powers of press, radio, television, and cinema, and their influence for good or for evil. In so doing, we forgot that scientific theory had warned us long before that the mass media had no power to hypnotize people into submission and that their effects were ultimately channelled through interpersonal communication. Recent Latin American research has again advocated that media messages are reprocessed through the cultural frameworks of individuals. Should we now adopt a more realistic position and neither demand from the media magic results nor demonize them? Should we learn to use their virtues to the advantage of democratic development without expecting them to go against the interests they were set to defend?

Notes for the 21st Century Agenda

What can the initial practitioners of communication for development do? Not very much perhaps in terms of actions. They did the best they could under changing circumstances. However, they can, and must, pass on their experiences (both good and bad) in a systematic and frank manner to those who will inherit their dreams and occupations in the very near future. They can offer notes for their 21st Century Agenda.

1. Put together the best of development support communication with alternative communication. Do not treat them as far apart islands. Blend social consciousness with a passion for planning. Put together technical abilities and political perceptions.

2. Do much more institution building than self-consummatory operations. Teach to fish, do not just hand out fishes. Persuade key schools of communication to include communication for development in their curricula. Foster in them, and in other institutions, communication research geared toward democratic development.

3. Do not support only government agencies. Put faith in the small communities themselves. Help workers' unions, peasant leagues, and neighbourhood groups and work with nongovernmental organizations.

4. Place paramount emphasis on communication for health, sanitation, nutrition, and population. People in Latin America must be healthy before they can afford to be well educated, housed, or employed. Plagues such as drugs, AIDS, and cholera epidemics demand massive education programs that can be attained only through communication.

5. Insist on persuading political leaders and development planners to rationally use communication to attain the development they promise to the people. Help the masses press them for development.

6. Encourage basic communication training at all levels, including the universities that train health, education, housing, agriculture, and development planning professionals. Communication specialists cannot cope with the massive job all by themselves. Help strengthen regional communication institutions. Our countries must expand cooperation. Not even the largest countries can do the whole job in isolation.

Mass Education: The Disaster's Deterrent

Let us not forget that, on the verge of year 2000, Latin America finds itself in a state of gravely increased underdevelopment. The colossal collapse of its economy has halted development, and the struggle seems now to be one for pure survival for many. The adjustments prescribed by the international financial organizations are castigating more than ever before the innocent,

downtrodden masses. Meanwhile the population continues its rapid growth without comparable gains in food production. The mighty do not yield. The rich are getting richer at the expense of the poor. If this situation continues and deteriorates even further, political upheaval and social chaos can be anticipated.

The United Nations Commission for Latin America and other similar agencies have recently recognized that massive education is now fundamental if economic development with social equity is to be secured — that is food with justice, prosperity with freedom, modernity with peace.

A Crusade for Year 2000

At long last, our profession should be called on to provide the essential instrument for this education. I hope this happens soon. I also hope that the development communication specialists of the new generation will meet the new and immense challenges in sight. In fact, I trust they will put their brains and souls to their job as a crusade to help avoid catastrophe and to build the humane society so many of us have for so long envisioned.