

# **Background Paper for Communication for Development Roundtable**

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## **Introduction**

It is two years since the last meeting of the Communication for Development Roundtable, two years in which the field of communication has evolved profoundly. This paper seeks to provide a summary of some of the key events, trends and developments in this field. It does not purport to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but to give a flavour, as succinctly as possible, of just some of the major developments and trends in this field. It is designed to provide information and to prompt discussion.<sup>i</sup> It is divided into two parts, the first of which focuses on debates on HIV/AIDS communication, the second on wider trends in communications over the last two years.

### **1 Part 1: HIV/AIDS and UNGASS: a new era of commitment?**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic arguably presents the starkest, gravest, most complex development challenge the development communication community has ever faced. The remorseless escalation of the epidemic in developing countries provides a devastating backdrop to this Communication for Development Roundtable. While important advances have been made in the effort to contain HIV, the reality behind this meeting is that more than 36 million people are now HIV+ and up to one in four of the adult population of the most heavily affected countries now carry the virus.

Conversely, there is also greater optimism, energy and commitment surrounding the epidemic than there has been for many years. HIV/AIDS has over the last two years become the focus of more intense international attention than any other public health issue facing the developing world, a process which culminated at the UN General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS) in June this year and the establishment of a new global fund (the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria). After years of conferences, lobbying by international agencies and civil society organisations, and the growing evidence of the scale of the crisis, 2001 saw the potential turning point where the international community made HIV/AIDS a major international priority.

Arguably we have been here before. In the late 1980s there was a similar (although not as intense) upsurge of international policy and public debate on HIV/AIDS with donors increasing their funding to tackle the epidemic and with intensive international media coverage focused on the issue. This international attention waned in the 1990s, partly because the epidemic did not materialise as a significant problem in the North, partly because of the decline in political advocacy in the North around the epidemic once antiretroviral treatments became more widely available, and partly because of the complexity of the epidemic and the lack of short term gains.

In the last few years, however, two issues have brought HIV/AIDS firmly back on to development agendas. The first is the (re)recognition of the scale of the epidemic itself. The second is the development of combination therapy of antiretroviral drugs, which quickly became widely available in the North, but unavailable to most people living with HIV/AIDS. This issue became the catalyst and focal point for arguably the first genuinely southern driven global movement in response to the epidemic.

The efforts of individuals and organisations to bring HIV/AIDS back onto the agenda of Northern governments paid fruit in 2000, when the G8 group of nations discussed the issue at the Okinawa summit. That meeting, combined with many other initiatives brought about the process that led to UNGASS in June 2001 - the first time that such a session had been called to discuss a health issue - and the establishment of the Global Health Fund (now known as the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria) in the same year.

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS that emerged from UNGASS was subject to intense and prolonged debate during its drafting, with some of the language, particularly on groups most at risk, being watered down. Nonetheless, it remains a stronger document than some critics had feared and, if applied, a potentially powerful tool mandating governments and others to undertake a wide range of actions. These include the development of "national strategies and financing plans for combating HIV/AIDS that address the epidemic in forthright terms" and to "confront stigma, silence and denial; address gender and age-based dimensions of the epidemic; eliminate discrimination and marginalization."

Furthermore, actors are urged to "involve partnerships with civil society and the business sector and the full participation of people living with HIV/AIDS, those in vulnerable groups and people mostly at risk, particularly women and young people ... fully promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

Now that the epidemic is once again on the international agenda, the hope is that this time, compared to the 1980s and 1990s, commitments made will be met. However, it remains to be seen how effective the Declaration will be. Many observers doubt that the deadlines and evaluation mechanisms it imposes for developing strategies will be met by many countries. Nonetheless, they believe that the language in the Declaration will provide a tool for NGOs and others to pressure their governments to take appropriate action and the Declaration will prove itself over time as the concepts it describes are incorporated into other documents and the general discourse on HIV/AIDS and development.

The biggest question marks hang over the newly created Global Fund. There remain a number of areas of uncertainty over the likely impact of the Fund; there are major concerns as to whether the fund will actually lead to new money being made available; there is continuing uncertainty as to the differing emphases on prevention and treatment; there are concerns over how the funds will be channelled, and particular concerns over representation (particularly from civil society) on involvement in setting spending priorities for the fund.

Nevertheless, there is a demonstrable new energy and commitment around HIV/AIDS from the international community, with new funding not only being channelled into the new Fund but also from existing and major new donors in this field. One of the challenges facing the Communication for Development Roundtable is identifying the most effective strategies on which this still inadequate resource based can be used.

## **1.1 Communication approaches and strategies on HIV/AIDS: what's new, what's not?**

The last two years have seen intense debate over different approaches to HIV/AIDS communication. In particular, there has been a growing questioning of social marketing and behaviour change oriented communication, and increased interest and debate focused in the field of Communication for Social Change, an approach to communication that focuses less on changing individual behaviours and more on empowering communities and societies to tackle the underlying issues of discrimination, poverty and marginalisation that are driving the epidemic in the first place. As these issues are closely related to the substance of the Roundtable, this section seeks to explain some of the main issues involved.

Two developments in particular have focused debate on this area, the first the publication of a new framework on Communication produced by UNAIDS, the second the work of the Rockefeller Foundation in this area.

### **1.1.1 UNAIDS New Communication Framework**

This UNAIDS framework was published in December 1999 following an intensive process of detailed consultations in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and internationally. Its conclusions were that:

“Based on a review of the literature and of experiences in the field, most current theories and models [of HIV communication programming] did not provide an adequate foundation on which to develop communications interventions for HIV/AIDS in the regions...

Participants at five consultative workshops (two global and three regional) noted the inadequacy and limitations of current theories and the models derived from them. Chief among the weaknesses identified were:

- The simple, linear relationship between individual knowledge and action, which underpinned many earlier interventions, does not take into account the variation among the political, socio-economic and cultural contexts that prevail in the regions.
- External decision-making processes that cater to rigid, narrowly focused and short term interests tend to overlook the benefits of long-term, internally derived, broad-based solutions.
- There is an assumption that decisions about HIV/AIDS prevention are based on rational, volitional thinking with no regard for more true-to-life emotional responses to engaging in sexual behaviour.
- There is an assumption that creating awareness through media campaigns will necessarily lead to behaviour change.
- There is an assumption that a simple strategy designed to trigger a once in a lifetime behaviour, such as immunization, would be adequate for changing

- and maintaining complex, life-long behaviours, such as consistent condom use.
- There is a nearly exclusive focus on condom promotion to the exclusion of the need to address the importance and centrality of social contexts, including government policy, socio-economic status, culture, gender relations and spirituality.
  - Approaches based on traditional family planning and population program strategies tend to target HIV/AIDS prevention to women, so that women, rather than men, are encouraged to initiate the use of condoms.”

The UNAIDS framework made a series of recommendations and set out a new framework for HIV/AIDS prevention. The conclusions of the framework were summarised very effectively in a paper prepared for UNAIDS by Arvind Singh<sup>iii</sup>:

“The UNAIDS framework calls for refocusing communication interventions on the basis of five key contextual domains: (1) government policy, (2) socio-economic status, (3) culture, (4) gender relations, and (5) spirituality. These contextual domains, while they lie outside the control of individuals, have a significant influence on their HIV/AIDS-related health behaviours. In essence, the UNAIDS framework calls for moving away from individual-level theories and models of preventive health behaviours (health belief models, theory of reasoned action, stages of change, hierarchy of effects model, social cognitive theory, diffusion of innovations, and others) to more multilevel, cultural, and contextual explanations and interventions (McKinlay & Marceau, 1999; 2000)”

### **1.1.2 The Rockefeller Foundation Communication for Social Change Network: behaviour change depends on social change**

The findings of the UNAIDS report strongly echoed the work and conclusions of a network facilitated by the Rockefeller Foundation which brings together communications actors and experts, ranging from grassroots and community based NGOs through to international NGOs and major multilateral and bilateral organisations. The Foundation’s conclusions argue that while mass education campaigns aimed at changing individual behaviour play an essential role in AIDS prevention, they are highly unlikely to be successful or sustainable unless they are accompanied by deep-rooted social changes which will only result from internally driven change processes, including informed and inclusive public debate.

Many millions of dollars have been spent on individually targeted education campaigns, and many of these campaigns have had important impacts. Increasingly, however, concern is mounting that these campaigns are at best insufficient in achieving the kind of long term, sustainable and rooted changes in society that are required for HIV/AIDS to be confronted.

The principles and approach associated with *Communication for Social Change* have been summarised as moving communication frameworks on HIV/AIDS...

- “away from people as the objects for change ... and on to people and communities as the agents of their own change
- away from designing, testing and delivering messages ... and on to supporting dialogue and debate on the key issues of concern
- away from the conveying of information from technical experts ... and on to sensitively placing that information into the dialogue and debate
- away from a focus on individual behaviours ... and on to social norms, policies, culture and a supportive environment
- away from persuading people to do something ... and on to negotiating the best way forward in a partnership process
- away from technical experts in “outside” agencies dominating and guiding the process ... and on to the people most affected by the issues of concern playing a central role”

Further details of this thinking can be found on the Roundtable ([www.comminit.com/roundtable2](http://www.comminit.com/roundtable2)), Communication Initiative ([www.comminit.com](http://www.comminit.com)) and Rockefeller Foundation ([WWW.ROCKFOUND.ORG](http://WWW.ROCKFOUND.ORG)) websites.

## **1.2 So, is this new and does it matter?**

The chief criticism levelled at these arguments in particular, and Communication for Social Change (CSC) advocates in general, is that they are saying little that is new. Specific criticisms tend to fall into four areas.

First, that participatory, people centred communication has been at the core of most mainstream communication thinking and practice for many years, and most development communication initiatives aim first and foremost to empower people to make informed choices. In this context, argue the critics, much of what CSC proponents are arguing is a reiteration of much of what has gone before.

Second, that some of these arguments are creating artificial boundaries between different approaches and schools of thought in communication. Good communication interventions focus on an intelligent and locally appropriate mix of behaviour change, social change, advocacy and other forms of communication. In focusing on moving away from “traditional” approaches to communication, CSC proponents are creating an unnecessary tension between different approaches to communication when what is needed (and, it is argued, already practiced) is a synthesis between a range of interventions.

Third, that while the UNAIDS and Rockefeller (and other similar) arguments have emerged largely from practitioners on the ground, and while there is along academic

tradition of participatory communication literature, CSC arguments are weak when it comes to backing their arguments up with rigorous academic analysis, modelling and theory. Similarly, they are weak in providing effective evaluation methodologies which can demonstrate the impact of their work.

Fourth, that while many of the ideas in documents such as the UNAIDS Communication Framework are strong in terms of principle, they are difficult to translate into practice on the ground, particularly within the setting of large institutions.

Proponents of Communication for Social Change acknowledge some of these criticisms. Nevertheless, they argue, while there is a rich and mainstream tradition of participatory communication, particularly in the field of HIV/AIDS this is not being applied. They point to a number of factors in response to criticisms made of them.

First, that both the UNAIDS and Rockefeller processes were centred on largely southern based, grassroots and civil society focused and driven debates. These processes appear to have revealed widespread perceptions on the ground that HIV/AIDS communication initiatives in developing countries are significantly driven by institutional and external agencies operating according to their own assessment of what needs to be done, rather than supporting and working within a framework of genuinely internally driven debates and agendas around HIV/AIDS.

In this sense, they appear to have revealed a substantial “disconnect” between funding and some international agencies, and indigenous organisations working on the ground. Such organisations, these processes suggest, perceive that mainstream communication interventions are often highly vertical, and are constructed through a process through which they feel they are sometimes partners, and in which they are sometimes involved, but over which they feel they have little control.

Second, that while participatory communication is indeed mainstream thinking among communication theorists and practitioners, systematically putting these principles into practice on the ground continues to be extremely difficult. Participatory and social change communications tends to work on long time horizons, to be difficult to evaluate in terms of impact and difficult for donors to support.

For these reasons, most financial support tends to be channelled to interventions, such as social marketing programmes, with short time horizons, and with clear and quantitative evaluation mechanisms. Many proponents of Communication for Social Change argue that these channels of communications are generally marginal and peripheral add ons to otherwise vertical and behaviour change oriented programmes, while they should provide the core and foundation of all other interventions.

Third, that in challenging the perceived emphasis on behaviour change interventions, it is not intended to create a false dichotomy between the various different approaches, but there is a strong argument that unless developing country societies and communities are setting and driving the underlying processes of change that are necessary to confront this epidemic, and unless support is provided for the creation of environments where that can happen, future progress in tackling HIV/AIDS is unlikely to be sustainable. They argue that developing countries, both in terms of government and civil

society, still find themselves in a position where they are responding to rather than shaping the international response to HIV/AIDS.

Fourth, that while theory and academic rigour are weak points in terms of Communication for Social Change interventions, there is increasing interest in learning from and adapting the rigorous thinking that goes into much behaviour change oriented interventions to communication for social change thinking.

Fifth, they argue that Communication for Social Change, while poorly defined, is not only suggesting the incorporation of more participatory techniques in existing project programming, but a major change in approach which involves institutions surrendering their agendas.

Sixth, they argue that many communication initiatives are overly focused on the symptoms of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, rather than the underlying causes. While high rates of sexual transmission are undeniably the principal driver for rapid spread of the virus, and changing sexual behaviour is necessary to contain the pandemic, behaviour change is unlikely to be achieved without addressing the underlying causes of these behaviours. Issues of inequality, prejudice, the status of women, the responsibility of men, marginalisation and disempowerment, community and social cohesion, poverty and many other social and political factors are fundamental drivers of the pandemic. Addressing these issues is also fundamentally about using and fostering communications in society.

And finally, they argue that the dispute is not necessarily an either/or issue and that clearly there is huge value in many behaviour change and social marketing interventions. Nevertheless, they argue that unless these are implemented within a broader social and political context then there are major limitations in terms of sustainability and impact.

### **1.2.1 A mosaic of approaches**

This paper has chosen to highlight just a few of these key debates in the HIV/AIDS communication field. There are many others, and in the fields of behaviour change, social change, advocacy and other communications approaches, there have been many developments, not to mention leading organisations, which have not been covered here and which will be discussed further at the roundtable.

One which should be mentioned, given the agenda of the roundtable is advocacy communications. An example of this comes from UNFPA's work on gender. Both in its work on HIV/AIDS in Africa and in changing alienating gender relations in reproductive and sexual health and rights, UNFPA's approach is to create a balance between advocacy communication, to create a positive cultural milieu for safe sexual and gender formation promoting equity and empowerment, and behaviour change communication, to change individual behaviour. Both are required to empower women and men and build equal partnerships between them. In both HIV/AIDS prevention and the change of harmful men's gender roles, more, rather than less advocacy is needed.

Such advocacy, UNFPA argues, has to take place at a number of levels: targeting men in their role as traditional or community leaders to collectively take the lead to change cultural ideas about masculinity; partnering religious leaders with population professionals to advocate safer sex and facilitate adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes; promoting new male gender roles, such as involvement in child care and supporting safe motherhood; working with men as perpetrators of domestic violence and not just treating women as survivors; building networks and coalitions between male groups; changing media stereotypes and creating a debate on the roles and responsibilities of men.

### **1.3 HIV becomes political again: treatment, stigma, men**

The last two years have also seen, arguably, a major change in the dynamics of the debate over HIV.

Since the beginning of the epidemic in the mid 1980s, civil society and AIDS support organisations in developing countries have struggled to make their voice heard internationally. While their North American and European civil society counterparts in the North, principally in the gay movement, formed extremely effective and highly organised caucuses to place the issues of HIV/AIDS on political and public agendas in the 1980s and 1990s, organisations from developing countries found it difficult to find a common voice and a global expression.

In contrast to the highly effective coalition, much of it driven from developing countries, which came into being around the Cairo and Beijing conferences to achieve a sea change in international and national priorities regarding the status of women in society, an analogous international HIV/AIDS civil society coalition has not emerged with the same strength and profile, in part perhaps because there was not a clear issue around which concrete demands for action could be made.

At the end of the late 1990s, that issue potentially emerged in the form of access to treatment for HIV/AIDS. Arguably for the first time, organisations in the South were able to set out their own agenda, their own demands and their own priorities in response to HIV/AIDS. A combination of chronic lack of access to HIV/AIDS treatments, consistent refusal by Northern drug companies and their governments to allow compulsory licensing of combination therapies, the perceived injustices of international framework of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) and the growing scale of the epidemic finally ignited a major international, southern driven political movement to campaign for the rights of people with HIV in developing countries.

The flames of this movement originated principally in South Africa and Brazil in response to the refusal of international pharmaceutical companies to reduce the price of ARVs or allow developing countries to produce them themselves. They were fanned by the political rows surrounding President Thabo Mbeki's unwillingness to acknowledge the reality of the AIDS epidemic in his country, and the lack of commitment to tackling the epidemic by many of Africa's political leaders (most clearly exemplified at the 1999 HIV/AIDS in Africa conference, where not a single African leader attended). The

international HIV/AIDS conference in Durban in 2000, the first such international conference to take place in a developing country and the first where a majority of participants were from developing countries, further energised this movement.

Despite the huge practical, as well as economic, constraints of making antiretroviral therapies available in many developing countries, this movement is beginning to provide civil society in developing countries with the opportunity to make the AIDS issue their own, to carve out their own agendas on the epidemic and to transform a health issue into a political one.

In doing so, millions of people in South Africa, Brazil and elsewhere who have formerly regarded the issue of HIV/AIDS as one of public health and sexual behaviour have been drawn into a debate marking it out as an issue of economic justice and human rights. International lobbying has led to important concessions by international pharmaceutical companies to reduce the prices of ARVs and most recently to major concessions over intellectual property rights at the World Trade Organization.

AIDS has a history of being a highly political and politicised epidemic, capable of energising social movements in a way that is rarely the case with other health issues (although it is far from unique, with the global movement around tobacco providing another example). It is clear that lasting impact on HIV/AIDS is dependent on a major global response, but it is equally clear that that response needs to be implemented within the context of a global agenda on the issue which is shaped and driven from within developing countries. The treatment campaign is helping to crystallise that response.

However many activists remain pessimistic over what can be achieved in providing a markedly increased level of access even with significantly increased funding. The UNGASS document stressed both prevention and treatment as key strategies in tackling the AIDS pandemic, and arguments are likely to intensify over coming months over where and how to prioritise resources.

An alternative analysis of the treatment campaign is that the issue, far from politicising the epidemic, is remedicalising it. A major reason for the establishment of UNAIDS was the acknowledgement of the complexity of the epidemic and the clear need for a multisectoral response to it. With the issue of treatment once again moving centre stage, there is a concern that the focus will move towards an essentially medical solution, with the focus shifting to treating the symptoms of an epidemic, not its underlying causes.

Access to treatment is far from being the only issue which is galvanising social movements in this way. A growing movement to confront HIV/AIDS related stigma is rapidly taking on a new profile and energy, and is emerging from networks of people living with HIV/AIDS, other HIV/AIDS related civil society organisations and is becoming a major priority for international agencies and organisations. UNAIDS has designated the issue as the focus of the next World AIDS Campaign.

#### **1.4 The challenge for communicators: immediate action or necessary reflection?**

There have been many debates over communication interventions over recent years, and the Communication for Social Change arguments outlined above constitute just one of them. These debates perhaps lead to a more fundamental set of questions facing communicators.

The international community is responding and has responded to the HIV/AIDS crisis and this response provides a possibly unrepeatably opportunity to make major progress in containing HIV/AIDS. A new and welcome atmosphere of urgency and energy has been created by organisations (such as Unicef and others represented at the roundtable) which has helped galvanise the international response.

Arguably (and very simplistically), there are three responses being proposed by communicators in response to UNGASS and the increased political priority being given to the epidemic.

There is an “emergency” response, with many agencies and highly committed communication practitioners arguing that we have learned a very great deal about HIV/AIDS and human sexual behaviour over the last 15 (and more) years and that the epidemic is now so devastating that we need to rapidly scale up the time, resources and energies putting the strategies we’ve already developed into action on the ground, and less time theorising about what needs to be done. They argue that the international attention now focused on the epidemic, and funding from donors will not last unless results are achieved rapidly, but the opportunity presents itself now.

That means a major scaling up of operations now. While the response to the AIDS fund has been disappointing, nevertheless much larger sums of money from both public and private sources are available and there is a need to dispense these in highly targeted programmes which take the best of what has worked in the past and combine these with innovative new approaches.

The emphasis here is on urgent action and large scale mass mobilisation of resources and programming, a putting into wide scale practice the strategies that have worked in the past. While proponents of this response acknowledge the risks, in terms of potential lack of indigenous ownership of large scale responses of this kind, they argue that the benefits and urgency outweigh the risk, and in any case African and other governments and societies are increasingly engaged in shaping agendas around the epidemic.

On the other hand, there are those who raise fundamental questions about the strategies that have been employed to date and argue that it is precisely the demand for quick, measurable results that has created a field heavily made up of large, donor driven, top down communication interventions which have, they argue, proved both unsustainable in securing behaviour change and have not addressed the underlying causes of the epidemic.

They argue that the scale and severity of the epidemic, despite the efforts made to contain it, suggests that a reassessment of strategy is necessary. They argue that major

international interventions have sometimes been introduced at the expense of communities and societies taking the ownership and leadership of the fights against HIV/AIDS on for themselves.

They argue that the issues of sex and sexuality, and the intimate links between HIV and poverty, HIV and discrimination and HIV and marginalisation suggest much more complex, bottom up strategies aimed at community empowerment, horizontal forms of communication and less rigid and (therefore less easily measurable) sets of interventions.

They also argue that the increasing complexity of developing country societies, prompted by greater liberalisation, more complex media systems, and more complex and horizontal communication patterns in society demand fresh thinking and approaches.

## 2 Some other developments in the communication field

### 2.1 A changing communication environment

Although communication technologies have dominated the discourse around recent developments in information and communications, there have been equally rapid and fundamental changes in the wider communication environment in which most communication initiatives operate, particularly regarding new technologies and the media. There are perhaps seven key trends, some of them contradictory, which have emerged over the last decade and particularly over the last five years:

- **New technologies**, principally in the form of the internet as well as mobile telecommunications, are creating major new opportunities for disseminating information, networking, amplifying marginalised voices and for creating synergies between new and old media. The potential of allying the power of the internet with the reach of radio offers particularly strong opportunities to create more knowledge based societies. New technologies are creating much more information based, increasingly horizontally networked and highly complex communications environments. They are leading to increasing information saturation for those who are connected, but also potentially major new forms of information (and therefore political and economic) exclusion for those who are not.
- **Media liberalisation:** A major liberalisation and opening up of the media in much of the developing world, particularly Africa, transforming both print and broadcast media from a largely government owned, monopolistic and uncreative media environment to a more dynamic, popular, democratic, creative and complex one. The print media have, despite their sometimes limited readership, played a critical role in providing increased internal scrutiny of governments, and a free press has become increasingly regarded as a precondition for effective and sustainable development and good governance. The number of print titles in many countries has increased rapidly, and while many of these rise and fall rapidly, particularly during election periods, many have been able to sustain themselves both financially and retain a genuine political independence from government.

The broadcast media have also been transformed in many countries, with competition ushering in a new environment of choice and creativity in programming, with many new private and community radio and (to a lesser extent) television stations rapidly establishing audience dominance over old state run broadcasting systems. Private radio stations, while often criticised for relying heavily on formulaic, music based programming, have also been praised for the opportunities they are providing for on-air discussions and for creating important new spaces for genuinely public debate.

This new environment has also created opportunities for the more rapid emergence of a community based media, although new regulatory environments in several countries have proved unsupportive to the development of genuine

community media movements. Satellite broadcasting of television, and more recently in digital radio, is adding a further layer to an increasingly complex media environment.

- **Consumerism:** Liberalisation has led not only to greater media freedoms, but also to the emergence of an increasingly consumer led, business oriented, advertising driven and urban centred communication infrastructure, one that is arguably less and less interested in the concerns of the poor, and in the case of broadcast media, decreasingly interested in providing news and information to its audiences.
- **State run broadcasting systems** have found it difficult to transform themselves into public broadcasting entities and are generally in decline, with a concomitant decline in language programming and the lack of strong and relevant programming of most concern to rural people. In the case of print media, journalists are finding it increasingly difficult to secure editorial space and resources to report on issues of most concern to the poor, and particularly to travel to rural areas, and there are in many cases fewer and fewer journalists who are interested in doing so.

This is arguably leading to an increasing “invisibility” of the poor, and poverty related issues, in public and political debate. The print media in many countries are also becoming increasingly “localised” and national in their outlook and editors are reporting less and less interest in international stories, particularly stories from other parts of the developing world.

The advertising driven nature of the media is also leading to highly sexualised, stereotypical images and messages around the role of women in society, images that have long been criticised in the North but are far more pervasive within many developing countries as a result of liberalisation.

- **Media freedom and freedom of expression:** Media freedoms have been hard won and fought for but remain under constant threat in many countries. New international networks have emerged to help protect media freedoms and donors have increasingly made their support conditional on governments guaranteeing free media. New technologies have made censorship and state control of information far more difficult. While there has been a general global trend towards much greater media freedom, sometimes this trend has been confined largely to urban metropolitan middle classes rather than the population as a whole.
- **Globalisation and transnational ownership** of the media is resulting in an increasing concentration of ownership of media and communications organisations internationally, with increasing numbers of mainstream developing country media institutions being bought by trans-national conglomerates. For most Southern based media, reliance on Northern based news sources for international news has grown rather than diminished and, with the exception of internet based news services, the number of independent southern based news and information sources has decreased, and the degree of regional reporting – and consequently of public understanding of events and attitudes in neighbouring countries – has declined.
- **Women** continue to suffer marginalisation in and from communication networks, and evidence of the scale of sexual harassment and discrimination within the

media itself in Africa (and elsewhere) is growing. When in 1995, UNESCO sponsored a global media monitoring project to explore the representation of women in 71 countries, it found that women made up just 17 per cent of all interviewees in the news world-wide. Women interviewees were much more likely to be lay voices, even on topics which were very woman-focused. Male interviewees were more typically interviewed as voices of authority. 29% of all female interviewees were portrayed as victims of crime or accidents, compared with just 10% of male interviewees. A follow-up world-wide study in 2000 has found similar results and these are relatively consistent across regions. Similar findings have been repeated in many national studies. A further twist in the story is the split in news coverage between urban and rural concerns – the latter receiving comparatively little attention. In one Kenyan study, rural women featured in a tiny fraction of news coverage and a striking 76% of rural women who appeared in the media were portrayed as criminals or victims.

- **Media and conflict:** The media continue to play a critical role in relation to the fuelling, and sometimes in the alleviation, of regional tensions and conflict. Nationalistic, sensational and ill-informed (or misinforming) media remains a major problem in some countries, and is making a major contribution to inciting public resentment, hatred and intolerance to neighbouring countries, migrant communities or particular minorities.

## **2.2 Development and donor trends: information and development = the new new?**

Debates and focus on the potential of communication technologies, combined with a growing understanding and acknowledgement of the role of information and “knowledge” in development, have helped to transform donor and international agency attitudes to the role of information in development. Five years ago, the role of communication and information in alleviating poverty, promoting equity and achieving sustainable development remained in the same position as it had for many years: on the margins of development agendas.

Today, the role of information, knowledge, communication and advocacy in development is better recognised and arguably has a higher profile than ever before. While these areas continue to be chronically underresourced and continue to face major evaluation challenges in terms of demonstrating impact and sustainability, they have moved emphatically from the periphery to the mainstream of donor agendas.

There are many reasons for this shift, with governments increasingly recognising the development implications of transnational information flows, of the concerns over the “digital divide”, the potential of new communication technologies, and the growing characterisation of humanity living increasingly in global information societies driven by global knowledge economies. Perhaps the key events and trends have been:

### **2.2.1 The knowledge debate**

In December 1998, the World Bank focused its keynote World Development Report on *Knowledge for Development*. In doing so, the Bank was signalling its own intended

transformation from being principally an economic entity into becoming a “knowledge bank”, where the expertise and accumulated wisdom that it held and could access was becoming as important as the money it could lend and dispense.

The report sparked substantial debate both within the development community and within the Bank itself, with many welcoming the shift as a further sign of the evolution of the Bank’s thinking away from a “postWashington consensus” view of economics to one which was more socially oriented. Others criticised the Bank for its apparent view that the principal problem facing developing countries was one of ignorance, combined with fears in conflating the terms “information” and “knowledge”, that the report apparently did not address the problem of who judges what is and is not knowledge.

The centrepiece of the Bank’s “knowledge bank strategy was the development of a new *Global Development Gateway*, a highly controversial internet initiative designed to bring together on one supersite all the available “knowledge” on development issues. The initiative met with criticism from civil society organisations who argued (and continue to argue) that it represented an unnecessary duplication and competition to existing initiatives, that editorial control of the site is too heavily centralised within the Bank itself or within participating governments, that while consultation processes around the Gateway have been significant, very little change has resulted from them, that the Gateway, in attempting to centralise information in one place, ignores the fundamental advantage of the internet in enabling a highly decentralised architecture in information recovery; and that the exercise is an unjustifiably expensive use of Bank funds. The Gateway however has been developed and still plans to be the largest portal for development information in the world ([www.developmentgateway.org](http://www.developmentgateway.org)).

The Bank also went on, among several other initiatives, to support the Global Knowledge Partnership, a major grouping of donors, governments, international organisations and some civil society organisations which organised a major Global Knowledge II conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2000 (itself a follow up to an earlier “GK” conference in Toronto in 1997.) That conference mapped out a “Global Knowledge Action Plan” which committed key participants to supporting a range of initiatives under the general titles of *Facilitating knowledge exchange and content creation; Building networks and partnerships; Addressing policy and regulatory frameworks; Promoting advocacy, empowerment and governance; and Promoting community based social development.*

### **2.2.2 ICTs and poverty**

The debate on knowledge was inextricably linked, and largely driven by, the increasing recognition of the potential of communication technologies in development. While some organisations closely connected to Communication for Development Roundtable meetings, such as IDRC, have been pioneering and advocating the use of ICTs for many years, it is only in the last half decade that they have so radically begun to inform development strategies and agendas.

A series of major conferences, policy initiatives, and international reports have contributed to this change. It is impossible to list here all the hundreds of events that have occurred over the last two or three years in this area although two recent developments are perhaps worth highlighting here.

### **2.2.3 Human Development Report 2001**

One is the Human Development Report 2001, *Making technologies work for human development*, a bold and highly optimistic report arguing that both information and genetic technologies offer huge promise in tackling fundamental poverty “*Often those with the least have least to fear from the future*” and it put forward six main arguments.

1. The technology divide does not have to follow the income divide, and throughout history, technology has been a powerful tool for human development and poverty reduction.
2. The market is a powerful tool of technological progress, but it is not powerful enough to create and diffuse the technologies needed to eradicate poverty.
3. Developing countries may gain especially high rewards from new technologies, but they also face especially severe challenges in managing the risks.
4. The technology revolution and globalization are creating a network age, and that is changing how technology is created and diffused.
5. Even in the network age, domestic policy still matters. All countries, even the poorest, need to implement policies that encourage innovation, access and the development of advanced skills.
6. National policies will not be sufficient to compensate for global market failures. New international initiatives and the fair use of global rules are needed to channel new technologies towards the most urgent needs of the world's poor people.

### **2.2.4 The G8 DOT Force**

In 2000, the G8 countries at their Okinawa meeting made the issue of communication technologies a major theme of their summit. The summit, which was held on an island inaccessible to protesters, drew criticism from many civil society organisations for failing to take significant action on developing country debt relief (thus prompting the burning of laptop computers in protest). The summit did nevertheless follow through on its commitment to set up a Digital Opportunities Task (DOT) Force.

The DOT Force was a highly unusual initiative for the G8, with task forces constituting in each G8 country of a representative each from government, industry and civil society, with additional representatives from a small number of developing countries. The report of the DOT Force was finalised in mid 2001 and presented and approved at its Genoa meeting, although the issues it dealt with were overshadowed by the focus on the violence surrounding the meeting, and the focus on anti globalisation protests.

The DOT Force made 9 key recommendations which it committed itself to implementing (full report at [www.dotforce.org](http://www.dotforce.org)):

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Action Point 1: | Help establish and support developing country and emerging economy <i>e strategies</i> |
| Action Point 2: | Improve connectivity, increase access and lower costs                                  |
| Action Point 3: | Enhance human capacity development, knowledge creation and sharing                     |

Action Point 4:	Foster enterprise and entrepreneurship for sustainable economic development
Action Point 5:	Establish and support universal participation in addressing new international policy and technical issues raised by the internet and ICT
Action Point 6:	Establish and support dedicated initiatives for the ICT inclusion of the least developed countries
Action Point 7:	Promote ICT for health care and in support against HIV/AIDS and other infectious and communicable diseases <sup>iii</sup>
Action Point 8:	National and international effort to support local content and applications creation
Action Point 9:	Prioritise ICT in G8 and other development assistance policies and programmes and enhance coordination of multilateral initiatives.

### **2.2.5 The UNICT Task Force**

A new ICT Task Force has just been launched and is mandated by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to find new, creative and quick-acting means to spread the benefits of the digital revolution from which four billion of the world's people are currently excluded.

The members of the Task Force come from the public and private sectors, from civil society and the scientific community, and from leaders of the developing as well as the most technologically advanced countries.

Task Force priorities, below, are defined by the ECOSOC 2000 Ministerial Declaration.

1. To forge strategic partnerships between the United Nations system, private industry, trusts and foundations, donor governments, programme countries, and other relevant international actors.
2. To pool the experiences of both developed and developing countries in introducing and promoting ICT for development.
3. To develop innovative modalities for strengthening the ICT capacity of the developing countries.
4. To assist Member States in creation of national ICT strategies, policy frameworks, and regulatory environment to ensure connectivity and universal access to ICT.
5. To promote ICT for development applications: building human resources and institutional capacity, including e-health, e-education, e-government, and e-commerce.
6. To mobilise new and additional resources - financial, technical, and human - for promoting and funding ICT-for-development programmes and projects.

Further information can be found at <http://www.unicttaskforce.org>

### **2.2.6 ICTs leading to a wider analysis of the role of information in development**

While many donors and international agencies are fundamentally reviewing their approach to communication technologies, for some this is also leading to a more fundamental thinking on the role of information in development per se. The ICT debate is combining with debates on a wider set of issues, such as knowledge, good governance, global inclusion and a greater focus on development strategies being owned by developing country societies, to create increasing institutional debates and renewed interest in the role of information in development.

### **2.2.7 A global civil society**

Another major, and accelerating, development over recent years is the emergence of a global civil society. While increasingly strong and dynamic civil societies at a national level have been developing and been recognised for several years, the scale and impact of a global civil society, principally enabled by ease of communication through email and the web, is a more recently recognised phenomenon. The publication of an inaugural Global Civil Society Yearbook in 2001 by the London School of Economics saw the coming of age of this concept (see <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/default.htm>).

It is arguably the women's movement which has been at the forefront of this development, first with the evolution of a formidably organised, coherent and effective caucus around the Beijing and Cairo conferences, and more recently with a series of initiatives carving out international spaces on the internet and using this to take forward a global movement.

One example is WomenWatch, a joint UN project to create a core Internet space on global women's issues. It was created to monitor the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. It was founded in March 1997 by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), together with other UN and other international partners.

One of the most remarkable of the initiatives from Womenwatch was an online email debate set up in preparation for Beijing +5 review. 10,000 individuals joined the debate which covered 12 critical areas of concerns, each area running for 6 weeks. 1,000 people contributed substantively to the debate, the average ratio: 52% from north, 48% from south. The debate generated information on shared and unique obstacles, lessons and practices. A summary, archives and full report are available on the WomenWatch website at [www.un.org/womenwatch/forum](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/forum).

Another key development is the emergence of Oneworld.net, a global network of civil society organisations, with a partnership now of more than 1,200 civil society partners grouped around a growing network of 10 Oneworld Centres.

Although not explicitly civil society based, another major portal in the field of communications has emerged in the form of the Communication Initiative. A combination of the interest in new technologies, an increasing recognition of the importance of the role of communication in development, and a hunger among communication practitioners worldwide for better information sharing and understanding

on communication issues was captured very successfully by the creation of the Communication Initiative ([www.comminit.com](http://www.comminit.com)). The Initiative is a partnership of major development organisations seeking to support advances in the effectiveness and scale of communication interventions for positive international development. The Initiative has become the key point of reference for debates and news for communication practitioners in this field.

### **2.2.8 World Summit on the Information Society**

While it is impossible to list all the initiatives currently underway in the information and communication field, one other development is worth highlighting. The International Telecommunication Union is organising a major two stage “summit”, the World Summit on the Information Society, the aim of which is to develop a common vision and understanding of the Information Society and to draw up a strategic plan of action for concerted development towards realizing this vision. The Summit will also provide a unique opportunity to gather the world community to assemble at a high level and to develop a better understanding of this revolution and its impact. It aims to bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations Agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society. The summit takes place in two stages, first in Geneva in 2003 and then in Tunis in 2005. Further information can be found at [www.itu.int/wsis/index.htm](http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.htm).

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<sup>i</sup> Declaration of interest: The analysis presented here has been put together by the Panos Institute and should not be taken to represent the views of any of the other cosponsors of this meeting. While we have attempted to be descriptive of the debates outlined here, rather than put forward any particular argument, Panos has been directly engaged in many of the issues and debates explained in this document, and it should be read in that context.

<sup>ii</sup> Singhal, Arvind, HIV/AIDS and Communication for Behaviour and Social Change: Programme Experiences, Examples and Ways Forward, International Workshop, UNAIDS, Department of Policy and Strategy, July 2000,

<sup>iii</sup> This item is of particular relevance to this roundtable. It committed the G8 to:

*a) Enhance the valuable uses of ICT in health education, knowledge sharing, monitoring, statistics, and delivery of care and in meeting internationally agreed health targets, particularly in the areas of HIV/AIDS and other infectious and communicable diseases.*

b) *Expand the use of ICT in the campaign against HIV/AIDS and other infectious and communicable diseases utilising appropriate forms of communication such as community radio, broadcast media, telecommunications and the Internet. The initiative should be focussed in severely affected areas with content, applications and strategies shared and replicated more broadly.*

c) *Create an "ICT Against HIV/AIDS" network in partnership with governments, the private sector, non-profit and international organizations emphasizing a) the logistical and management aspects of treatment in the field, and b) preventative measures through the dissemination of information to the general public, health sector professionals and policy makers*