



# PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DESIGN

A Handbook



SADC Centre of Communication  
for Development



# PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DESIGN

## A Handbook

Second Edition

Prepared by  
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for

the **SADC Centre of Communication for Development**  
in collaboration with  
the **Communication for Development Group**  
Extension, Education and Communication Service  
Sustainable Development Department

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**  
**Rome, 2004**

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ISBN 92-5-105252-2

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**Photographs:** SADC Centre of Communication for Development

**Available from:**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge their immense gratitude to the people in the rural areas of Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, who have participated in the field implementation of the communication strategies described in this handbook. This publication would not have been accomplished without their participation and encouragement. In addition, the authors would like to thank all the rural development workers, extension staff, health educators, media producers and trainers who have participated in the Action Programme for Communication Skills Development of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Centre of Communication for Development which has inspired this work. Many people contributed to the course work on which this handbook is based. The authors have drawn on their collective expertise but wish to particularly acknowledge the significant role played by Chike Anyaegbunam in the preparation of this publication and wish to thank, Gemma Luzuka, Jones Kaumba, Titus Moetsabi, Gary Coldevin, Peter D’Huys and Linda Manasa. In the same vein, the handbook has drawn on many written sources both published and unpublished. These are listed in the bibliography and the authors take this opportunity to thank the writers.

The authors extend a special thank you to the following people who have greatly contributed to specific sections of this Handbook; Joel Chikware and Simon Willby, who contributed in the writing of the section on print material, Osvaldo Lingua, contributing in the planning sections, Eddington Mhonda, for the section on radio and Jonathan Villet, for his contribution and in the refinement of the communication strategy. Also thank you to Luca Toronga who contributed in the original design and graphics of the handbook. In addition, the authors wish to thank all the staff members of the SADC Centre of Communication for Development for their constant support during the whole project, and they acknowledge the technical guidance provided by the Communication for Development Group in FAO Extension, Education and Communication Service in the implementation of the SADC Centre of Communication for Development and the preparation of this handbook. A special thank you to Mario Acunzo, Communication for Development Officer at FAO who took care of this second edition.

Finally, the SADC Centre of Communication for Development and FAO acknowledge the valuable contribution provided by the Government of Italy (Directorate General for Development Cooperation), their generous support is appreciated.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS HANDBOOK

Participatory Communication Strategy Design (PCSD) is normally conducted by a team of facilitators such as extension staff, field workers, communication and media experts in radio, video production and graphic designers. Development workers and communication specialists can use the handbook in two ways. First as a reference guide as they develop their Communication Strategy in the field and second as training guide as they prepare others to develop Communication Strategies. For those who have not been trained in PCSD, it is advisable to attend a training workshop in which the principles and procedures of the activity can be learnt and practised before applying them to a community group.

This handbook is very much a working document and feedback would not only be welcome but is positively encouraged. Please send comments to:

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## INTRODUCTION

- A About the Participatory Communication Strategy Design Handbook
- B Objectives of the Handbook
  - B.1 The Need for Proper Problem Identification and Analysis: A Revisit

### A About the Participatory Communication Strategy Design Handbook

This Handbook has been prepared as a training and field guide for designing, implementing and managing communication strategies for development purposes based on the results of field Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA). The book is a follow up to Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal: Starting with the People. As a logical continuation of the intervention initiated through PRCA, the methodology described in the present handbook outlines ways of involving people in the decision-making processes that may lead to effective communication planning and action to improve their livelihood. The handbook documents the process of planning a communication strategy in a participatory manner, i.e., with the people, in order to address practical problems and needs as identified and defined by them.

While the handbook has been prepared primarily as an instructional and reference material to be used during Action Programme workshops for Communication Skills Development, it can still be used as a guide for participatory communication strategy design work in general.

The handbook focuses on the process of communication strategy design. It also looks at message and discussion theme creation as well as the principles of communication media, materials and activity development and production. Although it does not dwell on the technical aspects of production, the handbook specifies the requirements for effective use of communication approaches, techniques, media, materials and methods among rural communities. It presents a step by step approach to strategy design. In this way the reader is able to see how they can plan, implement, supervise and monitor the whole process. This is done in order to ensure that the reader is capable of defining specifications for communication materials as well as activity development and production. A reader thus armed can work fruitfully with media production specialists for quality control purposes.

The strategy design process described in the handbook has been tested in training workshops. It has also been applied with great success to various development projects dealing with agriculture, health, education, income generation, gender, water and sanitation, animal husbandry, and poverty alleviation.

## B Objectives of the Handbook

Development workers who read this handbook will learn how to transform and use field PRCA and AKAP baseline findings to design and implement communication strategies appropriate for their project situation. They will learn how to design messages and discussion themes. They will acquire skills for supervising the production and pre-testing of media materials. In addition, they should be able to set up a management system for training field staff, monitoring and documenting the implementation of the strategy. Finally, they will acquire skills for carrying out both qualitative and quantitative communication programme impact assessment and evaluation during and immediately following the termination of the implementation process.

Specifically, at the end of this handbook, the reader, with involvement of the community, will be able to:

- transform field PRCA and AKAP baseline survey results into useful accounts for communication strategy design;
- utilise research results to refine and prioritise identified issues, problems, needs, opportunities and solutions in order to form clear and realistic communication objectives;
- review the characteristics of selected priority Interaction Groups for the design of messages, discussion themes, and communication media and activities;
- select and design effective and affordable communication approaches utilising locally-available activities and influential sources of advice and information appropriate in rural areas;
- create messages and discussion themes appropriate for the Interaction Groups;
- select media, and materials appropriate for the Interaction Groups;
- supervise the production and pre-testing of communication materials and activities;
- advise project field-staff who will assist in carrying out the implementation of the communication strategy on the appropriate utilisation of selected activities, media materials and channels; and
- supervise and monitor the implementation of the communication strategy, and evaluate its impact after completion.

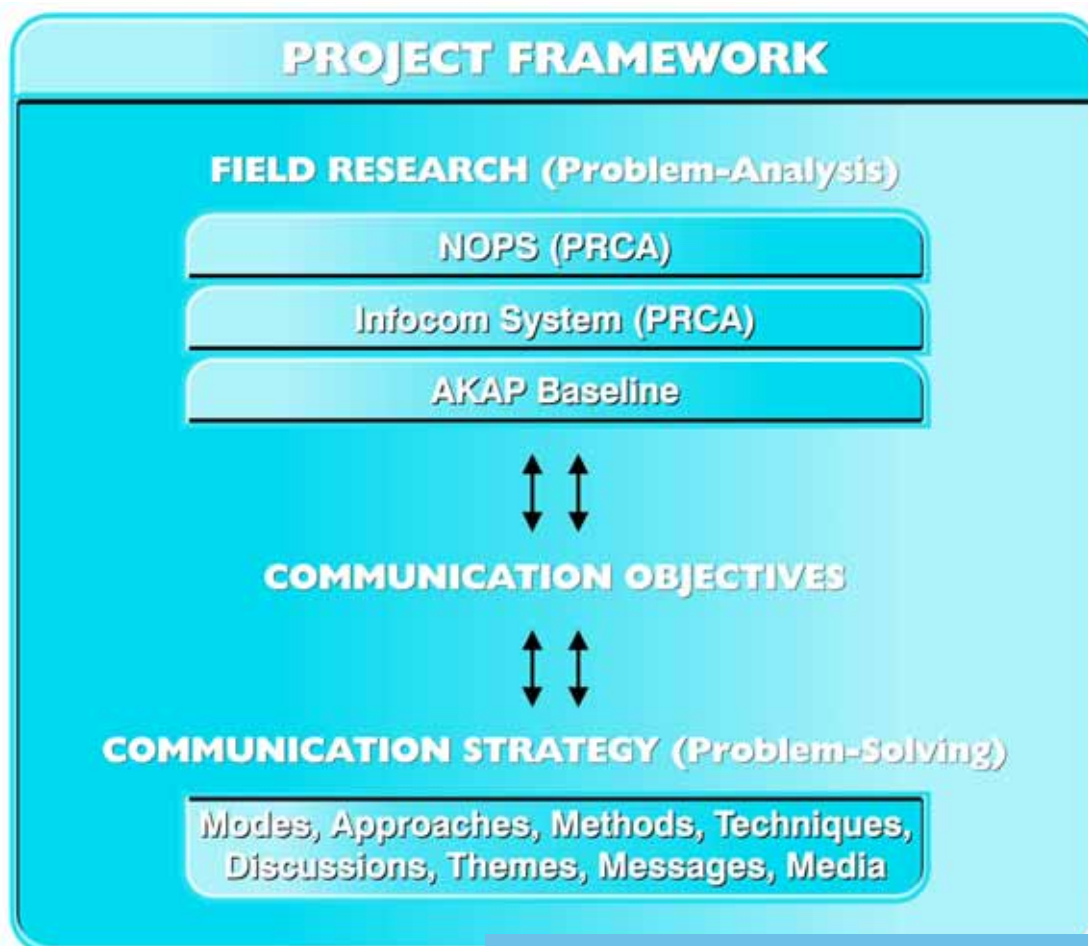
### B.1 The Need for Proper Problem Identification and Analysis: A Revisit

The strategy design process presented in this Handbook is a problem-solving methodology that derives its effectiveness from the involvement of all stakeholders in the need and problem identification during field PRCA and from the proper analysis and clear understanding of the project rationale and purpose. To be relevant to the community and achieve the intended objectives, the strategy is, to a large extent, shaped by information gathered during the field PRCA and data provided by the project staff. The data collected in the field is analysed

and transformed into usable accounts upon which the strategy is built. This process provides the relevant information about community needs, opportunities, problems, solutions, and perceptions and reveals the people's communication networks and systems (i.e. modern and traditional sources of information, preferred channels, influential sources, etc.).

As pointed out in the PRCA Handbook, remember that after the identification of the main problem, a problem tree is used to identify its major causes and effects. This is followed by further analysis of the major causes so as to select focal problems (i.e. priority problems to be addressed by communication). The focal problems, also known as entry points for intervention, are then turned into communication objectives, which are the beacons for the design of an appropriate strategy (see *figure on this page*). Note that as soon as the strategy design starts, the process shifts from a problem-analysis to a problem-solving mode.

The communication strategy is designed to achieve the set communication objectives. In order to determine the relevance of these objectives, consider a number of factors such as information from secondary sources, project objectives, community needs, opportunities, problems, possible solutions (NOPS), the people's culture and perceptions of the issues.



**Figure 1**

*The outside border of the figure symbolises the project boundaries within which the strategy has to be designed.*

The profile or characteristics of the Interaction Groups, their preferred sources of information and systems of communication should also be taken into consideration while defining the objectives to guide the designing of the strategy.

To ensure that the strategy is relevant and effective, it should be designed with the community in order to take into account their priorities and their aspirations. This approach reduces the possibility of using inappropriate communication approaches, idioms, media, channels or materials. As the strategy is being designed with the people, bear in mind that change is not necessarily synonymous with improvement. For instance, the “successful” implementation of a communication strategy that aims to change the state of awareness, the level of knowledge, attitudes, practices or even the people’s perception of a situation, may initiate a chain reaction resulting in major undesired changes in the overall way of life of a community. The story in Box 1 on the opposite page serves as a good warning.

## **Box 1**

*How a strategy with good intentions ruined a community.*

*The main and only significant economic resource of a small rural village was the production of hand-made carpets by the men of the community. The women performed the domestic chores while the men earned income. As the distinctive features of these carpets were relatively famous in the area, the villagers could afford a decent living according to the rural standards of their country. Things started to change when an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) identified this village as a possible target for their poverty alleviation programme.*

*Since the programme of this international NGO was focussed on gender issues, income generation for women was readily accepted as a project idea after a brief assessment. After a feasibility study, the NGO identified mechanised carpet production by women as the income-generating project. The NGO quickly provided the materials for a small industrial production plant and trained the women of the village to produce the famous hand-made carpets.*

*What happened next was inevitable. Women and men in the village began to compete for the limited carpet market. Women, with their machinery and training, were able to produce a higher number of carpets and therefore won the carpet war.*

*The results of this well-intentioned strategy are briefly outlined below:*

- *men stopped weaving carpets since they could not compete against the women and their new technology. The men began to spend most of their time and the money earned by their wives drinking;*
- *women, because they are now working in the new carpet factory, could not attend to their domestic chores as they used to with the result that many aspects of the village life started to deteriorate (e.g. availability of drinking water, traditionally fetched by women began to decrease, cooking, minding of the babies, etc. began to suffer);*

- *soon, as the quantity of manufactured carpets increased, the market became saturated with them, prices of carpets started to go down and as a consequence income began to decline rapidly in the village.*
- *on a social level, family bonds became weaker as men got drunk more often, felt useless and frustrated and frequently turned violent on their wives. Women, on the other hand, were working more and more to provide the basic subsistence income without being able to perform their usual daily tasks. Children were becoming increasingly neglected as carpet manufacturing took up most of the women's time and men refused to take up roles traditionally in the domain of women.*

The story in Box 1 illustrates one of the many situations in which the noble intentions of a development project have left the so-called beneficiaries worse-off than before. This is because communities are complex social systems with numerous inter linked units, with the result that any change in one unit could have unforeseen and undesirable consequences on other units. For this reason, it is crucial that before any strategy is designed and implemented special effort should be made, with the community, to forecast its possible positive and negative implications. Any strategy intended to effect change in a community should be discussed with, understood and agreed upon by the community, since the primary decision-makers about what and how to change are the very people who are going to be affected by the change.

Catastrophes, such as the one in the example above, are not limited to strategies that are designed on the basis of poorly analysed problems, needs and opportunities only. Similar calamities are also frequently encountered when strategies for solving communication-related problems are designed without the full involvement of the people. Remember the story of the malaria prevention campaign where villagers would not follow the actions suggested in one of the posters. Villagers thought they had nothing to be worried about because according to them, in their village there were no animals (i.e. mosquitoes) as huge as the one shown in the poster.