MODULE 2
MODULE 2

Theories of Communication for Development and Social Change
The goal of this module is to familiarise students with key theories and models of communication for development (C4D) and social change. The analysis of C4D theories module is organised around three levels (individual, community/society, structural) identified by the socio-ecological model. According to the socio-ecological model (SEM), any given development/social issue needs to be analysed in a multi-dimensional context. Development challenges are affected by obstacles and opportunities at various levels: individual, community, social and systems/structural. As a reaction against psychological model that assumed that obstacles and actions primarily lie at the level of the individual, the SEM stresses the importance of the social and political environment. SEM is not a theory, in the sense that it does not provide explanations or predictions about what causes affect/explain specific problems or how they need to be addressed. Nor does SEM provide a series of action guidelines – what to do and how. Instead, it is an explanatory model that offers insights into levels that need to be considered to produce nuanced assessments of a given situation.
C4D theories are designed to guide the design and implementation of programmes along specific assumptions about the relationship between or among phenomena. Theories offer evidence-based, systematic interpretations, and causal explanations of certain phenomena. Theories are sets of concepts formed into propositions that explain causes of particular conditions and events. Theories give us explanations and predict relations among phenomena. Theories help us make sense of observations, findings and analysis. Theories highlight certain aspects of a given situation (“how to analyse it”?), ask questions about the relationship between two or more phenomena (“what causes/influences/affects what”?), and offer insights to identify solutions for practical, concrete problems.
Key Competencies

After this module, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies:

- Understand the principles of C4D theories
- Identify core concepts and theoretical arguments
- Understand the practical implications of theoretical arguments
- Analyse the strengths and limitations of various theories
- Describe how theoretical concepts and arguments inform strategic choices for C4D interventions

Unit 1  Individual level and C4D theories
Unit 2  Community/Society level and C4D theories
Unit 3  Structure/Systems level and C4D theories
General Introduction

Psychosocial theories focus on individual and interpersonal dimensions related to behavioural issues. They basically approach development and social change by looking at various dimensions of individual behaviours. This unit does not provide a comprehensive analysis, but rather it is focused on key theories that are widely used and discussed in C4D.

Theories that analyse individual behaviours and communication include the Health Belief Model which claims that perceptions and beliefs exist among individuals about certain issues. Its basic premise is that attitudes are predictors of behaviours. Although this model has been, obviously, widely used across a range of programmes in public health communication, it provides valuable insights for addressing other social change/development issues. Changes in beliefs, then, may lead to behaviour change. Attitudes include perceptions about being affected by a problem (perceived susceptibility or risk perception); the vulnerability to the problem (perceived severity); the effectiveness of preventive actions; barriers or costs associated with taking action, and ability to act/practice to mitigate/reduce the likelihood of problems using it (“self-efficacy”). The analysis of perceptions offers information about how people understand the problem as well as plausible courses of action. When people hold incorrect perceptions, let us say about the severity of the problem or the ease of access to solutions, possible actions include offering information or promoting discussion to offer contrasting information through relevant platforms.

The “Stages of Change” theory has also been influential since its emergence in the early 1980s. This theory identifies stages through which people go through when adopting new behaviours. These include pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance (a fifth stage, preparation for action, was added later). During the precontemplation stage, individuals have the problem (regardless of whether they recognise it or not) and have no intention of changing. During the contemplation phase, individuals recognise the problem and seriously think about changes. Preparation for
Action refers to the stage in which individuals recognise the problem and intend to change the behaviour in the near future. Some behaviour change efforts may have been tried, but there is no consistent change yet. During the Action, individuals have enacted consistent behaviour change for a certain period of time. Finally, the maintenance stage refers to the phase when individuals maintain new behaviours for some time.

The Theory of Reasoned Action is based on the premise that humans are rational and have control over behaviours. The theory provides a construct that links individual beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviour. Key concepts of the theory include the following:

(i) A specific behaviour defined by a combination of four components: action, target, context, and time (e.g., implementing a sexual HIV risk reduction strategy (action) by using condoms with commercial sex workers (target) in brothels (context) every time (time).

(ii) The intention to perform a behaviour is the best predictor that a desired behaviour will actually occur. In order to measure it accurately and effectively, intent should be defined using the same components used to define behaviour: action, target, context, and time. Both attitude and norms influence intention to perform a behaviour.

(iii) A person’s positive or negative attitudes/feelings toward performing the defined behaviour.

(iv) Behavioural beliefs are a combination of a person’s beliefs regarding the outcomes of a defined behaviour and the person’s evaluation of potential outcomes.

(v) A person’s perception of other people’s opinions regarding the defined behaviour.

(vi) Normative beliefs are a combination of a person’s beliefs regarding other people’s views of a behaviour and the person’s willingness to conform to those views.

The TRA provides a framework for linking these variables. Basically, behavioural and normative beliefs – referred to as cognitive structures – influence individual attitudes and subjective norms, respectively. In turn, attitudes and norms shape a person’s intention to perform a behaviour. Finally, a person’s intention remains the best indicator that the desired behaviour will occur. Some limitations of the TRA include the inability of the theory, due to its individualistic approach, to consider the role of environmental and structural issues and the linearity of the theory components.

A different theoretical approach within this tradition focuses on interpersonal behaviours. An example is Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory which suggests that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modelling. Bandura argues that human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling. Observing others for instance offers ideas about how new behaviours are performed. Effective modelling requires attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences.
Most theorists and practitioners working in C4D today recognise that while individual-level change is important (and thus individual-level theories are essential), all individuals exist within a larger “ecology” that includes the family, the community and society as a whole. The next set of units examine theories that analyse community/society and structural dimensions in the socio-ecological model.

Questions for Discussion

- What defines individual/psycho-social theories?
- What are the key arguments of various theories?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the theories? What do they explain and what do they not explain?
- What are the similarities and differences among theories?
Reading List


Case Studies


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Ability to comprehend basic arguments of theories.
- Ability to use theoretical arguments in the analysis of practical challenges.
- Know basic concepts and argument of each theory.
- Understand how theoretical arguments are used in programme design.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions, Debates and Presentations

1. Prepare a five-page situation assessment of a given development/social change challenge based on a specific theoretical perspective. What problems, causes, solutions, and proposed interventions would be identified by that theory?
2. Students discuss one theory and produce a short “reflection” piece, documenting their own learning process and “take home” lessons about the usefulness of the theory.
Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Case study/scenario analysis and challenge
- Assignments: Oral and written presentations
Various theories address factors and interventions related to community and society issues underlying social change and development.

Like participation paradigm in general, participatory communication theories start from questioning the dominant modernisation/expert-centre paradigm of development, on the grounds that it promotes a top-down, ethnocentric and paternalistic view. It argues that the failure to address poverty and other structural problems in the Third World need to be explained on the faulty theoretical premises of dominant programmes. Any intervention focused on improving messages to better reach individuals to change behaviour or designed by elites is bound to fail. Instead, C4D needs a sensitivity to local participation, cultural diversity and specific contexts. The lack of local participation was viewed as responsible for the failure of programmes. Participatory theories consider it necessary to redefine C4D. This implies the abandonment of the persuasion bias inherited from propaganda theories, and the adoption of a different understanding of communication.

Communication means a process of creating and stimulating understanding as the basis for development rather than information transmission. Communication is the articulation of social relations among people. People should not be forced to adopt new practices, no matter how beneficial they seem in the eyes of agencies and governments. Instead, people need to be encouraged to participate rather than adopt new practices based on information. Participatory communication identifies encouraging participation, stimulating critical thinking, and stressing processes, rather than specific outcomes associated with modernisation and progress, as the main tasks of development communication. Participation needs to be present in all stages of development projects.

Another important theory is what is called “collective efficacy” which basically argues that communities with higher/better working trust and shared willingness of residents
to act collectively are more likely to address a host of social problems. Collective efficacy underscores the importance of shared expectations and mutual engagement by residents. It highlights shared beliefs in the capacity of people’s joint actions to achieve results.

The Social Norm theory suggests that norms develop in order to provide members of a community with some influence over the actions of others. Social norms are customary rules that govern behaviour in groups and societies. They define what is acceptable and what is not in a society or group. Unlike laws or moral codes, norms are sanctioned in different ways – mainly, personal networks and communication that tell/remind people about accepted/non-accepted behaviours. Norms have different functions in that, they provide a sense of order, ground social and cultural identities, promote a sense of belonging and so on. This does not mean that all norms necessarily have active functions, but rather, that is worth interrogating what purpose they serve.

Social norms have become a central concern for a range of development programmes, given that they are both obstacles and facilitators of behaviour and social change. From immunization to gender-based violence, social norms underlie critical development priorities that need to be properly understood. It is impossible to think about the amelioration of the conditions, let alone their resolution, without confronting head-on the role of social norms. A key issue for C4D programmes is how norms are monitored and enforced.

A critical issue for C4D is the distinction between objective and perceived norms. There is no close identification between them. What people do may not be what people believe others are doing. This opens the dimension of why people follow norms as it directs our attention to whether people believe that certain behaviours are accepted and others practice them, as well. Why do people follow norms? Various arguments have been made that help to explain why, for example, families immunize their children, prefer institutional birth, or certain foods. These could be the result of socialisation (what people learned in the past), identity (what people want to do to fit with specific clusters of people), and strategic choices to achieve expected benefits (prestige, acceptability, economic gain). In all cases, the main dynamics relate to how norms help people conform with their own expectations as well as perceived/tangible norms.

Social capital refers to the social resources of a community - networks, institutions, and attitudes that can be mobilised to promote positive change. The first step is the identification of existing social networks in a community that are well-respected and trusted that reach significant segments of the population. Many communities have women’s groups that meet on a regular basis and are highly involved in community organising and mobilising for issues of priority even outside of their community. Social networks require reciprocal, “give and take,” relationships. These social resources
allow for reaching people through credible and effective networks. Communities particularly with dense associational life (organisations/networks) and high levels of trust and social connection offer plenty of opportunities. The development and cultivation of partnerships coupled with the tapping into local social networks need to be constant processes throughout the life of a programme.

**Questions for Discussion**

- What is participatory communication?
- What is collective efficacy?
- What are social norms?
- What are the strengths and limitations of each theory?
- What examples of C4D programmes illustrate the main assumptions of each theory?
- How does each theory influence situation analysis and programme design?
Reading List


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General Introduction

Theories at the structural/systems level offer explanations that explain factors that influence policies which affect development and social change.

Policy advocacy aims to affect policy-making decisions. It analyses the factors that affect policy decisions by elites. It is conducted through several tactics such as meetings, lobbying, media campaigns, and street displays and mobilisation (e.g. protest, rallies) to get attention from political elites, raise awareness about specific issues, and discuss demands and solutions. Advocacy is understood as taking a position on an issue, and mobilising actors to influence private and public policies. Advocacy actions typically require the formation of communities of interests/the identification of stakeholders around common goals to promote policy transformations with the expectation they would result in social changes. The assumption is that if policies were different, society would be more successful at addressing problems. Effective advocacy usually requires the formation of coalitions that bring together actors unified around a similar goal and who can contribute in different capacities. Such coalitions are heterogeneous as they may involve groups and individuals. For example, advocacy coalitions to change policies affecting infant nutrition may involve mothers’ groups, public health staff and experts, women’s associations, food companies and distributors, and so on.

Advocacy actors may decide to act upon single or multiple policy levels such as municipal, state, national and global. The level of intervention is contingent upon who is considered to have power over those decisions. Because advocacy entails persuading powerful actors (from governments to private corporations) to affect policies and change decisions, they demand strategic communication. Therefore, they require understanding why those actors would support certain policies and mobilising convincing arguments informed by a nuanced analysis of opportunities and obstacles. Some actors may need to be informed about certain issues that they either ignore or do not consider important. Others may hold negative positions about proposed
policies. Some may be persuaded by fact-based arguments while; others may be more likely to be swayed by emotional appeals.

The agenda setting theory examines the processes that affect the media agenda (what is covered), the public agenda (what people think about), and the policy agenda (regulatory or legislative actions on issues). The significance of agenda setting lies on the fact that the media agenda has an influence over public opinion (what people think) and policy agenda (regulatory or legislative actions on issues).

Media/news advocacy is aimed at influencing the media agenda – what is covered and how it is covered, and conducted through meetings with media decision-makers, the provision of information to newsrooms (e.g. via press releases, news services, production of specific news stories), and training of reporters and editors. Media advocacy is intended to increase and/or improve media coverage of specific issues in news and fictional programming. It requires an understanding of how the media functions, in order to present persuasive arguments and why news organisations should devote more time and space to a given issue or cover it in a different way. The ultimate purpose is to raise awareness among specific audiences (e.g. policy makers) or the population at large with the expectation that an informed public opinion would demand leaders to change policies. Effective media advocacy requires the use of various techniques considered appropriate to persuade media staff (e.g. journalists, producers, scriptwriters, owners) to stage news events, hold one-on-one meetings, develop story ideas and, write op-ed pieces. The ultimate goals of media advocacy are to stimulate debate and promote responsible portrayals and coverage of development issues.

Social movement theories analyse how collective public groups raise demands and promote change. Social movements are major vehicles for ordinary people’s participation in public politics. They include a series of activities by which ordinary people make collective claims on others. They organise campaigns (sustained, organised public effort making collective claims of target authorities), include a vast repertoire of actions such as associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering; and hold displays that show their value, unity, numbers, and commitments to themselves and others. Social movements can be distinguished in terms of reform or radical goals, type of change, targets, tactics, and geographical range.
Questions for Discussion

- What is advocacy? What are its goals?
- How is advocacy related to C4D?
- What is agenda setting?
- What is news advocacy?
- What are media/news advocacy strategies?
- What are social movements?
- What is the purpose of social movements?
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Lectures, Small Group Discussions, Debates and Presentations

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2. Students discuss one theory and produce a short “reflection” piece documenting their own learning process and “take home” lessons about the usefulness of the theory.
3. Groups choose a social/development problem and discuss how it could be examined from theoretical perspectives at different levels (individual, community/social, structural/system), and indicate strengths and limitations of each theory.

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Case study/scenario analysis and challenge
- Assignments: Oral and written presentations
Coordinators and Leading Contributors:
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