Evaluating Communication for Development
A Framework for Social Change

by June Lennie and Jo Tacchi, RMIT University, Australia

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This book breaks new ground by presenting a powerful and persuasive experience-based statement of the case for recognising communication and its evaluation as central to good development practice and social change. It hits many nails on the head, and draws on many sources and insights. Contriving to do this clearly and coherently is a tour de force. By skilfully drawing together and interweaving the threads and themes of complexity, participation, emergence and holism, and combining these in an approach that is critical, realistic and learning-based, the authors serve the development community well. They present a coherent and comprehensive alternative to the currently dominant approach of donors, adding impetus and credibility to the big push forward to more grounded, cost-effective and sustainable development practice. Robert Chambers, Research Associate, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK

Synopsis

Evaluating Communication for Development presents a comprehensive framework for critically thinking about and understanding development, social change, and the evaluation of communication for development (C4D). This framework combines the latest thinking from a number of fields in new ways. The authors critique dominant measurement-oriented and upward accountability approaches to development and evaluation and offer an alternative holistic, participatory, learning-based approach based on systems and complexity thinking, feminist methodologies, action learning, and other key concepts.

The framework advocates a mixed methods approach which includes a focus on power, gender and other differences, social norms, continuous embedded evaluation, and holistic forms of evaluation capacity development. It has been designed as a way to focus on achieving sustainable social change and to continually improve and develop C4D and other social change initiatives. The benefits and rigour of this approach is supported by numerous examples from action research and evaluation capacity development projects undertaken by the authors over the past fifteen years, along with other illustrative examples.

Building on current arguments within the fields of C4D and development, the authors reinforce the case for effective communication being a central and vital component of participatory forms of development, something that needs to be appreciated by decision makers. They also consider ways of increasing the effectiveness of evaluation capacity development from grassroots to management level in the development context, an issue of growing importance to improving the quality, effectiveness and utilisation of monitoring and evaluation studies in this field.
The book includes a critical review of the key approaches, methodologies and methods that are considered effective for planning evaluations, assessing the outcomes of C4D, and engaging in continuous learning. It includes practical ideas and processes for implementing the framework and strategies for overcoming the many challenges associated with evaluating C4D. The authors highlight the need to take a long-term view of the value of this approach, which can be cost effective when its many benefits are considered.

This rigorous book will be of immense theoretical and practical value to students, scholars, professionals, and practitioners researching or working in development, communication and media, applied anthropology, and evaluation and program planning.

Background to the book

The framework presented in the book emerged from several participatory action research and evaluation capacity development projects conducted in South Asia and Australia, and the development of various resources for evaluating C4D. They include the following projects:

- **The development of Ethnographic Action Research** (EAR), which was designed to help people understand, evaluate and continually improve their C4D initiatives. EAR takes a holistic approach through the concept of communicative ecologies, which enables a focus on the actual use of, and interaction with, media and ICT in the wider context of people’s lives and social and cultural structures.

- **The Assessing Communication for Social Change project**, conducted in collaboration with the NGO Equal Access Nepal (EAN), which developed a participatory methodology and M&E systems and processes to assess the impacts of C4D radio programs made by EAN. This project provided significant learnings about evaluation capacity development in complex and challenging development contexts, and resulted in a toolkit for evaluating C4D initiatives which has recently been made available at [http://betterevaluation.org/toolkits/equal_access_participatory_monitoring](http://betterevaluation.org/toolkits/equal_access_participatory_monitoring)

- **The development of a UN Inter-agency Resource Pack for Researching, Monitoring and Evaluating C4D** for use by the UN and its partners. This project included a wide-ranging literature review and consultations with an Expert Panel and C4D Focal Points or M&E specialists in various UN agencies. This resulted in the development of a comprehensive set of principles for effective, appropriate and sustainable evaluation of C4D and an initial framework that incorporated these principles.

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Chapter outlines

**Chapter 1: Introduction** Introduces the framework and explains the need for the framework and the book. Defines some of the key concepts used in the framework, including communication for development, participation, social change and evaluation. Discusses the lack of understanding of C4D and its important role in development. Outlines the framework’s participatory approach to evaluation and its conceptualisation of social change and discusses issues related to the concepts of participation and
dialogue in C4D. Outlines the background to the book and the key action research and evaluation projects that informed it. Sets out general principles underpinning the framework and explains the process used to develop the principles and how these principles, recent literature reviews, and the author’s research over the past 15 years, led to the development of the framework. The other chapters of the book are summarised.

Chapter 2: Framework for Evaluating Communication for Development Sets out in detail the seven key components of the framework for evaluating C4D: participatory, holistic, complex, critical, emergent, realistic and learning-based and the principles for each of these key components. Highlights similarities and differences between the framework and four related evaluation frameworks or approaches in order to demonstrate the value and originality of the framework.

Chapter 3: New Thinking and Trends Reviews the latest critical thinking and new conceptual, theoretical and methodological advances in the field that have significant implications for how the evaluation of C4D and sustainable processes of social change are conceptualised. Provides detailed explanations of systems thinking and complexity theory in relation to development and evaluation, and the ‘simple, complicated and complex’ typology. Highlights the value of these theories for the evaluation of C4D and social change initiatives. Reviews some critical approaches to understanding and evaluating social change, and considers the implications and value of these approaches for the evaluation of C4D. Emphasises the importance of focussing on power relations, gender and social norms in the evaluation of C4D.

Chapter 4: Challenges, Issues and Strategies Introduces a number of contextual, structural, institutional and organisational challenges to evaluating C4D. Explores some implementation issues, from planning and managing the evaluation of C4D, to assessing the impacts of C4D. Proposes a range of strategies to address these challenges, including innovative and creative approaches to evaluation, new conceptualisations of evaluation and shifts in evaluation practice that have significant implications for understanding and evaluating C4D. This chapter draws on findings from consultations with UN specialists and experts from around the world and from the authors’ significant research in Nepal, South Asia and rural Australia.

Chapter 5: Evaluation Capacity Development Explains the concepts ‘creative capacity development’ and ‘evaluation capacity development’ (ECD). Makes the case for the holistic, participatory, learning-oriented approach to ECD that is an important part of the framework for evaluating C4D and explains the principles of this approach. Highlights the many challenges and issues in building evaluation capacities in development contexts and in C4D in particular. Suggests strategies for effective and sustainable ECD at different levels.

Chapter 6: Key Approaches, Methodologies and Methods Critically reviews various research and evaluation approaches and methodologies in terms of how effective and appropriate they are for evaluating C4D. This highlights the value of innovative, participatory and critical approaches. They include: developmental evaluation, feminist approaches, and methodologies such as ethnographic action research and outcome mapping. Issues related to identifying and using indicators in C4D evaluations, challenges with using indicators, and alternatives to indicators are also considered.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implementation Provides an overview of the framework for evaluating C4D. Summarises the complex challenges, tensions and issues that affect the evaluation of C4D, and suggested strategies for overcoming these challenges, including the framework. Sets out a number of practical ideas and processes for implementing the framework. This includes details of the many factors that need to be considered in selecting the most appropriate evaluation approaches, methodologies and methods.
Endorsements

Lennie and Tacchi have written a much-needed, readable and original book, packed with conceptual insights and practical examples. They show the maturation of participatory methodologies in the field of communication and social change, and convincingly demonstrate the implications of recent theoretical debates and conceptual developments for assessing program impact. The analysis shows the authors’ breadth of practical experience, and nuanced combination of theory and methodology. The book is a trove of ideas for research and practice. Silvio Waisbord, Professor of Media and Public Affairs, The George Washington University, USA

We are told so often that communication for development cannot be evaluated, meaning: crops or cell phones are much easier to count. We’ve heard so much about the lack of indicators to measure processes of social change. By experience we know how hard it is for development managers to understand the role of communication as a participatory process and not as institutional visibility or information dissemination. Now, with this book, those who are reluctant to accept the role of communication in development and social change will lack good arguments. It presents a comprehensive framework for understanding how C4D can be evaluated and why it is indispensable for long-term sustainable development. This book is an extraordinary contribution to understanding C4D, not only from the evaluation perspective. It was so much needed. Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron, Communication Specialist, Bolivia

This work valuably weaves together insights from years of experience with emerging trends in related fields, including complexity and systems thinking, to propose a practical framework for evaluating communication for development. It is an indispensable, accessible and much needed contribution, to guide evaluation practice in communication for development contexts and beyond. Ailish Byrne, Learning & Development Specialist, UNICEF Somalia

This is a must read for both academics and professionals in the field of communication for development. For scholars, to understand the real problems in the real world. For practitioners, to learn that muddling through has never been a viable way to sustainable social change. Jan Servaes, UNESCO Chair in Communication for Sustainable Social Change, USA

The authors provide an excellent and accessible framework for a systemic, participatory learning approach to evaluation that fully takes into account the challenges of power and positionality in development programming. This book should be essential reading for busy reflexive practitioners working to support processes of social transformation. Rosalind Eyben, Convenor of the Big Push Forward (http://bigpushforward.net/) and Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK
Dr June Lennie is a Senior Research Associate in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. She holds a PhD in feminist evaluation methodologies, gender and ICTs. She has conducted numerous research projects and consultancies with government, non-government and international agencies, including a major UN inter-agency consulting project. From 1990 - 2012 she worked on a range of communication-related projects at Queensland University of Technology.

Her work has focused on the development, application and meta-evaluation of participatory research and evaluation methodologies and ICTs for social change, sustainable community development, and rural women’s empowerment. This work has included major evaluation capacity development projects in rural communities and NGOs, including a development communication NGO in Nepal. She has co-developed several participatory evaluation frameworks and methodologies, toolkits and evaluation resources. June is a co-author of *Action Research and New Media* (Hampton Press, 2009).

Professor Jo Tacchi is Deputy Dean, Research and Innovation in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. She is an ARC Centre Fellow in the Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at QUT. She is a media anthropologist with a special interest in radio and digital media. Her research has included collaborations with a range of partners including UNESCO and other UN agencies, NGOs and...
Launch of the book no. 1

An initial, informal launch of the book was undertaken by Silvio Waisbord, Professor of Media and Public Affairs at The George Washington University, on 30 January 2013. This event was part of the Beyond the Impasse: Exploring New Thinking in Communication & Social Change Boutique Conference, which was held at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
Launch of the book no. 2

A second, more formal, launch of the book was undertaken by Robert Chambers from the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, on 28 February 2013. This event was part of the Evaluation for Development Evaluation Conclave held at the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Nepal.