

Context Paper Six

Developing Communication Skills for Participatory Upland Watershed Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Introduction: Power of Communication

Communication, based on the process of sharing information, is the chief medium giving the human species control of the planet. The unfortunate part of resource management at bureaucratic levels is that the word 'sharing' is eliminated; during planning, monitoring, and implementation stages, information remains to be 'delivered' only, meaning one-way communication. The paradigm shift to participatory approaches today has opened the gates of the concept of sharing. The importance of sharing information now occupies the centre stage of the planning process. Some of the key routes to successful methods of communication are outlined below.

Hearing and Listening

Communication will be effective if messages are provided to suit the social, cultural, and professional interests of the audience. Hearing refers to mere audible receptions on a physical basis without internalising the underlying messages. Often it depends on some of the factors listed below.

- Perceptions of the speakers
 - Seriousness given to speech
 - Depth of objectivity
 - Relevance for speaker
 - Physical environment in which it is delivered
 - Size of audience to whom it is addressed
 - Target audience
 - Manner of speech delivery: gestures and postures
 - Emphasis on words, phrasing and paraphrasing
 - Structure and design of delivery
- Perception of the audience
 - Seriousness of listening
 - Relevance realised
 - Physical environment - time and space of the day
 - State of mind
 - Level of interest

All these factors together have a strong impact on the success of communication between two parties. The watershed programme managers may have outstanding packages for delivery, but the general 'officialdom' culture becomes a barrier in the smooth transfer of the messages and intentions of programme managers to the people at the receiving end. Well meaning officials in the government sector may be able to design plans for integrated watershed management without any participation from the beneficiaries. This attitude leads to the failure of people to come forward to receive such plans unless they get a direct benefit, and that too, visible cash benefit.

In cases where participation of men and women has been sought at the planning stage by using an easy and strong communication channel, the people have come out with novel ideas to support plans on many mundane issues which were invisible to official planners.

Body Language: Gestures and Postures

The physical positions taken by everyone exchanging information are important, as they become a deciding factor in getting information through. The movement of hands and eyes plays a significant role in the reception and delivery of information. Levels of standing and sitting are also significant in deciding the acceptance. Listening is the art of instantaneously internalising messages by the audience. Different culture have different gestures, while some have none. Active listening includes:

- nodding,
- paraphrasing,
- eyeball movements,
- gestures of hands, palms, and
- shirks and empathising with the speaker

The factors affecting the listening of the audience are:

- perception: the clouds around them
- physical environment - time and place
- interest and curiosity
- shirks and empathising with speaker

The level at which the audience participates in communication is a direct indicator of listening. Their interest can be reflected by their eyeball movements, nods, comfort, and ease of sitting or standing postures, etc. Listening, in short, carries messages right from the ears to the mind and initiates a thought process to reflect back on the message.

These examples are visible during PRA or APA sessions in which people shed their physical barriers and become involved in the planning process with all their effort and efficiency to highlight the processes of importance for themselves.

Empathy

The meaning of empathy, stepping into another's shoes, if internalised by trainers and programme managers, can bring about the process of delivery and acceptance much more easily. Ice-breaking and further meetings are essential starters for inviting participation. Fortunately, empathy requires no extra investment or burden on the project cost! It is very easy to speak the language of the people for whom the planning package is being designed. Also, it contributes to bridging the identity gap between officials and people and the two-way flow of ideas and information starts.

Communication in Participatory Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation

If the person trying to sell a programme package is aware of these clouds, the communication delivery yields better results.

Some of the tips for better feedback on participatory communications are as follow.

- Be of interest
- Be timely
- Be understandable
- Be simple
- Be convincing
- Be participatory

Watershed Management Programmes in the Shivaliks have divided the major tasks required of the three main participating agencies, as summarised in Table 1.

And finally, this has resulted in excellent achievements at social and personal levels for the people involved. Rambai of Rishikesh glows with happiness: "Look at these wedding invitation cards on my rack. This directly reveals the respect and recognition I have received from villagers, for whom calling me, a widow, to functions was previously taboo. Now with my hard work delivering the message of integrated watershed development, as a woman from among them, all this has changed." During the planning process, participation is desirable to enable people to think about:

- what we have?
- what we need?
- how much and from where we will get it?

Developing a Communication Support Programme (CSP) for Watershed Management

Communication support is the coordinated use of different communication methods for the purpose of focussing attention on and offering a solution to a specific problem (Assifi and French 1984). This tool must be developed for the clientele it is meant to address and should include the following elements.

- Formulating specific objectives aimed at solving significant problems, like (checks for) excessive soil erosion and how PRA can be semi-structured to discuss this during joint sessions.
- Focus on a few critically important messages, e.g., how much fertile soil is lost annually, decreases in water recharge, declines in household water availability.
- Expressing these messages in live, attention-holding ways to leave an impact on the audience.
- Using a variety of communication channels to break the monotony and to reach the audience.
- Repeating important messages in various ways over a sustained period of time.

BOX 1 Cloud Model

The perceptions of the cloud model help people identify the background and state in which people are living and contribute to the instantaneous development of empathy. These clouds are as follow.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| • National | • Cultural |
| • Environmental | • Family |
| • Physical | • Nutritional |
| • Gender | • Residential |
| • Educational | • Individual Preferences |
| • Economic | • Social |

Table 1: Watershed Management Programmes in the Shivaliks

S. No	Project Agencies	Facilitators, NGOs and Consultants	People's Groups (Gramin)
1.	Motivating and counselling people to develop small groups	Training and documenting activities and process	Forming cohesive groups with delegated leadership within
2.	Encouraging joint planning and implementation through large-scale PRA	Developing methodology and refining skills	Carrying out an inventory
3.	Developing operation and maintenance methods and procedures	Case studies and facilitation carried out	Sample surveys developed and reporting for monitoring the project, frequent reviews with project people
4.	Utilising information, exchange and direct communication for feedback through reporting and meetings, identifying further training needs	Developing training materials, extending suggestions and views on the process to officials	Planning and participation in meetings, workshops, and study tours
5.	Introducing the private marketing sector to assist farmers and entrepreneurs for homestead industries required	Organizing meetings and training as people's programmes, sharing their views and extending solutions to their problems	Disseminating positive feedback to other villages in the area, sharing secrets of success with them

- Messages should not only inform but should also motivate people to take action.
- The entire process should be planned well in advance and the perception of the audience should be carefully kept in mind.
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation of whether the objective of delivering the message is being achieved.
- The effort should be carried out by a team and administered by a single manager to eliminate overlaps.

Steps in Planning CSP

- Problem/Policy Analysis
- Situational Analysis
- Audience Analysis
- Communication Objectives
- Communication Strategy
- Inventory of Activities
- Management Plan
- Media Production Plan
- Staff Training Plan
- Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

There are three main stages in CSP

- Planning
- Preparation
- Implementation

The message for the target groups can be reached through the following media channels.

- Flip-Charts (most simple speaking tool)
- Boards (portable, effectively conveying message)

BOX 2 Thailand

Mae On Irrigation Project with Joint Management emphasised:

- Joint problem-solving
- Maintaining open and active communication
- Establishing joint decision-making mechanisms and procedures that allow both parties to express opinions and address problems
- Sensitising the parties to each other's problems and limitations
- Equitable sharing of accountability, benefits, and opportunities
- Maintaining appropriate attitudes towards each other
- Stimulating improvement in each other's capabilities
- Sharing risks of actions required for sustainability and efficiency

- Models (simulating real forms, effective)
- Slides (depiction of actual objects)
- Transparencies (can combine objects with messages)
- Blackboards (most widely available in village scenes)
- Videotape (very effective for attracting crowds)
- Films (strongly effective for attracting all age groups)
- Audio tapes (only after initial segregation has occurred)
- Games (directly involves audience, DIY theory works and full participation achieved)
- Wall Charts (can stay and speak afterwards too)
- Extension kits (can be handled behind also)
- Drama (staging and copying things that are and can be)

Communication Objectives in Participatory Watershed Management

The ABCD approach (Assifi and French 1984) for identifying and defining communication objectives may be applied for effectively achieving desired levels of participation.

- **Audience:** The target group for communication is going to be:
 - the people during PRA, and
 - the officials and NGOs as partners.
- **Behaviour:** The expected changes to be reflected at the end; certain indicators may be developed for this, e.g., if a man or woman from the group can ask a question, this reflects changed behaviour.
- **Condition:** To determine when and under what conditions this change is expected to occur, the time and physical environment in which communication is carried out must be defined. For instance, very powerful means of communication may fail to invite women's participation if carried out during the prime hours of her productive roles and responsibilities.
- **Degree:** The extent of change expected should be specific and means of verifying this level of change should also be defined. If communication is successful, it can invite up to 70 per cent of women's

participation in rural areas, a high level for developing countries.

Organizing Monitoring and Evaluation in Watershed Management

The bureaucratic structure and cultural barriers to a transparent and unbiased communication of monitoring and evaluation outcomes are still far from being eliminated from South East Asian cultures. Without compromising with straight statements of facts, some suggestions to achieve successful communication of sensitive evaluation findings are outlined below.

- Direct personal communication is more appropriate than public exposure and sharing information with everyone.
- Smaller group discussions prove to be better than larger meetings.
- Self evaluation of shortfalls should be encouraged.
- Officials should be educated about the role of evaluators.
- Culturally appropriate channels need to be identified and suitable terms of communication may be evolved.

On communication of results and monitoring parameters, it is necessary to focus on who needs it.

- Project beneficiaries: Persons or groups who participate directly with the project
- Project staff: Field staff, administrators, trainers
- Community: Including non-beneficiaries
- Other communities: Close by, fringing the target
- National Headquarters: Country and programme managers
- Donors: Sponsors of the project
- Other development agencies: Those working in related fields, line departments

The field staff should facilitate and help out by suggesting tools, if and wherever, necessary. These may be to establish:

- the purpose of participatory monitoring and evaluation,

Table 2: Staff of a project in Thailand described leadership traits to distinguish a Participatory Style from an authoritarian one

	Authoritarian	Participatory
Information	Keep for one's own use	Share & seek
Judgement	Judging alone, use experts	Seek advice from people
Decision-making	Decides/consults superiors	Jointly deciding on a rational basis
Commitment	By pressure, sanctions	Through persuasion and delegation of authority
Co-ordinate	Distributes assignments, works with each person, keeps overall picture out of other's reach	Seeks commitment to overall objectives and agreement from those who implement

- what will be monitored,
- how the variables will be monitored,
- who will monitor and conduct ongoing evaluation,
- when the monitoring will be done,
- the tools that will be used to monitor, and
- who will want the information and how it should be presented.

Initial identification of the existing style is essential to outline the desired changes in personal behaviour.

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