Banging the bells: communicating hope for rural environments

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Abstract

This paper describes several communication methods used by development organisations to help improve the quality of life of people in rural environments around Laguna Lake. Four of these include the Community-Based Coastal Resource Management (CBCRM), Farmer Participatory Extension (FPE), Conservation Farming Village (CFV) and Information, Education, and Communication (IEC). These methods relied heavily on (1) heavy community organising and immersion work with non-government organisations; (2) high visibility of local government units in supporting/sponsoring CFV, and (3) a strong Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) component. In particular, IEC was used to create a strong public information awareness on the worsening situation of the lake, and at the same time to elicit commitments from stakeholders to rehabilitate the Laguna Lake of the Philippines. The IEC campaign culminated into a multi-sectoral dialogue that gathered, for the first time, 600 participants representing different sectors. Fifty participants were surveyed for their impressions on the conduct of the multi-stakeholder dialogue. Seventeen wanted to know specific programs to save the lake and ten participants recommended that the next dialogue will report the accomplishments after the first dialogue.

Keywords: communication, participatory, co-management, sustainable, stakeholder

Introduction

The good news with today's information system is that rural people communicate better and faster than they used to in the past years. This information system has lately made meaningful changes in the quality of the life of rural people. But the story does not stop from here. Information technology is never meant as a stand-alone. Development planners need to bring in other ingredients in order to reduce poverty in rural areas.

In the ancient days, the church would 'bang the bells' during times of festivities or emergencies. Community members, as soon as they heard the bells ringing, would immediately converge in the church vicinity to find out what matters were to be discussed and resolved. People understood perfectly what these ring tones meant. If the bells rang with a sad note, it meant somebody receiving his/her last rites on earth. If the bells rang joyously, it meant a couple being finally tied in marriage. If the bells rang with a note of urgency, it meant an impending disaster. Today, in many parts of the world, we hear another kind of ringing. We hear ring tones emanating from phones, computers, and other gadgets which have meanings perfectly understood by respective individual users. However, even with this very efficient transmission of messages, many questions remain floating in the air: Why is poverty still persistently creeping

like weeds in the rural areas? Why are forest areas disappearing? Why is the environment silently wasting?

This paper gives a bird's-eye view of various communication and extension strategies, but discusses in detail the use of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) in promoting participatory management of Laguna Lake in the Philippines.

Communication methods for rural environments

Except for a few cases, rural environments are generally poor. Increase in population, lack of education, capital, and disappearing forests because of lack of alternative means to earn a living other than farming, and many more – these all contribute to a highly marginalised society. This is why, even if the peripheral cities or countries for that matter are bursting with economic zest, rural areas are moving with lethargic energy towards the economic ladder of independence.

Despite this lethargy, there is hope as development-oriented organisations use approaches that empower the rural poor. They use various communication and extension approaches, like:

1. Community development communication, development journalism, and village drama. The International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) uses these methodologies in disseminating new technologies to farmer communities. Through Knowledge Management and Dissemination (KMD) type of research programs, ICARDA engages in a co-learning approach that aims to change culture and behavior of various stakeholders (ICARDA, 2004).
2. One-Stop Aquaculture Shop and Information System. The Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) arranges sessions for shrimp farmers to meet and exchange information in Vietnam. Various agencies get to meet these farmers and monitor/track information particularly for problem areas in raising shrimps (NACA, 2004).
3. Information and Communications Technology for market-related information. The Centro International de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) in Columbia uses ICT to support the creation of local content. In doing this, CIAT explores the use of participatory approach by which community-based stakeholder groups can be tapped. The approach embraces the use of conventional media (print, radio, printed bulletins, local drama).
4. Community-Based (Coastal) Resource Management (CBCRM). Pioneered by Silliman University to save coral reefs and other coastal resources in Apo Island, Dumaguete City, Philippines. This approach uses community organising in educating coastal pilot communities on the importance of maintaining sanctuaries. At present, the community maintains a fish sanctuary in its coastal area.
5. Farmer Participatory Extension (FPE). The ASIALAND Management of Sloping Lands Network finds FPE effective in empowering resource-poor farmers in Southeast Asia. FPE follows nine stages: training research and extension workers, site survey and characterisation, participatory client selection, participatory planning, enabling farmer volunteers to conduct on-farm trials, participatory monitoring and evaluation, training farmer trainers, disseminating knowledge and technology by farmers, and establishing farmer networks. FPE uses the Farmers' Field School Approach, but concentrates more on

training individual farmer-leaders who teach other farmers by showcasing their own farms as demonstration sites of soil conservation technologies.

6. Conservation Farming Village (CFV). The Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) and Care Philippines collaborated in a CFV pilot addressing selected upland communities. CFV taps local government units' involvement to formally declare some villages as CFVs (Malicsi, 2005).
7. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC). Studies of the IEC approach, such as those conducted by FAO (FAO, 199X) suggest that the use of a comprehensive IEC support for development projects unites a community and motivates this community to actively participate in resolving issues that concern their lives. Lessons learned from these studies include:
   a. Knowledge of existing community structures (e.g. who are the people who are highly credible and what formal or informal groups are they members of) and making communication campaigns flow through these structures.
   b. Rather emphasise positive behavior change than the negative consequences of current behavior to obtain development.
   c. People learn new behaviors best when they are learning something they feel is useful, when they can put into practice what they are learning, and when they receive feedback and are rewarded for doing well. Showing specific examples or demonstration sites is often the best way to teach complex behaviours.

These innovative approaches are supported by knowledge exchange and dissemination through institutes like e.g. the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA). SEARCA and other institutes build knowledge assets basically from its four offerings: graduate scholarship, short-term training, research and development, and consulting to advance agriculture and rural development. Dissemination and exchange of this information are through the print, web, face-to-face dialogues, roundtable discussions, conferences, seminars, etc. Clients are policy makers, development planners, executives, and managers who can influence policies and decisions on agriculture and natural resource management that might improve rural economies in South East Asian countries.

Using IEC campaign to save the Laguna Lake

An IEC campaign[5] to save the Laguna Lake in the Philippines was done by the AsiaDev Consulting Group[6] from June 2005 to February 2006. The IEC campaign consisted of four major activities, namely: (1) Multi-sectoral Dialogue, (2) Launching of the Integrated Watershed Management Learning and Resource Center, and (3) Multi-sectoral Participatory IEC Planning-Workshop; and (4) the Capacity Building of volunteer IEC representatives from various sectors. This paper discusses only the first major activity: the Multi-sectoral Dialogue. The objective of the dialogue was to gather all groups which had a stake or an issue on saving of Laguna Lake. The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) led this activity. LLDA is

[5] Funded by the World Bank and the Philippine Government.

[6] The author is one of the IEC Specialists working on the project.

an agency which coordinates and leads government initiatives in sustainable managing the lake and its resources.

Laguna de Bay

The Laguna de Bay provides life-support services to more than 10 million people in various ways. It is the largest and one of the most vital inland bodies of water in the Philippines. Its waters cover an area of approximately 900 square kilometres. The lake can hold more than 2,000 million cubic meters of water. Laguna de Bay is used for many purposes: supplying drinking water, irrigation water, fish and other foodstuffs, trading, recreation, and many others.

Today, it serves as a sink to most of the industries and households surrounding it. Some tributaries of Laguna Lake have water quality that is deteriorating because of high nutrient loading. Specifically a yearly load increase of nitrogen by 400% and phosphorus by 600% in San Pedro and Morong Rivers, have been observed within a ten-year period. Household wastes contribute about 69% of the organic wastes discharged into the lake; the rest come mainly from industry (19%) and agriculture (12%).

Biodiversity, on the other hand in Laguna Lake, has declined in the last ten years. Brackish water species, *Scatophagus argus*, for example no longer exists in the lake. Migratory species have been affected by government's policy to divert rivers for irrigation and dam construction. These decisions, somehow, have changed the habitat (drying of riverbeds in some areas) and the flora and fauna thriving in affected areas.

Ravaged through the years by abusive anthropocentric activities, Laguna de Bay is a centrepiece of campaign for resuscitation. The process of reviving the lake and its resources is multifaceted and will need the involvement of all stakeholders. Basically, IEC was used as a tool to mobilise and educate people on how to protect, preserve, and prepare the Lake for the next generations.

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA)

The Philippine government established LLDA in 1966 to lead, promote, and accelerate the development and balanced growth of the Laguna de Bay basin within the context of national and regional plans and policies for social and economic development. Primarily, it carries programs and activities that prevent undue ecological disturbances, deterioration and pollution of Laguna de Bay. LLDA's programs aim to influence stakeholders to become co-managers of the lake and its resources (http://www.llda.gov.ph/llda.htm). Because of the intensity of degradation that is taking place, there is a need for a multi-sectoral approach in attacking the problem of rehabilitating the lake. Thus, the IEC campaign.

Methodology

The AsiaDev Consultants used the IEC Conceptual Framework (Figure 6.9) in implementing the campaign for the Multi-sectoral Dialogue:

1. Consulting. AsiaDev consulted the different stakeholders of Laguna Lake about their perceptions and preferences on participating in the First Multi-sectoral Dialogue. AsiaDev consultants used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in getting information from stakeholders.
2. Analysing Content. After the FGDs and KIIs, IEC implementers analysed the contents and designed a theme as the rallying point by tying together all messages into one coherent IEC campaign theme.
3. Designing strategy/IEC theme and support activity. Contents woven into a thematic presentation of messages were packaged into different communication support materials: posters, radio scripts, straight news, video documentary, etc.
4. Approving Content and Budget. Lead organisation, in this example, the Laguna Lake Development Authority evaluated the content vis-à-vis technical content accuracy and budget and approved the actions, including the corresponding IEC strategy materials.
5. Pre-testing. This validated the intended stakeholders' perceptions on the types of communication activities and their corresponding IEC materials. It assessed the stakeholders' understanding and acceptance of the message being given to them.
6. Implementing IEC strategy. The Multi-sectoral Dialogue was implemented and support IEC materials were distributed.
7. Evaluating. The Multi-sectoral Dialogue and the IEC support materials were evaluated by letting the participants answer a simple questionnaire.

The Multi-sectoral Dialogue

The implementation of the Multi-sectoral Dialogue started with the creation of public awareness on the existing state of the Lake. Twenty-one press releases about the existing condition of the lake and the need for stakeholders to meet and dialogue were published in the Philippine National Dailies and Community Newspapers before the event. Posters and brochures were pre-tested with actual stakeholders before these were strategically posted and disseminated. Institutional radio announcements for the schedule of Multi-sectoral Dialogue were made. Some Laguna Lake sectoral representatives were interviewed live in the national and community radio and TV stations. The first among the four major IEC events in working towards a participatory lake management and resources sustainability, the Multi-sectoral

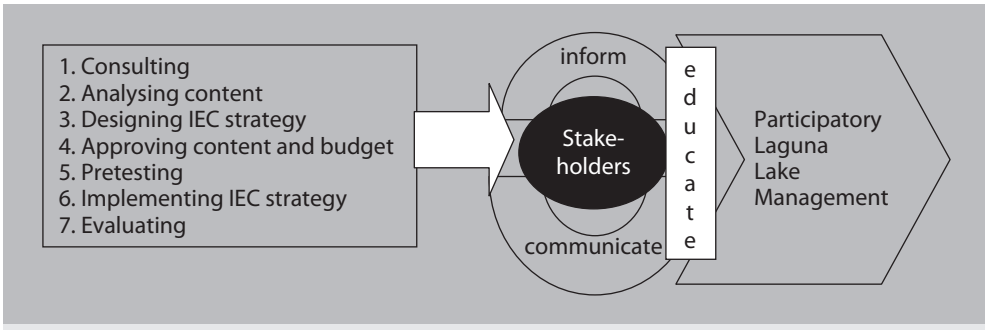

Figure 6.9. The conceptual framework of IEC (Information, Education and Communication.

Dialogue, or the Laguna de Bay Summit was held last August 19, 2005, at the Ayala Greenfield Estate Clubhouse in Maunong, Calamba City, Philippines. The activity was well accepted by the stakeholders. Four hundred stakeholders from different sectors were originally invited, but the turn-out was greater than expected: more than 600 participants during the day of the event.

The Multi-sectoral Dialogue had the following contents (gleaned from the Consulting phase):

- Programs and Accomplishments of Laguna Lake Development Authority in Saving Laguna Lake in the Philippines.
- Testimonies/best practices of other sectors in Saving the Lake.
- Open Forum after presentations.
- On-the-spot poster-drawing contest among high school students. Theme covered a united effort in saving the lake.
- Evaluation of the Multi-sectoral Dialogue, including the Exhibit materials during the day.

From this event, various issues were sieved to LLDA (Table 6.2). As a result of the multi-stakeholder dialogue, LLDA was able to build up its database on existing groups/key persons involved in Laguna Lake Rehabilitation. This database includes 600 key participants from the 5 provinces and parts of Metro Manila.

Evaluation of the Multi-sectoral Dialogue from the participants recorded the following:

1. Majority found the Multi-sectoral Dialogue as highly educational, useful and productive. It helped them become more aware of the mandates and functions of LLDA.

Table 6.2. Issues raised by stakeholders.

Stakeholders	Issues
Business Group	Need for Clear Policy Guidelines on the Environmental User Fund (EUF). The group feels that the domestic households where majority of the wastes come from, do not pay EUF; while they who are following the rules by using solid waste management technologies are penalised.
Fishermen	The lake waters smell bad, the fishes and other resources which were plentiful in the past, have significantly dwindled.
Federation of River Basin Council	They are tired of the lake clean-up drives and feel nothing is being accomplished. They feel the local government units are not implementing strictly the laws on solid waste management.
Youth (Students)	They want to see the local government units to apprehend people/ groups who are breaking the law, particularly on open waste dumping disposal.
Local Government Units	They are happy with the lake rehabilitation projects that they are currently doing.

2. High school students said that the activity widened their understanding on the importance of the lake. They were impressed that government through LLDA is doing something good in protecting the lake.
3. Participants from various groups highly welcomed focus group discussions as an avenue where they can air their issues and concerns. Participants made recommendations on what issues to discuss in the next Multi-sectoral Dialogue.

Discussion and conclusion

Laguna Lake

Preliminary results show various stakeholders appreciating government's move to involve them in rehabilitating the lake. The IEC approach for saving the lake has gathered overwhelming responses from its stakeholders, particularly on the use of the multi-sectoral dialogue as a major IEC strategy. This strategy is unanimously recommended by stakeholders to be done on a yearly basis. One policy that can be implemented is for government to earmark at least 15% of its total budget for IEC purposes in saving the lake. And part of this expense would be used for implementers and stakeholders alike to constantly dialogue; with the former mobilising stakeholders to get involved in lake rehabilitation.

During the Multi-sectoral Dialogue, stakeholders learned of the existing condition of the lake and the factors and practices contributing to its deterioration. The presentation of results of studies conducted by the academe served as an eye-opener to the participants during the day. The dialogue (question-and-answer) portion further clarified issues concerning the management of the lake. Written responses of 50 participants for the topics they wanted to learn more is in Table 6.3. An exhibit about the Lake was featured to complement the presentations.

Lessons learned

At the organisational level, development agencies can efficiently make use of knowledge exchange through print and web; development communication; one-stop-information shop; and information communication technology because they have control over their human resources, budgets, facilities, and equipment. Externally, these development agencies are well connected. They are able to tap expertise, database, and new funding sources from partner organisations with similar concerns. The IEC approach of spreading information to raise public awareness was very successful: the number of participants at the multi-stakeholders dialogue turned out much greater than was expected. IEC is one of the strategies that can be used to create a large participation of stakeholders.

On the other hand, at the community level, CBCRM, FPE, and CFV can be used by development agencies as extension approaches. They are very similar in goals and approaches. Once anchored in the lifestyle of community people, these approaches redound to sustainable ecosystem resource management in upland and coastal areas.

Table 6.3. What stakeholders want to know about the lake.

Information wanted	No. of respondents
1. About Laguna lake- plans/ programs/implementation	17
- Hydrology of the lake including its tributaries	
- Specific programs to save the lake	
2. Lake improvement after the first dialogue	10
3. Youth-oriented projects/programs	6
- Special project for the kids in elementary grades	
- How can children help to save the environment	
4. Stakeholder workshop	5
- Stakeholders' commitment to make the lake clean	
- Commitment of industries and households	
5. Fishermen participation	4
- Livelihood program for displaced fishermen	
- The testimonials of the fishermen and the youth	
6. Others	8
- The improvement of the Tanay River Basin	
- Funding the different projects of the river councils	

The success of the CFV approach hinges on six factors contributing to successful adoption of sustainable farming practices among farmers (Manzanilla *et al.*, 2004). Three of these had something to do with interpersonal communication or face-to-face contact: (1) heavy community organising and immersion work with non-government organisations; (2) high visibility of local government units in supporting/sponsoring CFV, and (3) a strong Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) component that aggressively promotes soil conservation technologies.

Concluding, development agencies can use IEC as a complement to extension innovations like 'Community-Based Resource Management' and 'Farmer Participatory Extension' to promote new paradigms and technologies. IEC can help development and extension planners to engender participation and behavioural changes among stakeholders, and to increase awareness and knowledge of communities. IEC would be a major approach that planners can use in banging the bells to communicate hope and healing for rural environments.

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