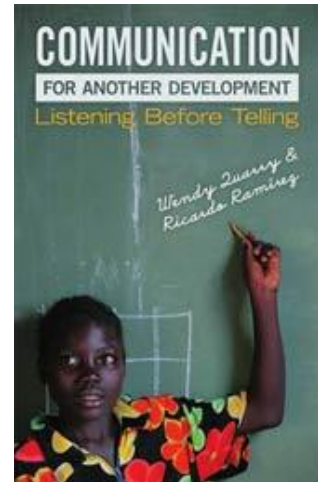


Wendy Quarry and Ricardo Ramirez, **Communication for Another Development: Listening Before Telling**, London: Zed Books, 2009, 220 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

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A career that involves “communication” in the title or description would elicit the thought that it would be easy to describe what such a worker does, and what exactly it means to communicate. However, the field of communication, particularly in relationship to communication for development, has its own language that is elusive and excludes those who are not part of it, making it difficult to communicate about communication. Authors Wendy Quarry and Ricardo Ramirez acknowledge this communication problem, likening it to the struggle of describing a process of “helping people talk to each other” versus a statement such as “I fix cars” (p. 49). It is this exclusivity that has resulted in difficulties for practitioners in the field of communication with encouraging or demanding that development projects engage in active dialogue with local individuals, rather than implementing top-down solutions. The tendency of development initiatives to push communication to the side, regulating it to a nice additional touch if the money is available, rather than using it as a basis for all development projects, has led to the failure of development. This failure has led to questioning the current methodologies of development organizations and projects, leaving room for more creative and innovative way to think about development—ways that include dialogue, rather than dissemination, at their very bases.



In *Communication for Another Development: Listening Before Telling*, practitioners Wendy Quarry and Ricardo Ramirez use their combined 40 years of experience in the communication for development field to clearly explain the important role that communication has had in development work. They divide their book into three sections, respectively concerning “what we know,” “what we learned,” and “what can we do differently.” The authors focus on how listening is a necessary element of good communication and good development to ensure that the two processes are not based solely on a one-way transfer of information. To illustrate this, examples and case studies are used throughout the book to explain that “good communication will only emerge through a compelling case for better development” (p. 21). Quarry and Ramirez acknowledge how the jargon surrounding “communication” and “development” has limited the ability of communicators to be completely effective at either process. Their thesis is that “it is not good communication that makes good development; it is good development that breeds good communication” (p. 28). Thus, their premise is that development needs to change and focus on listening to local individuals about their development goals and solutions, rather than continuing on with the telling from a policy-based, top-down approach. It is the authors’ use of plain, jargon-free language that makes it easier for individuals outside the communication for development field to identify the need to have this shift in the developmental framework.

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In the first section, entitled "What We Know," Quarry and Ramirez use their experience as practitioners in the field to describe common issues that practitioners and communicators face when working with development projects. They attempt to set the scene by acknowledging that not all communication creates "good" development, but that "a different approach to development is the condition for good communication" (p. 22). Quarry and Ramirez argue that traditional development practice struggles with communication because the practitioners are not able or willing to listen to people and allow them to decide on their own development needs, an affect of time constraints and the need to produce predictable, quantifiable results. In this argument, they mirror Easterly's division of the development world of "planners" and "searchers" as stated within *The White Man's Burden* (2006) with "tellers" and "listeners," where tellers believe that communication is about "telling people what to do and about changing behavior," versus listeners, who "are more interested in participatory communication, advocacy and a search for common meaning" (p. 41). It is this divide that Quarry and Ramirez argue puts communication for development experts at the margins of development work, resulting in a need for change.

The second section, entitled "What We Have Learned," explores the framework that Quarry and Ramirez use to analyze effective communication for development initiatives by looking broadly at champions, context, and communication functions. They argue that communication for development often involves working in the "grey zone" (p. 31), where the conditions are never right and direction or purposes are not always known, but communicators must keep on trying anyway. It is the champions, the context, and the communication functions that help practitioners to navigate the grey zone. According to Quarry and Ramirez, champions are communication experts who disregard the "telling" development mindset to act in ways that respect the views of the people they are working with to help them find their own solutions to their problems. These individuals are hard to find, but Quarry and Ramirez give some examples of individuals who succeed in this area. The second condition that is important in communication is context, which means that it is important to take into account communities, geography, culture, and history to understand that the success of each successful project is due, in part, to those factors, and not just to the structure of the plan. Quarry and Ramirez stress the fact that each development project must be approached through communication with local individuals, because every context varies significantly, and because it is only the principles that one can transfer from successful projects. Finally, the communication function is important to acknowledge, as it ranges from "telling" to "listening, exchange, and dialogue." The authors stress the importance to the latter functions of listening and exchange, over one-way communication. Overall, this section successfully focuses on individuals and case studies to illustrate how champions, context, and communication functions must work together to encourage "good" development.

The third section, entitled "What We Can Do Differently," provides suggestions toward the future in terms of what practitioners in the field can do differently. Overall, their argument is that, "instead of pushing good communication on decision-makers we really should be promoting another (good) development" (p. 117). They define "good development" as a process that allows people to talk with one another and decide their own development solutions. In order to accomplish this, the authors suggest using the coordinates of champions, context, and functions to propose ideas on improving capacity,

focusing specifically on training individuals who work in development to listen and argue for communication in the beginning of, as well as throughout, development projects. One thing that is stressed in this section is that effort "to inject communication in development programmes cannot significantly change the long-term development agency. The overall context must first change . . . we should relocate our effects . . . towards working more closely with champions in context" (p. 132). Thus, Quarry and Ramirez recognize that communication will continue to play a secondary role in development as long as there is no shift in how planners and decision makers view development.

Overall, Quarry and Ramirez were successful at communicating their desire for another form of development that incorporates communication as its basis, rather than as the first initiative on the chopping block. Throughout their book, they engage in an analysis of previous communication for development work in order to make the most realistic suggestions for future action, aiming to learn from mistakes in the past. They readily acknowledge the failures and shortfalls of practitioners in communication for development, but also argue that the current mode of thinking surrounding development has played a large role in limiting the practitioners' effectiveness in the first place. Based on this, I would state that Quarry and Ramirez successfully argued both for the need for a "better" development, and that it is only through a shift in development ideals to focus on listening instead of telling, that communication will be able to play a more substantial role in development initiatives.

Another important feature of this book is its use of jargon-free language instead of exclusive terms that are readily present in communication and development fields. As a student who is relevantly new to communication for development, I found that their use of plain language to explain their argument really provided a strong and clear introduction to the field. By using language that people who do not work in that field can understand, it allows the authors to make their argument stronger, as everyone can understand it and see the need for communication to play a key role in development initiatives. Furthermore, their ability to interweave storytelling of champions into their arguments of how they had, have, and must continue to navigate in the "grey zone" allows readers to understand exactly what the issues have been in a practical sense. It is evident that their passion is to create the desire for social change which will enable a shift to occur within the development worldview due to outside pressure brought by individuals who desire to listen, rather than to speak.

Quarry and Ramirez argue for the need for another "good" development that would put an emphasis on communication and interaction with local individuals, compared to policy-based projects that produce unsustainable solutions. However, such a shift is a high goal that may not be attainable anytime soon. They acknowledge that the development industry has been based on planning and telling, and that is difficult to change such large organizations and developmental norms. Thus, they argue that the need for change must come from pressure originating in civil society. While their book is written in such a way that lay people can understand and to encourage such pressure, I do not know if their solution for people employed in the communication for development field is accurate or beneficial. The two options for champions they provide are these: Work if the context is right, or alternatively, say no or tone down expectations. As they are experts in the field of communication for development, I know this suggestion by the authors has merit, but I do not think that avoiding the grey zone of less-than-perfect circumstances is beneficial. It is wading into the grey zone that brought current and former champions to

light, and that makes the need for appropriate context and communication evident. While the conditions are not perfect in the grey zone, the need for communication in development initiatives does not dissipate, but remains all the more necessary, lest the initiative in question be consumed as another victim of top-down development.

In conclusion, this book details the struggle that communication experts have in working in the development field. Too many times, the communication-related dimension of development work focuses on output and product, which is perhaps why development needs remain unmet in so many parts of the world. However, the participatory shift within development work that Quarry and Ramirez call for is extremely important and has proven quite successful at producing lasting change, as is illustrated by the success stories woven throughout this book. To anyone who has an interest in creating lasting development change—whether as a student new to communication for development or as a lifetime employee of a bilateral organization—this book is a must-read.

References

Easterly, W. (2006). *The white man's burden: Why the west's efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good*. New York: Penguin Press, Inc.