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## **Communications and Social Change: Forging Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

A Report on a Rockefeller Foundation  
Bellagio Conference  
April 21-25, 1997

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## Contents

<b>COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE</b>	
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	4
<p>In the Spring of 1997, the Rockefeller Foundation brought together a small group of social change activists, community organizers, communications professionals, Internet experts, film makers, broadcasters, electronic frontiers people, reporters/editors and social entrepreneurs to explore ways communications can be used to affect sustained, long-term, positive social change. This conference was organized on two assumptions. First: To be effective, the discipline and practice of communications -- not just the technology -- must adapt to changing global issues and trends. Second: Positive social change is heavily reliant on effective communications.</p>	
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	6
Context	6
Purpose of the Conference	6
Outcomes	7
Participants	7
Shared Work in Advance of the Conference	8
Conference Methodology	8
The Rockefeller Foundation	8
The Conference Report	9
<b>WHAT IS COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE</b>	9
Identifying the nucleus of tomorrow's social change in today's environment	10
Common Desirables for Communications and Social Change	11
Common Probables for Communications and Social Change	12
<b>HOW AND WHY COMMUNICATIONS ARE CHANGING</b>	12
The Properties of Communications	13
Technology	13
Action-Related Communications	14
Control and Access to Communications Systems	14

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW COMMUNICATIONS	15
What is Working in Communications and Social Change	15
What Isn't Working	16
Personal Aspects of Communications and Social Change	16
Snapshots illustrate new ways to use communications for social change	16
A SHARED VISION	21
How the power of communications can be tapped to bring about social change	21
World Vision: Envisioning tomorrow on a global scale	21
CALL TO ACTION, PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES	22
New Approaches for the Funding Community: Helping donors understand the power and validity of the new communications and use it to promote social change	22
Learning and Cultural Awareness: Fostering an environment that promotes tolerance, embraces diversity, encourages a sense of social responsibility	23
Creating a media environment that results in balanced news and information by enabling people to see the "big picture" and perspectives from all over the world	24
Creating a New "Social Content" in Communication: Finding new, exciting, relevant stories and images to promote social change	24
A DRAFT FRAMEWORK: HOW TO THINK ABOUT AND IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR THE NEW CENTURY	25
Declaration of the Bellagio Conference On Communications and Social Change	25
AN ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE	
The Bellagio Conference was a springboard to action. This section is the action plan drawn up by all the participants, including short-term, mid-range, and long-term projects	28
CONCLUSION	29

**Communications and Social Change:  
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A Report on a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Conference  
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**OVERVIEW**

In the spring of 1997, the Rockefeller Foundation brought together a small group of social change activists, community organizers, communications professionals, Internet experts, film makers, broadcasters, electronic frontiers people, reporters/editors and social entrepreneurs to explore ways communications can be used to effect sustained, long-term, positive social change. This conference was organized on two assumptions. First: To be effective, the discipline and practice of communications -- not just the technology -- must adapt to changing global issues and trends. Second: Positive social change is heavily reliant on effective communication.

In organizing this conference, the Foundation decided to organize a conference of people who already understand and use communications in new ways. The Foundation recognized the need to join the skills of communications professionals with the skills of social change agents throughout the world and to craft a new vision for the way communications promotes positive social change, behavior change for social good, and improvement of the lives of people who, historically, have been marginalized. The Foundation also recognized that this new vision and enhanced ways of crafting communications work can promote positive social change around the world.

In planning the conference and selecting participants, the Rockefeller Foundation realized the subject of communications and social change is difficult to define, riddled with jargon. We also recognized that, while, for years, social change activists around the world have been doing the type of work we hoped to learn more about, few formal attempts had been made to explore the intersection of communications and social change, or to analyze communicating to promote social change as a practice, as a discipline.

We also realized that traditional communications professionals alone should not design the future of communications to promote positive social change. Professionals often cling to the strategies and tactics that have worked in the past. Their past success may hamper them from trying alternatives. Social change activists, on the other hand, seem to be freer to try creative approaches, even though, or perhaps because, they are not professional communicators.

So we invited 22 participants from 12 countries, including a facilitator with expertise and experience in search conference methodology, to explore the vast possibilities of new communications strategies for social change. Following is a summary of the group's discoveries, the outcomes of the conference, and the group's action plan for the future.

In sum, the conference was a first but important step of a work in progress. The group has committed to work together in the coming months and years to transform their shared vision into reality. Their goals: Broaden the dialogue about communications and social change and create tools that help people use communications in new ways.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Context***

Information technology is making it possible, at least in theory, to communicate with anyone in the world, anywhere, any time. Every six months, Internet access, international telephone service, fax machines, modems and wireless communications become cheaper, easier to use and more sophisticated. Around the globe, social and political forces -- the human rights movement, the women's movement, and the pro-democracy movements -- are all challenging traditional institutions and power structures.

All of these changes sweeping the globe today have enormous potential in changing how people communicate with one another. As we move toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such forces could have a profound impact on communications for social change, and on communications that help improve the circumstances of individuals and communities throughout the world. Today, we are presented with a serious challenge -- and historic opportunity.

To explore these issues and others, the Rockefeller Foundation hosted a conference at its Bellagio Conference Center in Italy on "Communications and Social Change: Forging Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

### ***Purpose of the conference***

The purpose of the Bellagio conference was to explore the connections between social change and communications in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through an exploration of the work and experience of its participants, the conference sought to understand how and why communications practices are changing, and how the discipline can change more dramatically to reflect new realities and new possibilities in developing nations.

### *Outcomes*

In addition, the foundation anticipated three outcomes of the conference:

- a shared vision and heightened sense of urgency among participants of how the power of communications can be tapped to bring about social change;
- a call to action for new communications thinking; and heightened awareness of what enhanced communication can do for marginalized communities;
- a draft framework for how to think about and implement effective communications models and systems for the new century.

### *Participants*

The Rockefeller Foundation invited people from every continent whose interests and life's work involves communications and/or social change. Individuals invited to participate work in education, public health, grass-roots organization, energy transformation, human rights, environmental activism, union organizing, and micro enterprise development. Some have worked on a national or international scale; others' experience is mostly at the village level. Some are film makers, pioneers in cyberspace, anthropologists, educators, artists, publishers, electronic activists, journalists, specialists in public engagement and social marketing or public relations counselors. All participants expressed a strong desire to expand their own thinking and knowledge through interaction with colleagues from around the world.

The participants had all attended other conferences with people similar in background to their own. A key difference at the Bellagio conference on communications and social change was the diversity of the 22 participants -- in terms of national origin, work experience, education, language, culture, profession, age, gender.

The participants traveled to Bellagio to learn and gain valuable insights from others, to form a global network, to discover common ground among diverse people.

They wanted to share their vision of the future of communications and social change, and they wanted a conference grounded in reality, an opportunity to exchange information and advice about proven strategies.

### ***Shared Work in Advance of the Conference***

Four months before the conference, the Bellagio conferees began an electronic dialogue in order to make their time together as productive as possible. They shared advance information about their aspirations, work and thinking, and discussed selected case studies and current communications challenges. Participants also identified issues for discussion in order to shape the final agenda for the conference.

### ***Conference Methodology***

The conference used a modified search conference methodology, a technique for participative planning in which a group of 20 people to 35 people come together to explore an issue that can be dealt with effectively only with the combined experience and knowledge of everyone at the meeting. The search is for a common ground. The group meets on a "social island" for two and a half days to four days.

While there were no formal presentations, which is consistent with the search conference methodology, some of the conference participants presented their stories as a way of helping others understand their personal experience with communications and social change. Their stories are included as snapshots in the section Characteristics of New Communications.

### ***The Rockefeller Foundation***

The Rockefeller Foundation, one of the oldest and largest private foundations in the world and one of the most global in its perspective, has long recognized the power of communications for addressing the wrenching problems of our times. Positive social change -- improving the circumstances of individuals and communities throughout the world -- requires communications strategies that engage people, that provide information that moves beyond message dissemination. Today, the foundation sees more possibilities than ever for a new kind of communications.

### ***The Conference Report***

The Bellagio conference participants functioned as a small global think tank. They generated knowledge about communications and social change and analyzed it. Their declaration -- including principles of the new communications and the group's action plan -- appears later on in this report.

This report summarizes the discussions, outcomes and conclusions of that conference, which was an important first step. It distills a week of wide-ranging discussions. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion about the enormous potential of new models of communications for social change, models that challenge conventional wisdom about what works and what doesn't.

### **WHAT IS COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE?**

Communicating for positive social change focuses on how information is transmitted among and by people, how information is shared, how the pursuit of information is encouraged, how voice and identity are shaped, how trust is built. It's a dynamic, multi-faceted process that ensures that ideas and concerns are voiced and heard. Messages are created, sent, received, and responded to, as part of a process of listening to needs. Communications are created by people and communities for the purpose of moving behaviors and/or attitudes, elevating awareness and understanding of community issues, creating social consciousness, fostering a shared sense of responsibility for improving the lives of people and communities.

Other phrases that capture elements of this concept are: communications and development; communications for social good, communications and civic engagement, and "public" communications.

Social change communications is inclusive of social mobilization and social marketing, but not limited to such approaches. Communications for social change can be a practice, a discipline with distinct processes and ways of practicing, studying and evaluating, like other communications specialties, such as media relations, financial relations, or employee communications.

Communications for social change is altruistic, promotes the social good, and has a public service orientation. It builds on the proven success of advertising and marketing techniques, using such techniques for public good.

Yet, communications for social change is even bigger than public service advertising or social marketing, which focus on “telling” and distributing information based on the perceived need (as determined by others outside the target community). Too often, they “parachute” information from “above,” with limited understanding of realities “on the ground.”

The focus is on process, not just outcomes. Communications for social change requires community participation in identifying target audiences and in defining communications needs. It empowers people and liberates their ideas. It enables people to tell previously unheard stories. It creates ways to share information. It can foster long-term improvement in the lives of people and communities.

### ***Identifying the nucleus of tomorrow's social change in today's environment***

The Bellagio conference was an attempt by all the attendees to design a future that uses communications to accelerate positive social change. [Note: Participants acknowledged that positive social change means different things to different people. For example, many people in Russia today say the dangers, risks and unfairness of the free enterprise system cannot be considered positive social change.]

As a first step, participants described what is going on in today's world by identifying current social, political, economic and cultural trends and events, the embryos of tomorrow's social change. Some trends generating social change can be controlled; others cannot. Some trends can be influenced; some not.

Some participants said that information age technology would soon be widely available to individuals and communities worldwide. Others doubted technology would be a cure-all for today's problems: Merely because people have access to the Internet does not mean their lives will improve. In addition, some participants felt emerging economies could not compete in the capital-intensive world of information technology and were in danger of being left behind in the information revolution. Others said the spread of technology -- and the universal enjoyment of its benefits -- was unstoppable.

Other discussions at the conference centered on the gap between the world's rich and poor. Some participants saw the gap growing; others saw it closing. Some participants saw media becoming increasingly decentralized; others thought the trend was toward monopoly by a powerful few, most of whom live outside the developing world.

Brainstorming exercises were designed to move the group to a common set of assumptions about the past and present which would lead to a shared vision of the future. Illustrative of the group's discussions are the following:

### **Common Desirables for Communications and Social Change**

- Democracy and civil society initiatives will become more prevalent around the world.
- Human rights, pro democracy and women's rights movements will continue to grow and become more influential, leading to new models for leadership and social change.
- New institutions -- small, community-based, self-sufficient, accountable -- and new ways of operating institutions will emerge around the globe.
- Organizations will become more accountable, transparent and efficient.
- Cheaper, easier technology will become accessible, more widespread.

### **Common Probables for Communications and Social Change**

- The use of communications technology will continue to expand exponentially.
- Traditional institutions and frameworks will continue to be questioned, and small, more responsive, local initiatives will be created in response.
- Ethnic issues will override national boundaries.
- Globalization will increase. [Note: On this point, there was disagreement. Some participants said globalization would result in a concentration of power by multinational corporations, including media conglomerates. Others said globalization would lead to decentralization of power and therefore to greater freedom of expression worldwide.]
- The gap between rich and poor will increase. [Some participants disagreed, arguing that current evidence shows that the economic disparity between North and South is lessening. Other believe global deregulation trends are leading to cheaper, more accessible communications for emerging economies, thereby eventually reducing the gap in at least one area.]

### **HOW AND WHY COMMUNICATIONS ARE CHANGING**

Having identified common desirables and probables, the conference participants addressed the issues of how and why communications practices are changing, and can change more dramatically, to reflect new realities and new possibilities in developing nations.

Participants identified many factors prevalent in the evolution of the communications field. Some of the key observations include:

### *The Properties of Communications*

- Today's communications is making it possible for instantaneous feedback.
- News and information can be communicated worldwide without the filters of government censorship, corporate advertising or institutional controls.
- The new communications is a shift from sending messages to enabling individuals and communities to access information from the ground up (shifting away from a "one-to-many" model of communications to a "many-to-many" model).
- Increasingly, communications for social change involves horizontal communications, as opposed to the top-down, hierarchic approach to communications.
- The history of communications has evolved from sole emphasis on delivering a message -- or pushing -- to pulling from the "bottom" up.
- Sustained social change and successful movements seem to have visual elements, or emblems. For instance: flags, symbols, fads, gestures--any compelling image that represents a host of ideals, values, visions that can easily capture attention and generate enthusiasm.
- The speed of change -- on all levels, in all fields, around the world--is accelerating.

### *Technology*

- Technology is an enabler of anywhere, any time communications.
- Technology changes and evolves. It is shaped by social policy; it is never neutral. New technology may begin with dreams and ideals, but then nation states and corporations intervene.
- Attempts to control modern, digital technology and access to electronic information in the hands of a few owners or centers are doomed.
- Technology is changing the nature of power configurations and creating the possibility that many-to-many communications can shift the balance of political power away from governments and corporations. That is, giving individuals the ability to communicate directly across boundaries will shift traditional balances of power.

- The convergence of multi-media allows for a fuller experience of events: People witness and experience events firsthand that were once remote, e.g., elections, epidemics, natural disasters, wars.

### *Action-related Communications*

Commercial development and opportunity have fueled communications innovation. Social entrepreneurs -- independent, risk takers, creative individuals and small groups -- are changing our world more rapidly than large commercial enterprises altered societies earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- Successful communications involves the target audience; that is, information processes and messages are created with direct input from the target audience.
- Even in hostile, heavily regulated environments, open communications is increasingly possible. As one participant put it, freedom of speech is becoming a local ordinance, as a result of access to electronic technology.
- Social change is the result of "proactive" communications. That is, only when individuals and communities are actively engaged in improving their circumstances -- and energized to do so -- is social change possible.

### *Control and Access to Communications System*

- The influence of public service television seems to be waning in industrialized nations.
- When the powerful few -- individuals, corporations, or governments -- control communications, they monopolize the flow of information, stifle democratic debate, create an environment where social change is difficult.
- Authority uses communications for the establishment. But, now, other forms of communications can take place outside of institutional sanction.
- If world conditions are truly going to change for all people, those who control communications channels and have access to communications systems must use them for societal good.

- It is important to keep lobbying the traditional institutions that control media. We must feed them high-quality content and programs to encourage them to continue distributing information that promotes social change.
- We must acknowledge the world's diversity in communications, both in how the work is done and in who has access. The American and European-centric experiences and perspectives are all part of a bigger, global whole. The dominance of American and European-centric models of communications must recede.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW COMMUNICATIONS**

A key purpose of the conference was to describe the characteristics of the new communications that best links the merging value set of a global civil society with the potentials of the new technologies.

Given today's environment, having identified common desirables and probables, and having examined how and why communications are changing, the Bellagio conferees focused on what works and what doesn't work, in terms of communications and social change.

### **WHAT IS WORKING IN COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

In small-group and plenary sessions, participants discussed a wide range of examples of communications that foster social change. For example, one-on-one communicating is often more effective than one person addressing many. Other effective tactics include getting the insider's perspective, learning the community's culture, language, metaphors. In addition, communications that work give people control of the communications process and use popular formats, such as soap operas, oral tradition and theater.

## **WHAT ISN'T WORKING**

The conference participants discussed why some communications campaigns fail to deliver results. These ineffective communications programs include “parachuting” tactics that send messages from “on high,” and have little or nothing to do with realities “on the ground.” Also what doesn’t work is lecturing the audience, assuming the message sender knows all. And while getting media headlines are extremely effective in calling attention to a critical social problem, additional tactics are required to sustain serious public dialogue on the issue. Finally, wherever communications outlets are controlled by a powerful few, lasting social change is difficult to achieve.

## **PERSONAL ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

- Communications must use vivid, personal images to be effective in bringing about social change.
- Social change results when people use their own voices, when they have the opportunity to shape their own lives.
- The more personal the communications, and the less institutional, the more effective it is.

### ***Snapshots illustrate new ways to use communications for social change***

Looking at current day examples from the participants, we learned that communications is most effective when it:

1. Empowers individuals and coalesces communities
2. Allows previously marginalized people to be heard
3. Opens up channels of communication to all, regardless of lifestyle, economic status, disabilities, or cultural background
4. Becomes universally accessible -- affordable, readily available, easy to use

5. Uses vivid, personal images that are free of mediation by editors, censors and regulators
6. Is horizontal -- from many to many, allowing information to flow across national boundaries and cultures

The following “snapshots” are real-time examples provided by the participants of how communications strategies based on trust, information, and democratic principles have helped individuals and communities improve their circumstances; how strong images, dialogue, and unmediated communications could point the way to broader successes for the future.

***Snapshot: Grameen Bank and the Power of Trust***

Founded by Professor Mohammad Yunus, its managing director, the world-renowned Grameen Bank of Bangladesh has more than 2 million borrowers, who use their loans to start and expand tiny self-employment ventures. The Grameen Bank model is so effective, and has become the model for similar programs in dozens of countries around the world, because it uses new communications strategies to promote positive social change. For example, the bank’s staff do not operate from offices. Instead, they do business in person by visiting the homes of the poorest people in a village, especially women. They communicate one on one, face-to-face. The message: “We are not a huge, faceless institution. We do not have fancy offices designed to intimidate you.”

In addition, borrowers actually own the bank through shares costing the equivalent of U.S. \$2.50 each. The result: Instead of the traditional communications between the lender and borrower, the loan becomes a dialogue among the community of owners.

Also, when a borrower experiences a setback, such as a milk producer whose cow dies, Grameen’s staff coaches her, explaining that “these things happen” and encouraging her to try again. The result: borrowers become entrepreneurial, determined, optimistic. Sometimes, the bank uses traditional communications models to promote new models of change.

Grameen also takes advantage of modern technology, including a satellite dish it uses to access the world's information infrastructure. In addition, the bank is taking advantage of innovative information technology. With the goal of putting at least one cellular telephone in every one of Bangladesh's 65,000 villages by the year 2003, Professor Yunus started Grameen Phone Company. With the goal of improving the lives of people living in poor communities, where telephone lines do not reach people's homes, Professor Yunus plans to help borrowers open a public office at which customers would pay per call. Until now, only wealthy business leaders could afford access to cellular phones. Thanks to Grameen Bank, both the entrepreneurs who own the telephone centers and their customers can take advantage of easily accessible and affordable telecommunications.

When a Grameen staff member has been dishonest with bank funds or has failed to treat borrowers with respect and dignity, the responsible individuals are sternly reminded that borrowers own the bank. The message: "We are a bank that operates according to a clearly defined set of values."

***Snapshot: South Korean Labor and the Power of Image***

Labor News Production is a group of South Korean video makers specializing in education videos and documentaries. Labor unions are part of the pro-reform movement in South Korea. Because of censorship laws, the group, which was founded in 1989, distributes its work through union organizations. They also train workers to make their own videos, a communications strategy that gives people the opportunity to tell their stories, to create their own compelling images, to document abuses of workers' rights. The group is part of a worldwide network of workers' organizations that communicate by fax and through the Internet. They also have an underground network within South Korea. Labor News Production's video "Urgent: Report on the General Strike" documents students and workers in the history-making, month-long strike in January 1997.

***Snapshot: Russia and the Power of Marginalized Young People***

The New Perspectives Foundation promotes democracy in the Russian Federation by focusing on people who have previously been marginalized, specifically, young people. With representative clubs in 43 regions of the Russian Federation, the New Perspectives Foundation also has a global perspective. For example, members of the Foundation observed Britain's recent national elections. The foundation's goal is to encourage Russia's young people to be pro-democracy change agents. It produces educational, research and training activities, including "Vklouchis" ("Plug In"), which seeks to overcome the apathy of Russia's youth towards social problems in general and democracy in particular. The foundation has produced four television programs, conducted numerous discussions, seminars and role-playing exercises to change attitudes of young people. One current project is to adapt the Boys' State/Girls' State model of the American Foreign Legion to Russian circumstances, namely a series of mock-government projects to instill an appreciation of the democratic process.

***Snapshot: Colombia and the Power of Information***

Many documentaries have authoritarian voice-overs and camera work that tell the audience the "truth" or "reality" of a situation. Not so with the new cinema in Colombia. Using real-life radio and television news clips to create a heart-pounding sense of being in the thick of the nation's crisis, blaring popular Colombian music, and including a wider range of human voices and faces, "The Prosecutor," a documentary about the Colombian government's chief anti-drug enforcer, profiles a heroic change agent. Against a backdrop of wrenching social issues and economic tensions, there are clear-cut values of justice, but no pat answers about how to address the crisis.

Interviews and close-ups of members of his family, his staff and colleagues, and political analysts add human dimension to a remote, single-minded prosecutor and the complex issues he and the rest of the nation confront. Images of his children laughing at play contrast with images of corrupt politicians, dangerous drug lords, peasants seeking an alternative to raising drugs -- telling the story of this procedure's complex, vulnerable existence.

***Snapshot: Cyberspace and the Power of Communicating Anywhere/Anytime to Anyone***

Cyberspace -- the "location" created by computers and telephones for all things online and digital -- holds tremendous promise for using communications to promote social change. For example, a film censored by a government can be shown on the Internet.

Originally designed to withstand nuclear war, the Internet may make the nation state irrelevant while it enables everyone on Earth to have a voice, to enjoy information on demand, and to participate fully in the life of virtual communities.

## **A SHARED VISION**

### ***How the power of communications can be tapped to bring about social change.***

To end the week with a shared sense of the new communications as a discipline, the group spent many tough hours together in plenary and small-group discussions defining the current environment, i.e., describing how communications work is currently done, strengths and weaknesses of current practice, how it works or doesn't work in changing the world, the evolution and history of the system, and, ultimately, reaching a shared vision of how future communications will work.

Participants agreed that for positive social change to advance and lives around the world to improve, communications, as a discipline, must be better integrated into social change theories. It's power to move individuals, cultures, institutions and nations is essential on the continuum of change. People need to use and understand communications differently. The participants held many visions for the 21st century in common, particularly as they pertained to the future of communications and social change.

### ***World Vision: Envisioning tomorrow on a global scale***

Brainstorming in small and plenary sessions, the participants focused on a future vision that included a world without censorship and diversity in media ownership. The participants also envisioned a world where everyone, regardless of nationality or economic circumstances, has easy, affordable access to the benefits of the information age. Also, the participants anticipated how communications services as inexpensive as transistor radios would provide people throughout the world timely, balanced and accurate information including news about elections, natural disasters, infectious diseases, etc.

## **CALL TO ACTION, PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES**

### ***New Approaches for the Funding Community: Helping donors understand the power and validity of the new communications and use it to promote social change***

The following are suggestions made by conference participants:

- Increase understanding of the new communications by the global donor community, foundations, UN agencies, World Bank, USAID, etc.
- Transform the concept of development aid, in which the agenda is driven by informed public debate, listening to the needs of the people rather than paternalistic approaches.
- Fund groups with the commitment, know-how and leadership skills to use communications to promote social change.
- Enable communities by providing them access to communications technologies that can help them to express their aspirations about their future.
- Promote horizontal communications and dialogues in communities.
- Promote an environment that will enable people throughout the world to talk to each other across national borders and time zones.
- Connect everyone in the world electronically to everyone else, without interference by government regulation.
- Promote institutional access free for those who cannot pay -- connecting local libraries, schools, community centers, village halls, universities for people who cannot afford to pay for hardware, software, telephone service and electricity.
- Provide instantaneous translations to enable people to communicate, regardless of their language.
- Make all forms of communications technology extremely cheap, down to the cost of a transistor radio -- including Internet access, personal computers, modems, televisions.
- Connect all the villages in emerging economies worldwide to the global telecommunications network to promote democracy and cross-cultural understanding.

- Use communications technology to provide information and monitor health services for each human being on this planet. For example, communications technology, such as Internet communities, could make people more health conscious; help reduce infant and maternal mortality, enable communities to mobilize quickly to avoid epidemics and natural disasters, issue “calls” for humanitarian aid.

***Learning and Cultural Awareness: Fostering an environment that promotes tolerance, embraces diversity, encourages a sense of social responsibility***

- Give young children throughout the world instantaneous exposure to other cultures using communications technology, irrespective of their lifestyle or economic circumstances.
- Help today’s children be critical consumers of all media -- Internet, television, radio, fostering their appreciation of media that reflect democratic values, support sustainable development and concern for the environment, and present a global perspective.
- Preserve cultural/oral traditions by tapping memories of the elderly (keeping the best of ancient traditions).
- Produce media projects that focus on unsung heroes, individuals whose lives are dedicated to social change -- for international consumption.
- Create an international academy for communications and social change, an institution of higher learning that passes on what we know, helps us gain new knowledge; creates specific communications strategies for social change.
- Eliminate jargon from academic and other professional language; helping make specialized knowledge more accessible.
- Create a virtual university worldwide, a university that transcends national borders and time zones -- which, at its core, would train students in social change principles and values.

***Creating a media environment that results in balanced news and information by enabling people to see the “big picture” and perspectives from all over the world.***

- Create a professional and informed communications industry through framing organizations and centers of excellence within regions.
- Support a corps of reporters who act as independent eyes, ears, and pens of the international community, a kind of media version of the International Red Cross.
- Re-invigorate the concept and restore the viability of public service broadcasting.
- Continue to promote the work of “specialty” communications, such as women in film.

***Creating a New “Social Content” in Communication: Finding new, exciting, relevant stories and images to promote social change***

- Through careful study and evaluation of how and why popular fads occur, learn how to understand and use the dynamics of social fads/popular movements to promote change. Examples: popular telenovelas in Latin America that endorse family planning; the television show “M.A.S.H”, which had an anti-war message; and the May 1968 student demonstrations worldwide, many of which successfully challenged traditional political and social institutions.
- Creating a “Dallas,” for social change, a popular television soap opera to promote social change and celebrate democratic values, civil society, etc.

## **A DRAFT FRAMEWORK: HOW TO THINK ABOUT AND IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE NEW CENTURY**

### **Declaration of Principles Vision of Communications for Social Change**

We recognize that the practice and systems of communications have the power to transform lives, and to influence the behavior of organizations, institutions, communities and nations. We also believe that for too long the processes and systems of communications have been concentrated within the power of too few in industrialized countries who use such power to homogenize cultures and ideologies. Recognizing this, and that communication systems and processes are not easily accessible to all the world's people, we the following joined together to propose a vision of communications for the 21st century that animates our collective commitment to positive social change.

This vision is shaped by the following principles:

- I. Every voice has the right to be heard and should have the means to be heard.
- II. Communications systems and technology must, therefore, be affordable, accessible to all.
- III. To work best, the process of communication must allow a free flow from many to many, rather than from one to many.
- IV. Communities must play an essential role in finding their own communications solutions and developing their own communications strategies.

We believe that unmediated communication processes, in which all of us may communicate freely, directly and horizontally with one another, will endow each of us with a greater sense of our own possibilities, enrich our cultures through direct contact with other cultures, create a conversation without limits in which each voice may be heard equally, and from which may evolve enlightened societies that value tolerance, self-determination and active participation.

We believe in the power of strong, vivid and personal images to transform consciousness. And we believe that the images and stories that define and shape a group, a community or a people are primarily theirs alone to make.

For we believe that the cultures of the world need not be subsumed by those cultures of industrialized nations which dominate control of channels of communications.

We believe that ideas with the power to enhance our lives are arising from voices too long excluded from the larger human discourse. These are too often the voices of people from the edges of the world, from the margins of society. They may own neither presses nor broadcasting towers, but they do have the capability of taking responsibility for their futures. We've seen how many previously marginalized people, given the opportunity, can create solutions for complex world problems, and may, in fact, well possess the energy and vision that will help ensure the future for all of us.

We believe that communication is essential for strengthening cultural identity and human values, encouraging further world development, allowing people in communities throughout the world to participate in their own governance, to organize, and to shape our future world.

Moved to action by these principles, we have agreed to work together toward free and open access of all people to the methods, means and tools of communication, to reach out to communities around the world for their ideas and their strength, and to embrace and promote new understanding and new knowledge from wherever it might arise.

Having traveled from 12 countries in late April of 1997 to meet together in Bellagio, Italy, we are:

Alan Alda, New York, NY, U.S.A  
Marlene Arnold, Millersville, PA, U.S.A  
Michael Backes, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A  
Oguz Baburoglu, Istanbul, Turkey  
John Perry Barlow, Pinedale, WY, U.S.A  
James Deane, London, England  
George Gerbner, Philadelphia, PA, U.S.A  
Sushmita Ghosh, Calcutta, India  
Julie Gipwola, Kampala, Uganda  
Denise Gray-Felder, New York, NY, U.S.A  
Alfonso Gumucio, Port-au-Prince, Haiti  
Myoung Joon Kim, Seoul, Korea\*  
Jim Lowenthal, Rabat-Agdal, Morocco  
Susan Mach, Kearny, New Jersey, U.S.A  
Matthew Moonieya, East London, South Africa  
Jenny Richards, London, England  
Marcia Sharp, Washington, D.C., U.S.A  
Nadya Seryakova, Moscow, Russia \*  
Julie Su, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A  
Adelaida Trujillo, Bogota, Colombia  
Galina Venediktova, Arlington, VA, (Currently U.S.A; native of Russia)  
Muhammad Yunus, Dhaka, Bangladesh

\* Translation by Hye-June Park and Edward Kushelov

## **AN ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE.**

The Bellagio conference was a springboard to action. Below are the major elements of the action plan drawn up by all the participants, including short-term, mid-range, and long-term projects.

**Action Item 1:**

Stay in touch as a group through electronic mail.

**Action Item 2:**

Put material on the conference on the Rockefeller Foundation's Web site.

**Action Item 3:**

Work together on key projects and publicize them on the Internet.

**Action Item 4:**

Broaden the dialogue by identifying new communications strategies and advocating these new strategies, in compelling ways, to the World Bank, other donor organizations, non-government organizations, etc.

**Action Item 5:**

Meet again in about a year.

**Action Item 6:**

Plan a virtual university. [Long term action, to be discussed further.]

**Action item 7:**

Challenge and set out to disprove the idea that some places on the globe cannot be wired. Identify two remote areas of the world and wire them.

**Action Item 8:**

Create regional centers of training.

**Action Item 9:**

Study the dynamics of popular fashion fads, especially fashion fads that signal fundamental change; assess how/whether communications for social change can advance by using those dynamics.

**Action Item 10:**

Prepare a scholarly journal article and submit it.

**Action Item 11:**

Learn more about impact of restricted trade on potential for bringing technology hardware to emerging economies, possibly as first step to Action Item 7.

## **CONCLUSION**

The participants at the Bellagio conference accomplished much. They became a global network of people engaged in communications and social change. They confirmed the values that should drive new communications strategies. They created an ambitious, long-range action plan. They shared success tactics, practical tips.

Execution is the next step. The Rockefeller Foundation and the participants are committed to the action plan. Today's communications technology has enormous potential for helping people and communities improve their circumstances. New kinds of communications strategies could accelerate social change, strategies that take full advantage of the vast changes sweeping the globe.

For example, communications technology makes distance learning possible. Students in a community without a physics teacher, for example, can tune in remotely, attend lectures and engage in two-way communication with a physics teacher in a community thousands of miles away. Communications technology also has made telemedicine possible. A medical professional can diagnose symptoms and prescribe treatment for a patient thousands of miles away. Communications technology can, with the help of distributed networks, create a totally unregulated, almost cost-free Internet that can escape government censorship and corporate monopolies of information and news.

The conference added dimension to participants' thinking, providing practical tips and proven tactics that could be adapted to suit local needs. For example, soap operas can provide young people information on family planning. Puppet theaters can help teach children the importance of getting an education. 'Net Days can help a community connect its schools to the global information superhighway.

Finally, the conference identified a set of guidelines for communications strategies to promote social change. In essence, the declaration and the action plan became the roadmap to the participants' shared vision of the 21st century -- a future where the connections between communications and social change is recognized and celebrated.

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