
Book review: *Strategic Communication Management for Development and Social Change: perspectives from the African region*

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The background of this book is rooted in the imbalance of global narratives on development communication, which for decades has been dominated by academic traditions from Latin America, Europe and North America. As explained in the book's introduction by Thomas Tufte, large-scale communication projects for social change have largely failed to accommodate African perspectives, despite Africa's long history of communication activism, ranging from community radio, development theatre, to citizen journalism (pp. v–viii). This book attempts to bridge that gap by presenting 15 chapters written by African academics from various countries and institutions, including South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Sudan.

The editors of this book have very solid academic and professional track records. Tsietsi Mmutle is a lecturer in business Management at the University of Pretoria, specialising in strategic communication. Tshepang Bright Molale from the University of Witwatersrand is an expert in participatory communication. Olanrewaju O. Akinola is a mass communication academic from Nigeria, while Olebogeng Selebi contributed to developing a strategic framework for public policy-based development communication. The editors' academic credibility and diverse backgrounds strengthen the book's position as a cross-disciplinary work grounded in the context and real-world experiences of Africa.

Structurally, the book is divided into four parts. The first part, titled *Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to Communication for Development and Sustainable Social Change in Africa*, discusses the theoretical foundations and empirical studies of citizen participation. The first chapter introduces a conceptual framework on the importance of strategic communication in addressing poverty, conflict and debt crises in Africa. The author emphasises that development is impossible without communication that encourages active citizen participation (pp. 1–5). The second chapter by Molale presents a framework for participatory communication in local development planning in South Africa, showing how communication can serve as a bridge between local governments and their citizens (pp. 21–40). The third chapter features a case study in Ghana through the Access Project, which successfully used Community Information Centres and interpersonal dialogue as channels for citizen participation (pp. 41–60). The fourth chapter offers a Mutual Sustainability Communication (MSC) framework to integrate private sector CSR into the sustainable development agenda (pp. 61–80).



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The second part, entitled Strategic Communication in Governance, Planning and Policy Reforms, explores the relationship between strategic communication and public policy reform. Chapter five emphasises the importance of communication in building inclusive citizen engagement at the local government level (pp. 83–102). The sixth chapter by Van der Waldt discusses network governance as a new approach to creating collaboration among development stakeholders (pp. 103–122). The seventh chapter presents a field study from Nigeria on how World Bank-supported community projects can succeed thanks to communication strategies that combine traditional African approaches and modern media (pp. 123–140).

The third section, themed Communication for Social Change, Bottom-Up Development and Social Movements in Africa, offers reflections on social movements and grassroots empowerment. Chapter eight highlights the role of the Sudanese Professionals Association in the 2019 Revolution, showing how social media communication, visual arts and non-violent values became instruments of social change in Sudan (pp. 143–160). Chapter nine examines the contradiction between citizen participation in local policy and the prevalence of public service protests in South Africa (pp. 161–182). Chapter ten by Masombuka analyses the communication of student movements such as Fees Must Fall as a form of resistance against structural inequality through grassroots communication networks (pp. 183–196).

The final section of Case Studies in Applied Strategic Communication, Development, Social Change and Electoral Reform focuses on the application of communication in practical issues. Chapter 11 reveals the positive relationship between public health communication and economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa (pp. 199–216). Chapter 12 evaluates the role of digital technology in enhancing the role of community radio in Kenya as a tool for social transformation (pp. 217–230). Chapter thirteen by Akinola examines low voter turnout in Nigerian elections and shows that segmented, market-oriented political communication strongly influences voter behaviour (pp. 231–254). Chapter fourteen by Selebi applies the Arena Model to design a communication strategy for South Africa's National Development Plan, which is often criticised by political elites (pp. 255–274). Chapter fifteen concludes with a reflection on the role of communication as a facilitative force that determines the direction of sustainable social change (pp. 275–284).

Critically, the main strength of this book is its boldness in bringing together two fields of communication - strategic communication and development communication that have often been separated in previous studies. Another strength is the diversity of case studies across countries and contexts, as well as the involvement of authors from various African academic institutions that provide epistemic legitimacy to the narrative offered. The book also successfully summarizes top-down and bottom-up approaches in a strategic framework that strengthens citizen participation and the role of government simultaneously.

However, its weakness lies in the lack of synthesis between the book's sections. Although each chapter stands strong individually, the argumentative thread between sections has not been fully sharpened. In addition, references to non-African literature are still dominant in some sections, even though the aim of the book is to offer an African perspective. Some chapters are also highly descriptive and less reflective of the limitations of the context. In terms of contribution to science, this book has strategic value in enriching the global literature on development communication from the Global South. It broadens the horizon of approaches to development by placing communication as a strategic actor, not just a means of conveying information. This book is an important reference for academics, researchers, policy makers and civil society organizations working in the fields of development, democratization and social change.

For readers coming from the fields of communication, development studies, or public policy, this book offers a cross-disciplinary approach that is contextual and relevant. For master and doctoral students, this book can be used as study material in development communication, strategic communication and policy communication courses. For communication practitioners in government agencies and NGOs, this book provides

practical insights into designing communication strategies based on participation and empowerment. Thus, *Strategic Communication Management for Development and Social Change* is an important work that not only documents communication experiences in Africa but also challenges the epistemic dominance of the Global North and voices that solutions to development problems must depart from the experiences, values and voices of local communities themselves.

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