Inside this issue

Editorial: Statement of Support from the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council Incorporated | Editorial - From Speaking to Listening | Communicating with Communities by Martin Dawes | Poor Visibility by Robert Chambers | Community Radio and Development by Maria Dolores Martinez | Five Issues Raised By BBC’s India’s Daughter Documentary by Shakuntala Banaji | Interview with Father Gustavo Gutierrez by Rev. Daniel Hartnett, SJ | Social Mobilisation and Girls’ Education by Levison Lijoni | When Development Dies by Linje Manyozo
The Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council Incorporated (the Council), is the organisation that advocates for and represents the Wurundjeri people. The Wurundjeri, also known as the Yarra Yarra and the Manna Gum people, are the Traditional Owners of Melbourne and surrounding territories.

The traditional language of the Wurundjeri people is Woi-wurrung.

The Council was delighted to have been invited by RMIT to provide a Woi-wurrung language concept for this important Bulletin. The invitation demonstrated to the Council that RMIT recognized and respected Wurundjeri people’s cultural protocols.

“Wumen Bagung Ngang-gak ba Boorndap” translates as “Come Gather, Listen and Respect”. Gathering to share stories, learning from one another, respecting one another and the land that sustains us all, are experiences that unite everyone. Wumen Bagung will further facilitate learning, sharing and strengthening ties between participating communities.
Writing in the *London Times Supplement* of 1966, Edward Palmer Thompson propounded the notion of people’s history, as a form of historical reconstruction that requires scholars to read, unpack and appreciate historical events from the perspective of ‘nonpersons’, those that Gayatri Spivak described as without having access to lines of social mobility. Thompson would indeed test this new theoretical and methodological trajectory through the research and publication of *The Making of the English Working Class*, which would cement the notion of history from below as a major scholarly tradition. He would note in the Preface to this timeless classic:

“I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the obsolete hand-loom weaver, the ‘utopian’ artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties”.

In emphasising the quest to ‘rescue’, Thompson was not being dismissive of the agency of the marginalised and oppressed groups to construct their own history. Far from it. In fact in 1988, Spivak, in *Can the subaltern speak?* would confirm the immense power and ability of these groups to master the art of politicizing speech.

What Thompson was calling for was a new kind of scholarly pedagogy, in which historical writing takes on ethnographic and moral responsibilities. Ethnographic in that the studying of history of the common people would now no longer rely on
positivist and empiricist ethos, but rather involve building long and trusted relationships with the subjects of study.

The moral ethos is well illuminated by the pioneer of liberation theology, Father Gustavo Gutierrez, who introduces the notion of ‘preferential option for the poor’. Gutierrez notes that if there ‘is no friendship with them and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals.’

What Thompson and Gutierrez are calling for here is a reinvigorated and aspirational kind of historical writing that can no longer be apolitical in the face of the violence and cannibalism of the predatory forms of capitalism and globalisation. As students of society, we can no longer remain neutral in the name of scientific objectivity.

In this case to write history—as in designing and implementing development interventions - implies that we take the side of the poor, the marginalized, the classless, and that we understand their viewpoint, which then becomes an intellectual and programmatic pedestal for constructing and implementing a discursive imaginary. To write history in this case means that we are going to war, against the structural inequalities that perpetuate what Aime Cesaarie construes as the thingification of the subaltern.

When Thompson thus calls for the ‘rescuing’ of such oppressed groups, he does not simply imply that we have to write their histories, articulate their feelings and needs; rather that we have to undertake the sacred duty of historical writing, with empathy, ‘understanding, compassion, careful study for the purposes of co-existence and enlargement of horizons’, as pointed out by Edward Said in the revised Preface to Orientalism.

This poses a challenge for both formal and informal training programs in communication for development and social change: How do we produce students, graduates and professionals who have the tools and skills for living and engaging with people?

In a 2006 Media Development article, Alfonso Gumucio and Clemencia Rodriguez describe ‘a new type of communicator’ who is equipped with ‘all the necessary know-how, competences, and commitment to work hand-in-hand with those engaged in development and social change processes’. We need to begin to create intellectual spaces that allow students and professionals to be challenged by alternative discourses and paradigms.

The field of communication for development today experiences a preponderance of modernist theories and approaches. Yet, as the intellectual ruptures caused by the 2008 Financial Crash have demonstrated, there are other ways of theorising, thinking about, explaining and of deconstructing the world that have emerged in the slums of India, in the First Nation territories in Australia, Canada or Latin America, in the valleys of China, the favelas of Brasil, the plains of Tsalamanki or Kaduna, the compounds of Monomotapa or Timbuktu kingdoms and much of the south.

These knowledges are largely oral, passed on from generations to generations. Even if there is penetration of technology, the spoken word, largely in forms of proverbs, song, dance and spirituality, remains a powerful article and convention for the generation, exchange and consumption of social meanings and their reference frameworks.

Today, marginalisation is tearing the world apart. Some are choosing to pose naked and post pictures on the internet. Others, as in the #BlackLives Matter or #FeesMustFall movements are employing contestational advocacy to expose and undermine organised forms of structural violence against the subaltern. In some cases, the subaltern decide to set themselves on fire, as did Mohammed Bouaziz in 2010, sparking the Tunisian and later on, the Arab Revolution, which in many instances is transforming into a political
nightmare. Nevertheless, the subaltern are speaking; but who is listening?

In development teaching, research and practice, we should destabilise and interrupt the dominant myth that communication for development was a perpetuation of western development thinking.

Evidence from much of the south shows that communication for development emerged as a postcolonial movement that vehemently contested and rejected the modernist approaches of western development paradigms. At its base, the theory and practice of the field was and remains a humanist initiative. Colonialism, as manifested in modernist and civilizational development was never, and will never be humanist.

Whatever our disagreements with regards to alternative ways of thinking and knowing, those ‘aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience’ and thus, deserve to be studied and embraced as a critical strategy for ensuring our students and professionals learn to listen.

Listening is much more than keeping quiet when one is speaking. Listening requires that we enter into a discursive communion with others, in order to appreciate knowledge from alternative perspective, not as a way of reaffirming and strengthening our position, but rather to ensure that we understand the argument as a whole.

Within RMIT’s School of Media and Communication, there is a renewed commitment to a critical pedagogy; one that involves recognising and incorporating the knowledge and expertise of industry practitioners, subject specialists, indigenous knowledge and community organisations. These vital stakeholders are reshaping and redefining our teaching philosophies, content and outcomes.

Thus, listening is a fundamental building block of our teaching and research. Our graduates are grounded individuals who have mastered theory, understand its relevance and are good at integrating it into practice.

Supporting all of these efforts are the excellent research outputs of the Digital Ethnography Research Centre (DERC), which is revitalising the way we think about Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), if deemed necessary, to development and social change endeavors. Ethnography has now become a principal research method and trajectory for constructing the theory and practice of listening.

The initiation of this Bulletin is a celebration of the DERC initiatives to take the classroom into the community to ensure the wider relevance of our teaching and research.

This bulletin has a Woi-wurrung language name: Wumen Bagung Ngang-gak ba Boorndap. Woi-wurrung is the language of the Traditional Owners of Melbourne and Greater Melbourne, the Wurundjeri people. The language name translates as “Come Gather, Listen and Respect”. This alludes to an aspirational, fraternal, collaborative, cooperative and democratic development engagement, that centres around listening to and respecting each other.

The First Nations people of Wurundjeri Tribe are the rightful owners of the land upon which RMIT University stands today. This Bulletin, like RMIT itself, pays respect to the elders, past, present and future.

Wumen Bagung is therefore not just a name, but a reminder of our belief that development theory and practice requires us to pay attention to other people, their ways of thinking, and their ways of defining the world. In the Woi-wurrung, listening is not just about hearing others, it is about seeing them and finding them as people. When we say “I hear you”, we are also saying, I see you, and thus, are acknowledging and respecting their humanity and their spirituality.

Notwithstanding the access to opportunities and resources, it is imperatively ethical and political that we listen to and see other voices as advised by Said, Gutierrez and Thompson.
This edition features articles that celebrate listening. Enjoy the read, and please, advise how we can improve on this experience!

Wumen Bagung Ngang-gak ba Boorndap!!!

**Linje Manyozo Mlauzi** is a Senior Lecturer in Communication for Development at RMIT University. He is also a development practitioner whose portfolio comprises international and grassroots development organisations.

He is the author of *Media, Communication and Development* (Sage) and *People’s Radio* (Southbound). An original version of this article was published in *Development in Practice* in 2010.
Communicating with communities has been defined as comprising activities where the exchange of information is used to save lives, mitigate risk, enable greater accountability and shape the response, as well as supporting the communication needs of people caught up in conflicts, natural disasters and other crises. In this article, Martin Dawes of the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities - CDAC Network, reflects on the challenges facing the generation of effective communication packages that simultaneously meet the needs of aid organisations and communities on the ground.

For most of the modern history of international humanitarian response to emergencies, there has been communication. Through the production of countless words and pictures, there has been communication about the affected people caught up in some ghastly disaster or conflict.

This aims to assist fundraising, while also justifying the approaches of the agency or non-governmental organisation, defining their brand and reinforcing unique market position. Then there is ‘behavioural change communication’ that sets out to assist in the achievement of program results by challenging social norms through well-researched campaign messages and approaches to achieve a clear effect.

Recently, there has been more interest in communication to achieve greater accountability through feedback on what is being done.

Increasingly donors are requiring mechanisms, such as call centres, to be established as part of the implementation.

It remains however, painfully obvious that humanitarian action remains a service industry that is extremely poor at asking those about whom is most concerned with what they actually want - whether they have any advice or experience that is relevant and what they think the aid agencies are...
doing. In most circumstances the finger is firmly on the ‘send’ button and barely flicks across to ‘receive’.

To outsiders this may seem harsh, particularly when there are many good intentions for flying into countries where transparency and accountability are strangers to indigenous policy makers. This is beside the point.

Even at the most basic level there is a need to ensure that aid is effective, and it will not be if there is misinformation, cultural insensitivity and a lack of listening to, and involvement of, affected people in the aid response.

Communication that is done in the right way is essential to ensure that people turn up at the right landing strip for a food distribution; that health workers turning up to remove another victim of Ebola are not attacked because of rumours of body snatching; and that the aid response improves because of what is actually happening and not from wishful self-reporting.

Secondly, humanitarian responders must and should do better is that it is required of them. Meeting the information and communication needs of affected populations abides by Article 19 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights which states: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’.

In terms of the global development objectives, the Sustainable Development Goals include not only the right to information, but also the requirement to ‘ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels’ (SDGs 16.7). Even during an emergency response, there is an obligation to engage and communicate with affected populations and take account of their knowledge, experience and advice—as the response is developed and later on, in the recovery phase.

At the first ever United Nations (UN) World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul in May 2016, ‘People at the Centre’ was one of the core action areas defined by the UN Secretary General, although it seemed obvious that this meant very different things to different speakers at the session.

One of the problems implicit in the discussions was whether communication and community engagement should be seen through a narrow focus of how this helps ‘aid’ and aid organisations to do a better job, or whether it is a multiplier that allows people to link also with their own networks, give news to families, receive diaspora funds perhaps via their mobiles and receive information from a variety of sources of their own choosing as they plan their futures. The latter context is considered a less hierarchical approach.

This is a relatively new area, but one that is widely recognised even if not always adopted. In 2005, The World Disaster Report from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, stated that ‘As well as saving lives, information reduces suffering in the wake of disaster. Tracing lost family and friends, knowing how much compensation you’re entitled to or where you’re going to live, simply understanding why disaster struck: such information means an enormous amount to survivors left homeless and traumatised’. The report also argued that information was just as much an essential as food and clean water. Other papers such as Left in the Dark by the BBC Media Action, developed a similar argument. Likewise, the Listening Project (CDA) spoke to more than six thousand development aid recipients. The report concluded that people do want more ownership, more say over the priorities, and that how assistance is given is as critical as how much.

In 2010 a project supported by British UK Aid, known as InfoasAid, was established with the aim of improving communication with crisis-affected communities. It was implemented by a consortium of two media development organisations - Internews and BBC Media Action.
The project worked to improve communications with crisis-affected communities. It had two main objectives: To strengthen the capacity and preparedness of the humanitarian system to respond to the information and communication needs of crisis-affected populations; To partner with aid agencies to help inform and support their communication response in emergencies. It ended in December 2012, and its role was assumed by a network of humanitarian agencies, technology and media development organisations called the Communication with Disaster Affected Communities Network (CDAC), formed in 2009.

Within months of the CDAC Network coming together it was heavily involved in the 2010 Haiti earthquake. The humanitarian response there represents one of the largest cross-agency commitments to communication ever seen in an emergency. The humanitarian community’s capacity to communicate with affected communities became especially acute when the cholera epidemic erupted. CDAC Haiti was at that point appointed by the UN Coordination Office to act as a communication hub. It played a critical role of generating and exchanging appropriate, efficient and coherent communication with disaster affected communities. CDAC Haiti also ensured efficient information sharing among partners, identification of gaps and reduction of duplication.

**Listening to people**
Despite increased knowledge and research, gaining wide acceptance that communication should be integrated in all emergency response has proved difficult. The ALNAP network which aims to strengthen humanitarian practise said in its 2012 Report that 44% of aid recipients surveyed were not consulted on their needs by aid agencies prior to the start of their programs, 33% of recipients said they had been consulted and of these 20% said agencies had acted on this feedback and made changes.

In 2016, a three-year study reported on consultations with 2,700 people from ‘insecure environments’ in Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. Only about 400 of the 2700 said they had been asked by aid agencies for their opinion. It was not as if feedback mechanisms had not been established, in fact in Somalia at least there had been quite a range; it was just that people did not know about them or, as in the case of Afghanistan the collected information from phone surveys was not used in a systematic way to improve aid effectiveness. The researchers found that across all four contexts there were five concerns. These comprised: aid agencies being over reliant on views of dominant community representatives; communities not hearing back having provided feedback; extant channels not enabling communities to discuss sensitive issues; people being asked for feedback only at certain stages of aid projects; and communities not knowing which agencies to complain to.

In countries where there is considerable insecurity, and where it is dangerous for international aid workers to practice, it may seem reasonable that there is less discussion with, and involvement of, communities. The writers observed that this makes it even more important to know from local people what is happening with aid and to involve them in the process. This would be in line with the 2014 Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Project to place ‘affected people at the centre of humanitarian action and, if the standards are applied in practise, they will improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance provided and facilitate greater accountability to communities and people’.

**Rumours**
When rumours are allowed to flourish, local responders are not engaged and bad messages are used. This was evident in the 2014-15 Ebola Virus Outbreak in West Africa. This outbreak claimed more than 11,000 lives mainly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Not only were fundamental mistakes made about spotting the outbreak as it started to claim victims in Guinea, but messaging about the high fatality rate helped to cause panic and even suspicion in isolated communities. This led to attacks on hygiene teams spraying communal areas, as rumours declared they were actually spreading the disease.
Heavy handed removal of bodies that flew in the face of customs and deeply entrenched belief systems also led to denial and refusals to report possible victims. With no vaccine to combat Ebola, the international teams that came to support overstretched and impoverished national public health systems belatedly realised that much had to be done using local viewpoints and working with communities. The aim was to change behaviours, rather than impose actions, though this was a critical public health issue.

When the outbreak was under control and the number of new cases reduced to a handful, the public health expert and UN Special Envoy Dr. David Nabarro emphasised that the key to change had been the building of trust through negotiation with local leaders and said that the need for community engagement had been one of the most important lessons.

System changes?
The aforementioned discussion has raised critical lessons. There is not enough money to deal effectively with humanitarian needs. Having less efficient systems that neglect the advice and knowledge of local communities, should be consigned to wherever bad ideas come to rest. There is now an increasingly strong demand to listen, engage and truly put ‘People at the Centre’. The test of this will be the business of communicating with, alongside and listening.

We need to have systems that reach out and hear, in ways that are appropriate and smart. Smart enough to sit under a tree and listen to the people and look around to see if women are there as well. Clever enough to desegregate. Empathetic to what is really worrying people and astute enough to know that telling people how their views have wrought changes means that they will be more empowered, resilient and welcoming. Caring enough to know that a woman on a restored mobile link telling her daughter that she has survived puts the human back into humanitarian, even if it is not ticking a defined box on a donor matrix. Achieving this and enabling people to turn around and say ‘brilliant’, ‘no thanks’ and ‘if you do this, mothers will come too’ will create real change for good in humanitarian response.

Martin Dawes is a senior member of the Communication Team with the Disaster Affected Communities Network, a group comprising UN agencies and NGOs. He is a former BBC Foreign Correspondent and Senior Communication Adviser with UNICEF in South Asia and West Africa. Recently he attended the first ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. Contact: martin.dawes@cdacnetwork.org
Writing in The New Internationalist of February 1981, Robert Chambers argues that there are severe constraints to perceiving rural poverty, not just because of the nature of poverty itself, but because of the failure of these external experts to perceive poverty. Over and above the many factors that prevent the ‘rural development tourist’ from perceiving poverty is university education and professional training, which Chambers argues “impart an assortment of biases” that shape the way we see things.

Chambers contends that, at times, professional training “inculcates an arrogance in which superior knowledge and superior status are assumed,” in which “professionals then see the rural poor as ignorant, backward and primitive, and who have only themselves to blame for their poverty.”

In this piece Professor Chambers argues that ‘policy makers are rarely poor: to understand poverty they must study it. A visit to the village promises a glimpse of the real thing, but meeting poor people is not so simple. Anything from fuel prices to bad weather can obscure rural poverty from the urban visitor’.

For Wumen Bagung, this is an important conversation to have, as an increasing number of universities are rethinking their training, education content and philosophies. In a way, Chambers is raising fundamental questions: What kind of graduates are we producing? Which tools and skills do they possess that enable them work with and alongside other peoples and cultures?

Thus when it comes to studying, making sense of and then constructing representations of poverty, Chambers suggests it is all about the values, perception and the skills.

Close-typed reports and colourless statistics are the staple diet of the office-bound expert. It is from them that the facts and figures on
development come. But it is the occasional day out, the field trip, the visit to the village that offer city dwellers and policy makers their most colourful and enduring images of rural life. And in most cases it is rural development tourism—the brief rural visit, often a guided tour—that provides urban outsiders with their only experience of rural poverty. Visitors may differ widely in nationality and religion, in experience and prejudice, but they usually have three things in common: they come from urban areas; they want to find something out; and they are short of time. So the visit begins.

The visitor sets out late, delayed by last minute business, by subordinates or superiors anxious for decisions, by a family crisis, by a cable or telephone call, by mechanical or administrative problems with vehicles, or by urban traffic jams. Even if the way is not lost, there is enough fuel and there are no breakdowns, the programme still slips behind schedule. The visitor is encapsulated, first in a Landrover and later in a moving entourage of officials and local notables (headmen, chairmen of village committees, village accountants, progressive farmers, traders and the like).

Whatever their private feelings, the rural residents put on their best face and receive the visitor hospitably. According to ecology, economy and culture, the visitor is given goats, garlands, coconut milk, coca cola, coffee, tea or milk. Speeches are made. School children sing or clap. Photographs are taken. Buildings, machines, construction works, new crops, exotic animals, the clinic, the school, the new road—all are inspected. Some special group—the self-help committee or the women’s handicraft group—it is members dressed in their best clothes, is seen and spoken to. They nervously respond in ways which they hope will bring benefits and avoid penalties.

As the day wears on and heats up, the visitor becomes less inquisitive, asks fewer questions and is finally glad, exhausted and bemused, to retire to the rest house, the host official’s residence or back to an urban home or hotel. The village returns to normal, no longer wearing its special face.

When darkness falls and people talk more freely, the visitor is not there.

Shortage of time, the importance of the visitor and the desire for information all influence what is perceived. Lack of time drives out the open-ended question; the visitor imposes meanings through the questions asked. Checking is impossible and lies become accepted as facts. People are neglected while formal actions and physical objects are given attention. Refugees in a rural camp in Tanzania said of UN and government officials that ‘They come and they sign the book and they go’. But above all it is the poorer people who tend to be unseen and remain unmet. Starting and ending in urban centres, these visits follow networks of roads. The hazards of dirt roads, the comfort of the tourist, the location of places for spending the night and shortages of time and fuel all dictate a preference for tarmac roads and for travel close to urban centres. The result is urban and roadside bias.

Urban bias concentrates rural visits near capital cities and large administrative centres. But the poorest rural residents are often in more remoter areas—Northern Brazil, lower Ukambani in Kenya, the Tribal Districts of Central India. In many places, people are being extruded from densely populated
areas better served with communications and in order to survive, are forced, to colonise less accessible areas, especially the savannahs and forests. Inaccessible from the urban centre, the poorest of the poor remain largely unseen.

Visible development follows main roads. Factories, offices, shops and official markets all tend to be at the sides of main roads. Even agricultural development has a roadside bias: in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu agricultural demonstrations of new seeds and fertilizers have been sited beside main roads.

Services along roadsides are also better—improved tarmac surfaces, buses, electricity, telephone, piped water supply—so those who are better off buy up roadside plots and build on them. The poorer people shift away out of sight. Ribbon development along roadsides gives a false impression in many countries. The better the roads, the nearer the urban centre and the higher the traffic, so the more pronounced is the roadside development and the more likely visitors are to see it and be misled.

Fuel shortages and costs accentuate urban bias. Whenever governments make budget cuts, travel is a favourite; it can be trimmed without visible loss. But each cut makes rural contact rarer and harder, and urban and tarmac bias more pronounced.

Every rise in oil prices not only impoverishes the more remote, poorer people by tilting the urban-rural terms of trade against them, but also reduces the chances of that deprivation being known.

Visitors are pointed to those rural places where something is happening—where money is being spent, staff are stationed, a project is in hand. Contact and learning are with tiny atypical islands of activity that attract repeated attention.

Project bias is most marked with the showpiece: the nicely groomed pet project or model village, specially staffed and supported, with well-briefed members who know what to say, sited a reasonable but not excessive distance from the urban headquarters. Governments in capital cities need showpiece projects for foreign visitors; district and sub-district staff need them too, for visits by their senior officers. Many such projects have one thing in common; they direct attention away from the rural poor.

Listening to communities is painstaking but it helps strengthen an understanding of poverty.

Some projects have attracted international attention. Any roll of honour would include the Anand Dairy Cooperatives in India; the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit in Ethiopia; the Comilla Project in Bangladesh; the Gezira Scheme in Sudan; the Intensive Agricultural Districts Programme (IADP) in India; Lilongwe in Malawi; the Muda Irrigation Project in Malaysia; the Mwea Irrigation Settlement in Kenya; the Ujamaa programme in Tanzania. All of these have been much visited and much studied. Students seeking doctorates have read about them then sought to do their field-work on them.

Research generates more research, and investment by donors draws research after it and provides funds for it. Fame forces the managers of showpiece projects into public relations. More and more of their time has to be spent showing visitors around. Flooded with the celebrated, the curious, and the ignorant—prime ministers, graduate
students, farmers’ groups, aid missions and
directors of this and that—managers set up public
relations units and develop a public relations style.
Visitors then get the treatment.

A fluent guide follows a standard routine
and standard route. Two British Members of
Parliament visited the Anand Cooperatives in
India during February 1979. They were impressed
by the delivery of milk from small producers to
one centre. Inside hung a photograph of James
Callaghan, the British Prime Minister, taken during
his visit to the same centre. Asked if they would
like to see a second centre, they readily assented.
There they found another photograph, this time of
the visit to that centre of Judith Hart, the British
Minister of Overseas Development.

So often, the same buildings are entered, the
same people met, the same books signed,
the same polite praise inscribed in the book
against the visitors’ names. Inquisitive visitors
depart loaded with research papers, technical
evaluations, and annual reports which they
probably will never read. They leave with a
sense of guilt at the unworthy skepticism, which
prompted probing questions and with memories
of some of those who are better-off in the special
project, and of the charisma of the exceptional
leader or manager who has created it. They write
journey reports, evaluations and articles on the
basis of these impressions. Such projects then
take off into the realm of self-sustaining myth.

Experienced tourists may bypass projects and
head for ‘ordinary’ villages. But their reception
committee will still be swollen by the local elite—
progressive farmers, headmen, religious leaders,
teachers and other government workers. It is they
who receive and speak to the visitors; they who
articulate the village’s interests and wishes; their
concerns which emerge as the village’s priorities
for development. It is they who entertain visitors,
generously providing the expected beast or
beverage. Meanwhile the poorest villagers remain
silent—weak, powerless, and isolated they are
reluctant to push themselves forward.

Just as most rural tourists are men, most rural
people with whom they make contact so are also
men. Women have inferior status and are often
shy of visitors. Yet poor rural women are a class
within a class. They work very long hours and are
paid less than men. Single women, female heads
of households, and widows are among the most
wretched and unseen of the world’s poor.

Tourists also tend to visit places where activity
is concentrated, easily visible, and hence easy
to study. Children in school are more likely to be
seen and questioned than those who are not in
school; those who use the health clinic more than
those who are too sick, too poor or too distant to
use it.

Visibility comes to those who frequent the market
because they have goods to sell or money with
which to buy, more than those who stay at home
because they have neither; members of the
cooperatives more than those who are too poor or
powerless to join it; those who have adopted new
agricultural, health or family planning practices
more than those who have not. Again and again it
is the underprivileged who are overlooked.

Most of the rural poor live in areas of marked
wet-dry seasonality. For the great majority
whose livelihoods depend on cultivation the
most difficult time of the year is usually the wet
season, especially before the first harvest. Food is
short, food prices high, work hard and infections
prevalent.

Malnutrition and mortality rise; body weights
decline. The poorer people, women and children
are particularly vulnerable. Birth weights drop
and more newborn babies die. Childcare is
inadequate. Desperate people become indebted.
This is both the hungry season and the sick
season. It is also the season of ratchets, of
irreversible downward movements into poverty
through the sale or mortgaging of assets, the
time when poor people are most likely to become
poorer.
The wet season is also the unseen season. The rains are a bad time for rural travel because of the inconvenience posed by floods, mud, broken bridges, getting stuck, damaging vehicles, losing time and enduring discomfort. In some places roads are officially closed. Many rural areas, especially those that are remote and poor, are quite simply inaccessible by vehicle during the rains.

Once the rains are over visitors can travel more freely. It is in the dry season, when disease is diminishing, the harvest in, food stocks adequate, body weights rising, ceremonies in full swing, and people at their least deprived, that there is most contact between urban-based professionals and the rural poor.

The poorest people are most visible at precisely those times when they are least deprived. As fair weather favours the tourists, so rural development tourism favours roadsides and projects, elites and men. The urban outsider is guided towards better-off people in better-provided areas at better times of the year. Thus the prosperity after the harvest of a male farmer on a project besides a main road close to a capital city may colour the perceptions of a succession of officials and dignitaries. But the plight of a poor widow starving and sick in the wet season in a remote and inaccessible area may never be known outside her own community. As rural development tourism persists so rural poverty remains unseen.

Prof Robert Chambers is a Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, working on rural development in South Asia and Africa. This article appeared in the Issue 96 of New Internationalist of February 1981.

Mozambique’s path to media development has been a long and windy road. The country attained independence from Portugal in 1975, but immediately experienced a bloody and destructive civil war that ended in the 1990s. A new constitution and political dispensation provided a space for pluralist politics. To strengthen good governance and democracy, the government of Mozambique, alongside a host of development partners, implemented media building initiatives in order to consolidate professionalism, objectivity and diversity in media practice and systems. A major sector that has received much support has been the community radio sector, which from the early days of multiparty governance, received support from the Media Project (1998-2006) supported by UNESCO and UNDP.

The major objective of this Media Project was to build Mozambique’s media sector through strengthening the public service broadcasters, establishing community radios and multimedia centres, building the capacity of journalists to report development news as well as to strengthen regional media. After this project, a host of development bodies have partnered with the Mozambican Government to consolidate building initiatives. This brief report provides a short review of the role of one of these development partners, the American-based organisation, IREX. Maria Dolores Martinez reviews the progress to date.

Despite a huge resource base of minerals, fertile soils and other natural resources, Mozambique remains one of the poorest countries in the world, as ranked by the Human Development Index (HDI) 2015. The HDI sheds light on the many development challenges faced by the southern African nation: Education, Health, Gender Equality, Youth Empowerment, and Labor Policies, among others. Overcoming these challenges will be a rigorous endeavor, and although community radio’s contribution might seem tiny, it can be transformative.
When IREX began implementing the USAID-funded, Media Strengthening Program (MSP) in 2012, one of our objectives was to create a space for participatory and deliberative development for the regional provinces, particularly in the northern provinces, which have often been ‘beneficiaries’ of development policies designed in the capital, Mozambique.

Our objective was therefore, to implement a project outside of Mozambique’s capital, Maputo, even though we knew that this decision would bring many challenges.

The first step was to choose the location of our project. The selected provinces were Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Zambezia and Niassa provinces, all located in central and northern Mozambique. Nampula and Zambezia provinces are the most populated provinces in Mozambique, and sadly, also the most impoverished. The project started with six community radios for the pilot phase (three in Nampula and two in Zambezia) and later we included 20 more radios. Currently we have 26 partner stations: nine radios in Cabo Delgado, seven in Nampula, nine in Zambezia and one in Niassa.

The second step was to develop a capacity building plan around three critical issues—management, broadcasting journalism and information technology. It must be emphasised that the country’s previous community radio studies had identified capacity assessment and building as key challenges facing the sector. As such, our main goal has been to: (a) strengthen radios to provide better quality information to their communities; (b) ensure that radios are financially and institutionally sustainable; (c) provide a space for radios to be independent so that they are able to create their own agendas, and be capable of covering relevant stories of interest to Mozambican citizens.

And Eureka! We thus realised that for all these things to happen, the Media Support Project would have to focus on sound training, coaching, monitoring and evaluation of activities. In the last three years, we have witnessed amazing progress in these community radios that we have been working with. This article describes the progress made under the themes of management, broadcasting journalism and information and communication technologies.

Management
The MSP trained staff radio by focusing on two aspects: financial sustainability and stability of personnel. Every radio station needs a minimum level of income to function and needs to recruit, train and retain qualified people to operate. In order to achieve these goals, MSP has facilitated marketing training and provided targeted consultancies. Stations such as Mocuba and Tumbine in Zambezia have followed training tips and have achieved encouraging results. Radio Tumbine in Milange, a border town between Mozambique and Malawi, is benefiting from the capacity building programs.
Integration with ICTs

One major contribution of the MSP relates to equipment, a major challenge for most community radios in Africa and beyond. This is one of the greatest challenges that community radios face. Our radio partners usually have one or two digital recorders to produce their programs. As a result, each journalist wants to be the first to request a recorder in order to conduct field work for their own programs. In Cabo Delgado Province, Mpharama Radio in Balama district has only three recorders. For this reason, in 2015 the station could only broadcast six hours per day as they could not produce enough content. Thanks to MSP, the station now has seven digital recorders, and thus can afford 17 hours of broadcast hours per day, much of which is locally generated and embraces the participatory communication model.

The second example of ICT integration is the use of Facebook and other web 2.0 tools such as Youtube and Whatsapp. It should be pointed out that only 6% of Mozambicans have access to the Internet. However, 69% of the population have mobile phones. There are currently three companies in the mobile business but the arrival of the last one, Movitel, revolutionised the telecommunications market, bringing mobile net in zones where there was previously no access to electricity or the internet. Movitel provides solar panels at low cost. In the middle of this boom, community radios began their adventure with Facebook, using the platform to disseminate news to their community, engage listeners, connect with other national and international media outlets, and also to gain new advertisers.

A community radio journalist Arjum Francisco, from Radio Ile, expresses appreciation on how the MSP training has made him understand the importance of protecting journalistic sources and how to deal with sensitive issues such as human traffic, and rape. Such ethics training is critical for journalists such as Arjum as they discuss sensitive information and also publish it across social media to engage more community members, especially the youth.

Many small and medium traders use this border to do business and share different goods. The station coordinator mobilised this team to gain more paid advertisements for the radio. Incomes from local advertisers enabled the community radio to purchase several motorcycles that could be used by its reporters to collect information in remote areas. In Mocuba, the benefits came through acquisition of a new photocopy machine. As such, community radios on the MSP are now providing a service to the community and are able to pay honorarium to the volunteers and supply mosquito nets for all staff.

Broadcast journalism

These community radios have strengthened their journalism skills and approaches. For Radio Monapo in Nampula, a program called Okhalihero Yamussi provides family counselling. In this program, the host introduces a topic, and then it is debated by several guests playing the role of community elders. They respond to the questions posed by the listeners via telephone or text message, and offer solutions. For this purpose, it is of great importance that the host develops basic journalism skills such as moderating a group talk, conducting an interview or modulating one’s voice.

Through MSP’s broadcasting training, journalists are equipped with participatory techniques and tools to support their daily work. For instance, at the Gurue Community Radio, Pastor Manteiga Bulaisse produces his own radio program which helps listeners deal with family problems such as domestic violence, a big problem in the country.

A community radio journalist Arjum Francisco, from Radio Ile, expresses appreciation on how the MSP training has made him understand the importance of protecting journalistic sources and how to deal with sensitive issues such as human traffic, and rape. Such ethics training is critical for journalists such as Arjum as they discuss sensitive information and also publish it across social media to engage more community members, especially the youth.
Likewise, Radio Watana in Nacala, produced a video about a conflict in a mineral area, posting it on Facebook and Youtube (https://youtu.be/ymRO_3Hf9_4). They reported details that no other media in the country reported because they had easy access to the place. The video has been viewed over 790 times.

**Establishing a training methodology**

As a project, MSP initially piloted a training methodology and based on the results, we realised that we needed to improve and further enhance our approach. Nevertheless, we are constantly reinventing our training methodology, incorporating social issues and themes that have been shown to be meaningful to local communities. One of the things we often do is to assess their needs and then provide more individualised and targeted support to them through on-the-job training in their stations. We insist on the idea of developing local solutions in order to guarantee the radio’s sustainability. I am sure that so many organisations are worried about the numbers. While high numbers of trained participants might seem an ideal measure of success, I think it is more important to measure the impact of our activities or actions at the community level.

An important aspect of the capacity building support that we provide is instilling the value of respect in journalists, so that they are aware of their role as the voice, eyes, and ears of their own communities. We also aim to inspire them, we instil in them to be creative and innovators capable of finding viable and local solutions for problems in their community. In addition, we emphasise the idea of a citizen journalist, an individual that plays an active role in the collection, critical analysis, and reporting of key and relevant information for their community.

**Can community radios contribute to development?**

I believe that community radio plays a great role in Mozambique, particularly for rural areas, where the radio is the principal means of delivering and exchanging information. In fact, the information they broadcast makes a difference in people’s lives. Community radio allows for the exchange of important information between experts and local communities. The next section shows four ways in which community radio acts as a sieve that filters the huge amount of available information and thereby enables communities to access the relevant information for their needs.

1. Community radio facilitates exchange of technical information. For Mozambique, 70 per cent of the population lives in rural areas and programs about agriculture are in huge demand. Cuamba and Monapo Radios (in Niassa and Nampula provinces) broadcast debates about the best way to plant cassava and inform farmers about market prices. Also Sao Francisco de Assis Community Radio in Nangololo, has a program called “How to do it”, where radio coordinator Jonas Valerio offers tips on how to make nutritious foods for children and to prevent diseases. Listening to this program enabled mothers to fight malnutrition and illnesses such as anaemia.

2. Community radio is a human rights advocacy institution. In terms of primary education, Mozambique is facing challenges of child and early marriages. Some 14% of girls are married by the age of 15. In Macomia, in Cabo Delgado province, Miss Ana Paulo is a listener of this kind of program. She was pregnant at 13 years old and she lost everything, her parents rejected her and the child’s father as well. Her grandmother took her in, and she went to volunteer at the local radio, encouraged by the programming that she had heard. Here she acquired basic computer skills and now she is also a radio producer. “With the help of the community radio, my self-esteem increased”, explains Anna.

3. Community radios allow for horizontal production of marginalised voices. Community radios feature women’s programs in order to provide a space for women to talk openly about sensitive issues such as domestic violence,
health, education, marriage, and human rights. Radios use such programs to inform women about obstetric fistula, a condition that affects many women after childbirth. Zambezia community radios joined together to spearhead an advocacy campaign to provide access to medical care and operations to women affected by obstetric fistula at the Gurue District Hospital. According to the statistics over 100 thousand women suffer from obstetric fistula in Mozambique.

Likewise to combat the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Mozambique, groups of people living with HIV and AIDS such as the Hankoni Association produce prevention programs for community radios which fight against stigma and discrimination.

4. Community radio contributes towards effective community mobilisation. Natural disasters are recurrent in Mozambique. In Mocuba, in the center of the country, a river flood damaged the north-south road and an estimated 19,000 households were displaced. Mocuba community radio participated with authorities in the rescue and resettlement of families. Even though there was no longer imminent danger from the floods, the radio continued its mission of sending preventive messages about malaria, cholera and other diseases that affect the community.

Conclusion
This reflective discussion of the Media Strengthening Project demonstrates that careful planning and sensitivity to local training needs and aspirations can allow for the development and implementation of community radio capacity building plan that is sustainable and effective. It should be acknowledged that IREX’s efforts are contributing to previous efforts by other organisations.

As shown in this discussion, community radio involved in this Media Strengthening Program are contributing to making waves in their communities and country in whatever small way they can. Research demonstrates that community radio is the most expansive, readily available and effective tool of development communication in the global south. Therefore development organisations and governments have a lot to gain by empowering and capacitating these stations.

Maria Dolores Martinez is currently a Senior Field Coordinator for the IREX Media Strengthening Project in Mozambique. Email: mmartinez@irex.org
One of the challenges facing the field of communication for development and social change today is representation, especially the representation of other people, places and cultures. Whilst India, and much of the world faces a serious problem of structural violence against women and of course children, it is the framing and representation of such issues by international media that is fraught with concerns over voice and authority. On 16th December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a 23-year old medical student was gang raped and murdered in Dehli. In 2015, Channel 4 of the BBC would produce the documentary, ‘India’s Daughter’ to explore this crime. This documentary would be banned by the Indian government for what it argued were legal concerns with the way rape was framed and represented in the film. In and outside India, there were debates on the way the rape issue was framed but also whether the Indian government should have banned the airing of the film in the country. In this 2015 exposition, Shakuntala Banaji separates debates thrown up by the film, from those around gender violence in India to the discussion of violence against women in a wider context, and from the issue of orientalist perspectives in the western media to the question of whether the film should be shown while judicial procedures are still pending.

There are five issues that need to be disaggregated in relation to the furious debate now raging over India’s ban on Leslee Udwin’s BBC documentary ‘India’s Daughter’, although they can and should be brought together and re-articulated at various points. Perhaps in an attempt to prevent demonstrations about rape from starting across the country, the avowed reason for banning this film is that it gives voice to one of the unrepentant rapists. Dozens of articles and thousands of comments flying around international print and electronic media suggest that the issue of free speech and censorship has almost overshadowed the issues of gender-based violence and protest against it.
In many online comments, rape as a practice, Indian male attitudes, and Western disrespect of India are decontextualised. In this brief post, I cannot hope to do justice to all of the issues raised, or their cultural and academic histories. I merely hope to foreground how important perspectives that examine gender and violence at the intersection of class, geography, race and sexuality are, and to point towards ways forward. This is important for any of us who wish to work towards a world in which misogyny and rape, lynching and capital punishment, and racist stereotyping are rare and unusual phenomena.

The everyday and familiar comments that interweave their narrative of love and loss—the throwaway comments from relatives about why they celebrated Jyoti’s birth with sweets ‘as if she were a boy’; the disapproval of their male relatives when they sold their small plot of ancestral land to fund their daughter’s university degree, are all eminently familiar to me, as a researcher in issues of gender, sexuality and media in India, as they will be to so many others who have grown up across the country, or worked there.

And I have no doubt that some audiences, watching closely, or through tears, will note the connections between this everyday misogyny and the horror which ended Jyoti’s life. Audiences are not all the same. Some will watch with puerile hurt nationalist pride, stupefied disapproval of India (see Daily Mail comments) or blood-thirsty anti male rage; many will not.

The equally pressing issue of vicious sexual, ethnic and gender violence and torture, including rapes of all kinds against children, women and men; and the ideologies and rhetorics (Hindutva/Caste/Wahabism/Salafism/Indian Patriotism/‘Indian tradition’, etc.) used to justify or disavow responsibility for them in India.

India’s Daughter raises issues about widespread and insidious processes and practices of gender discrimination, from sex-selective abortions, to sexual harassment, which are part of custom and practice and form the backdrop to more violent sexual crimes against women. The film is worth watching just for the first five minutes in which Jyoti’s parents, a humble working couple, appear on screen, speak their memories even when words fail them, in Hindi, laying out minute by painful minute the life’s work that she embodied for them as people and as parents.

It is eminently clear that they loved her as an equal; that they negotiated with her ambitions humanely, generously; that the manner of her death has not changed their beliefs about their decision to treat her as an equal or about their feelings of love and respect for her. Here are two eminently sensible, calm, persuasive Indians, a woman and a man, who live in a conservative institutional social setting, telling parts of a very traumatic story.

The very pressing issue of vicious sexual, ethnic and gender violence and torture, including rapes of all kinds against children, women and men; and the ideologies and rhetorics (Hindutva/Caste/Wahabism/Salafism/Indian Patriotism/‘Indian tradition’, etc.) used to justify or disavow responsibility for them in India.

The equally pressing issue of vicious sexual, gender, ethnic, racial, religious discrimination, violence and torture, including rape of all kinds, in different geographical and cultural contexts from Nigeria and Syria to Australia and the UK.

During my research on gender, sexual harassment and homophobia at the intersection of media and everyday life, I’ve heard arguments about which types of girls get raped or molested from men and boys, young and old across the global south (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) and across the UK, as well as from numerous women; and sometimes from girls ‘slut shaming’ each other or making homophobic comments which suggest that all non-heterosexuals endanger themselves. India has no premium on retrograde views about rape, gender and sexuality; in this case, India happens to be the geographical locus of the story. Rape happens to be its central conceit as the statistics at the very end of the film emphasise. And no media text can be expected to tackle every contextual issue. Nevertheless, the film would have been far more resonant and powerful, had the Indian context been linked creatively, even briefly, to wider histories of rape around the globe and in the subcontinent—in
private, in marriage, in the streets, in police stations, in factories, in public, as a weapon of the colonisers, as a weapon of caste elites, as a weapon against religious minorities, amongst all-male cadres of Hindu chauvinist organisations, by members of the army, and during pogroms.

The postcolonial/colonial history of orientalism which is as evident in academia as in journalism. An impulse which can lead to a disavowal of problems such as misogyny and homophobia amongst White communities, and to representations of ‘the other’ as essentially different and uncivilised, and with female ‘others’ as powerless victims rather than victims, participants, perpetrators and resistors.

This documentary, like all documentaries, is in some ways a work of fiction and its editing and sensational music speaks to this. It does try to include the repulsive views of ‘educated’ men such as the defence lawyers. But still, problematically, its narrative ends up othering certain types of Indian men, while distancing Indian political elites, the middle and upper classes, and everyone else from worldviews in which: women who go out at night are courting rape; women who do not cover themselves are ‘bad’; women who have male friends are ‘fair game’; women who roll bidis, wash floors or work in mines are ‘worth’ less airtime, life for life.

The overlaying to one of Jyoti’s rapists’ misogynist commentary from his goal cell with brief shots of film posters of women’s bodies on walls, and working-class men’s leering faces, apparently examining these posters, establishes a narrative of subaltern Indian male sexual perversion which has both classist and orientalist overtones. And yes, the film is also responsible, unlike the warm and grieving parents captured at the beginning and end, of suggesting—not arguing outright, but simply connoting, hinting, implying—that Jyoti, the victim, was a hardworking, English-speaking graduate assaulted by unreformed working class Indian men.

But films, news broadcasts and documentaries made by Indians purportedly about ‘terrorism’ have led the way in this regard; the BBC has no monopoly on orientalism or on illogical ideological segues. We need higher regard for journalistic ethics across the board in such troubling and heinous circumstances, and deeper reflection on the ways in which even subtle inflections of sound and aesthetics can alter sociological perceptions.

The frames, constraints and exigencies of media production in a quasi-neoliberal ratings-oriented media economy; namely, editorial decisions related to particular audiences and the decontextualisation of complex histories/content for the sake of brevity/narrative; the spectacularisation of bodies, crowds and events; weakened journalistic ethics and reflexivity.

Documentaries are not made in vacuums. In the absence of unlimited, or even limited creative budgets, they require a cutting edge ‘pitch’, financial backing, logistical support and ratings to justify the time and efforts of their directors. Without doubt India’s Daughter is at points guilty of international journalistic malaise—sensational jump cut and segues, soft-focus on crowds, rhetorically loaded music which could just as well be from Bollywood as from the BBC.

For instance, the commentary of the bus driver rapist is stretched across images of the slum houses in which the rapists lived suggests overtly that steroids, alcohol, a penchant for aggressive encounters, and male camaraderie were forged over years, and played out tragically for Jyoti; and perhaps, suggests to some that slums, with their cramped spaces, peeling walls, dirty gutters and lack of privacy are the places where psychosis is bred.

But films, news broadcasts and documentaries made by Indians purportedly about ‘terrorism’ have led the way in this regard; the BBC has no monopoly on orientalism or on illogical ideological segues. We need higher regard for journalistic ethics across the board in such troubling and heinous circumstances, and deeper reflection on the ways in which even subtle inflections of sound and aesthetics can alter sociological perceptions.

Violence, capital punishment and criminal justice; the proportionality of response to rape, protections for both perpetrators and those who have suffered violence, avoidance of lynching and other mob-related behaviours.
Should the film have been banned? No. I do not think so.

If anything, that single act will ensure that it is watched widely, and not necessarily by those who will learn from or gain from watching it. Was it necessary to screen the film right now? Right in the middle of the judicial appeal process of the rapists in the documentary? After all, lives have been lost, but other lives are also at stake; chillingly underlined in wider media by Jyoti’s mother’s call for swifter capital punishment.

There are merits in the points made by the writer who argues that the significance of judicial ethics and legal context do not appear to weigh as heavily in the mind of the BBC and Udwin in relation to India as these issues might in relation to Western cases. For instance imagine an equally painful and sensational film linking British colonial racist violence to contemporary race discrimination and hate crime in the UK. Imagine this released on the eve of the appeal or trial of the murderers of young London student, Stephen Lawrence. Newspapers were criticised for revealing the names of the suspects at the time. Questions of law, ethics, prejudice and justice raised.

But should the story of Jyoti and of her killers be told? Yes, I believe it should, loud and clear, again and again, by Leslee Udwin, herself a rape survivor, by Indian journalists, by others with similar stories, male or female, from the global north or the global south; some of these retelling will hopefully be more nuanced; some will contest Udwin’s; some will raise issues about the humanity and ethics of capital punishment; some will not.

As some feminist campaigners in India have argued, and showbiz commentator Shoba De has emphasised, it would not be a bad thing if films like this were shown and discussed on college curricula. It’s an imperfect film about a desperately sad and violent event in a longstanding national context of hostility and violence towards women, children, gay people, poor people, of every religion, and it should be seen as part of a conversation rather than the beginning or end of one.
For many scholars, students and practitioners in communication for development, Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy is considered a must read, as it provides the firm foundation for thinking about theory, practice and policy towards empowerment. Wumen Bagung Bulletin observes that Freire’s ideas should be understood within the larger context of liberation theology and philosophy that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s.

Father Gustavo Gutierrez Merino is widely considered the pioneer of liberation theology, which itself has theoretical and spiritual roots in the meetings and declarations of the Second Vatican Council and the follow up meetings of the Catholic Bishops of Latin America, which would culminate in the Medellín Declaration, promulgated on the 6th September, 1968.

The first observation in that declaration was that “The Latin American bishops cannot remain indifferent in the face of the tremendous social injustices existent in Latin America, which keep the majority of our peoples in dismal poverty, which in many cases becomes inhuman wretchedness.” It is this background that would formulate the backbone of Gustavo Gutierrez Merino’s book, ‘A Theology of Liberation’. We republish excerpts of Gutierrez’s interview conducted by Reverend Daniel Hartnett.

On the principle of ‘preferential option for the poor’

Yes, I do believe that the option for the poor has become part of the Catholic social teaching. The phrase comes from the experience of the Latin American church. The precise term was born sometime between the Latin American bishops’ conferences in Medellín (1968) and in Puebla (1979).

In Medellín, the three words (option, preference, poor) are all present, but it was only in the years immediately following Medellín that we brought
these words into a complete phrase. It would be accurate to say that the term “preferential option for the poor” comes from the Latin American church, but the content, the underlying intuition, is entirely biblical. Liberation theology tries to deepen our understanding of this core biblical conviction.

The preferential option for the poor has gradually become a central tenet of the church’s teaching. Perhaps we can briefly explain the meaning of each term:

The term poverty refers to the real poor. This is not a preferential option for the spiritually poor. After all, such an option would be very easy, if for no other reason that there are so few of them! The spiritually poor are the saints! The poverty to which the option refers is material poverty.

Material poverty means premature and unjust death. The poor person is someone who is treated as a non-person, someone who is considered insignificant from an economic, political and cultural point of view. The poor count as statistics; they are the nameless.

But even though the poor remain insignificant within society, they are never insignificant before God.

Some people feel, wrongly I believe, that the word preferential waters down or softens the option for the poor, but this is not true. God’s love has two dimensions, the universal and the particular; and while there is a tension between the two, there is no contradiction.

God’s love excludes no one. Nevertheless, God demonstrates a special predilection toward those who have been excluded from the banquet of life. The word preference recalls the other dimension of the gratuitous love of God—the universality.

In some ways, option is perhaps the weakest word in the sentence. In English, the word merely connotes a choice between two things.

In Spanish, however, it evokes the sense of commitment. The option for the poor is not optional, but is incumbent upon every Christian. It is not something that a Christian can either take or leave. As understood by Medellin, the option for the poor is twofold: it involves standing in solidarity with the poor, but it also entails a stance against inhumane poverty.

The preferential option for the poor is ultimately a question of friendship. Without friendship, an option for the poor can easily become commitment to an abstraction (to a social class, a race, a culture, an idea). Aristotle emphasised the important place of friendship for the moral life, but we also find this clearly stated in John’s Gospel.

Christ says, “I do not call you servants, but friends.” As Christians, we are called to reproduce this quality of friendship in our relationships with others. When we become friends with the poor, their presence leaves an indelible imprint on our lives, and we are much more likely to remain committed.

On joy and hope
Christian joy is not tied to a particular object, but to the experience of God’s unconditional love for us. Christian joy comes from knowing God and from trying to follow God’s will. Joy means rejoicing in God. But we can see from the Magnificat that, when Mary rejoices in God, she is also celebrating the liberating action of God in history.

Mary rejoices in a God who is faithful to the poor. Our service of others must be wrapped in this joy. Only work embraced with joy truly transforms. And we must also engage in our work hopefully. Hope is not the same thing as optimism.

Optimism merely reflects the desire that external circumstances may one day improve. There is nothing wrong with optimism, but we may not always have reasons for it. The theological virtue of hope is much more than optimism. Hope is based on the conviction that God is at work in our lives and in the world.
Hope is ultimately a gift from God given to sustain us during difficult times. Charles Péguy described hope as the “little sister” that walks between the “taller sisters” of faith and charity; when the taller sisters grow tired, the little one instills new life and energy into the other two. Hope never allows our faith to grow weak or our love to falter.

I learned a lot about hope and joy when I was young. From the age of 12 to 18 I had osteomyelitis and was confined to bed. There certainly were reasons for discouragement, but also very present was the gift of hope that came to me through prayer, reading, family and friends.

Later my parishioners in Lima would also teach me volumes about hope in the midst of suffering, and this is when I decided to write a book about Joy. Hope is precisely for the difficult moments.
A major approach towards addressing gender-based violence encompasses involving communities to contribute to, and own, the design and implementation of prevention strategies, as well as to adopt service-seeking behaviours. In Malawi, the Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM) is renowned for implementing community mobilisation interventions in development issues, from HIV and AIDS, Education, Gender and Women Empowerment, Child Protection and Youth Development, to Climate Change Resilience. This organisation is a product of a USAID-funded, Malawi Government project ‘Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education’ (GABLE).

CRECCOM is a change organisation with a vision to be a vibrant, leading, and trusted organisation that effects social development change. CRECCOM applies creative and innovative strategies to create self-reliant citizens and organisations at national and international levels. The organisation seeks to mobilise and empower communities and other stakeholders towards full ownership of development initiatives, through their effective involvement and participation.

Central to its approach is community mobilisation, through which communities are empowered to levels that enable them to undertake most of the activities under the project on their own while utilising locally available resources. The organisation has conceived a Social Mobilisation Campaign (SMC) model that guides the mobilisation of communities for change, participation and ownership. Its strategies towards participation bring on board relevant government departments depending on the social issues being addressed, but also field staff and grassroots groups, such as chiefs, initiation counselors, as well as school institutions (school management committees, mothers groups etc.); not forgetting community action groups.

Keeping girls in school requires the concerted efforts of governments, civil society and communities.
Theoretically, CRECCOM’s theory of change posits that the wellbeing of individuals and the community can most effectively and efficiently be improved if all environments in which they live are aligned toward the same goal. This theory of change is applied as the framework for projects such as the ‘education of girls’. In this project, CRECCOM encourages the provision of support to each girl, to enable them to complete primary education, and then transit to secondary school and beyond.

Unfortunately family, peer, community, school, and policy environments are often unaligned and may even actively work against girls’ educational wellbeing. CRECCOM suggests that if a set of activities (each with a significant evidence base), is instituted across these environments, they will become more aligned; and girls’ wellbeing in and out of school will rapidly and significantly improve.

Available evidence suggests that the key challenges to girls’ education and wellbeing comprise: lack of knowledge of and control over sexual and reproductive health decision making, high rates of gender-based violence, low expectations and inadequate support for girls’ academic performance, high family demands for girls’ time and labour, strong patriarchal socio-cultural norms and practices, long distance to school, inadequate support for direct and indirect costs of schooling. At the root of these challenges are socio-inequalities—especially for girls and young women. To address this development predicament, CRECCOM launched the Equitable Quality Education Program that involves mobilising communities to design, own and manage the necessary interventions.

**Working in the community**

With funding from OXFAM and the Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief, a social mobilisation campaign for gender equality was established in Thyolo District, southern part of Malawi. Communities were sensitised and mobilised to address all forms of gender-based violence. Such initiatives involved tackling domestic violence, eliminating harmful socio-cultural factors, providing sexual and reproductive health education; and opening up economic opportunities for women. The organisation’s community engagement has reached out to 19,500 households with a population of 77,000, and has institutionalised practices aimed at sustainably promoting girls and women’s rights in the following ways.

**Project Outputs**

1. **Village forums (also known as STAR Circles) established in all villages.** A forum, comprising of villagers, engages in dialogue to eliminate harmful cultural practices, address gender-based violence and engage in Village Savings and Loans (VSL). At Traditional Authority level, a forum was also established for advocacy, monitoring, sharing, and reporting of issues coming from the village forums. It also conducts mentoring sessions with girls in all schools in the area and reaches out to secure scholarships for girls. For example the local member of parliament financially supports 40 secondary school girls. Over 120 village forums (representing 80% of villages in the area) operate in the local authority.

2) **By-laws formed and enforced** to promote retention, re-admission of teen mothers to formal education, and to discourage early marriages before 18 years. Traditional leaders emphasise their dedication to implementing bylaws that prevent early marriages and encourage young mothers to return to school.

A village forum session discussing girls’ education. Photo credit: CRECCOM
3) Enhanced linkages with service providers
in the area such as the Police Victim Support
Unit, health workers, agriculture officers, religious
leaders. The aim is to provide technical support
to local economic endeavours, to support girls’
education, and to put an end to child marriages
and gender based violence.

4) Village savings and loans groups established
in all villages. In order to strengthen women’s
economic rights, over 2837 mothers were
engaged in village savings and loans at the
household level. The aim is to economically
empower them to support their children’s
education. This includes girls’ secondary school
costs, and other direct and indirect costs.

Project Outcomes

The results of such heightened community
momentum towards addressing issues affecting
girls and women have been life changing and
transformative. Here are some of them:

1. There is high enrolment of children in both
primary and secondary schools: Over 7897
learners re-enrolled. 46% of those re-enrolled are
at Secondary Schools, of which 65% are girls.

2364 of these are orphans and vulnerable children
who are living in dire poverty.

2. Early marriages and early pregnancies have
reduced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Secondary School</th>
<th>Number of Pregnant Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagwengwere</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntambanyama</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nyodola</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A 47-year-old woman, Bather Gilbert, is one of the women in Khwethemule area, Thyolo district whose
lives are elevated from misery. Her miserable life of being beaten by her husband ended when the husband
was selected to facilitate STAR Circle in their village. Now her family is peaceful. No more beating. She is a
member of VSL in her village and because of that, she is a proud owner of assets including 5 goats.

Bather borrowed MK15,000 from the VSL and she invested it in maize farming and produced 20 bags of
maize as a result. After selling the bags, she bought two goats which, after reproducing, have increased to
five. She also started a business of poultry farming and as it stands she has five hybrid and twenty one local
chickens. “I have a more loving and caring husband than before”, explained Bather Gilbert in the interview.
Notably, there has consequently been an increase in re-admissions to education from 10% to 90%. Over 27 child marriages were ended in 2015.

3. More women are engaged in income generation activities: This has increased household incomes, thereby enabling guardians to provide financial support for children’s education. Approximately 2837 women are engaged in village savings and loan and income generating activities. Outcomes from these savings include constructing an iron-roofed house, owning physical and material assets; and experienced improvements in food and clothing. About 872 women are paying fees for their children’s secondary education.

4. Levels of gender based violence (GBV) have reduced: More people are becoming aware of its effects and consequences, people are using friendly reporting structures, available within the villages, and that cases are being addressed “20 GBV cases were reported at the TA per week before the project, now only one case in 4 months. Village heads are now sleeping because domestic violence has reduced greatly. 80% of households in our area are GBV free”, said Mary Chikuti, girls’ education advocate and a STAR Circle facilitator.

Many girls are re-enrolling in school. For example, Martha had no fees to pay when she enrolled in Form 1 at Chisudame secondary school and almost dropped out. “The STAR circle members came to my school one day to provide counseling and mentoring sessions. I was rescued because when they heard my story, they felt obliged to support me. I am very excited that I am attending secondary school. I am the only girl in my family who is at secondary school.”

Promise was enrolled at Chisudame private secondary school. In Form 4 she became pregnant and dropped out of school. She stayed at home for 2 years after that “Then Mary Chikuti, a member of the STAR circle came to my house and asked me to go back to school. She also talked to my parents and asked them to take care of my child while I go back to school”, explains Promise. She re-enrolled at Nagwengwere Community Day Secondary School in Form 3. Now, the star circle pays her school fees.

Sustainable Social Change

To completely achieve their aspirations, there is need for a community robust income generating activity to support school fees especially for orphans. If programs such as the Education for Girls are to be sustainable, there is also need to reduce long distance to schools, for example, by constructing boarding hostels. There is a need for additional classrooms in primary schools, and to further strengthen extension services for technical support and the need for data systematic management at village level to track progress. There is no doubt that there is further work to be done, but The Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation has lit the fires of social change in Malawi communities.

Levison Lijoni is a Field Programmes Officer for CRECCOM’s girls’ education initiatives in Malawi.
Contacts: levisonll@gmail.com
There is a certain kind of thinking prevailing among some western scholars and practitioners that sacrifices rich narratives for theory. Theory becomes a prison, limiting knowledge production by referencing a largely western scholarship. However, theory is not inaccessible: theory is coherent, theory is liberating, theory is narrative, it is everyday. In fact theory comprises the stories, the ways of singing, dancing, story-telling that enable each group to explain their world.

This auto-ethnographic orality argues that in development thinking and practice, the ‘experts’ are at times morally and ideologically distant from local people, knowledge, and places, and hence they are illegitimate representatives who should never have been consulted in the first place. In this 2010 ‘Development in Practice’ piece, Linje Manyozo argues that there are two kinds of this expert: the external and the internal.

The external expert is always an outsider but relies on the internal expert, mostly an educated local professing an objective understanding of people, places, and development issues. The following discussion demonstrates that the internal expert is an obstruction to people-centred development processes.

One advantage of being raised in a dysfunctional family is that one grows up rough and tough. No matter what comes your way, life does not scare you. Families in our clan used to brew illegal traditional gin, and there were always drunken people in the compound. I grew up surrounded by noise and by lots of children.

It was as if the parents were not around. Not that this bothered me, since my father, too, used to disappear once in a while, leaving my unemployed mother with two children, myself and a sister. Absent fathers have been an infectious disease in our clan. I resented my mother’s selling traditional gin, because there were so many men in our yard,
and worse, because of the noise. Nevertheless, I admired my mother for her ability to manage the shebeen business and still raise her kids in a Christian way. She has always been a wise woman, but determined.

When the rains washed away the only wooden bridge between our village and the primary school, almost every kid in the village dropped out from school. My mother would, despite my protests, wrap up my uniform in a plastic satchel, escort me through the muddy waters, and dress me in my uniform. For her, this was the only way I could ‘complete the white man’s education’.

Apart from the dramas in the shebeen, the thing I loved most was spending time with fellow goat herders. After school, every boy would take his family goats to the village forests, where there was green grass. We would learn to play games, hunt mice, rabbits, and grasshoppers, and of course, do what boys always do when they just want to be boys—fight.

We watched traditional dances in the moonlight together, as the ladies in the village performed those nice dances that involve shaking the waists and the beads, consequently shaking the manhood out of every living boy and man who happened to be watching.

Football also preoccupied our minds. We played football when we went to school. We played football during break. We played on the road when we came back from school. We played football all the time. The village had about three teams. The big boys played in the A team, and they used the leather ball. The B team, like us the C team, used the plastic paper balls, which we rolled into a spherical shape and tightened with strings. My teammates were those that I used to herd goats with.

They were the same buddies I used to swim with at the village river. They were the same friends who taught me to eat stolen chicken. We were together when we received the Eucharist sacrament. Our being together all the time made up for the absent fathers, I guess.

Football was everything, because it had the ability to bring the whole village together, even though our senior team usually lost. All I remember is that when they won, there were evening ‘reward sessions’, when they would allocate the nice girls to each other, and pair by pair they would disappear into the night. It was as if even the girls themselves always looked forward to our village’s victory, because of such ‘rewards’. As C team players, we grew up expecting to be rewarded one day, if we were to bring glory to our village.

Time seemed to move slowly. Wedding after wedding, traditional dances after traditional dances, football games after football games, funerals after funerals, we were growing up, but perhaps we were too preoccupied to notice. Most of the A and B team players must have grown older, married or moved from the village for reasons one never knows.

I just know that one day we were on the pitch representing the village, using the leather ball now. We were beaten 10–0 and were even jeered by our own village. We went on a long losing streak.

Until one day, two refugee boys came to live in the village, after their families had fled from the war in Mozambique. These boys joined us in herding the goats, swimming, and playing football. One of them was a very good striker, and the older one joined me in defence. They encouraged us to be much rougher with our opponents, to instill fear in them. While waiting for a corner, for instance, we could slap our opponents, irritate them, and if they retaliated we would fight them, because we were good at that.

Over time, we started experiencing draws, and then victories followed. There was once again interest in football in the village. The key was to play rough—after all, games in those days had no referees. A corner could be contested verbally or through a fist fight between the striker who was
claiming it and the defender who was arguing for a goal kick. Teams would come together, find a solution, and the game would continue.

Our strategies had always resulted from collective negotiations during the game or at half-time, when village elders would come and swear at us for missing this or that ball. Sometimes five of them would be talking at the same time, and even though we could not remember what they actually said, we always got the point: that the second half had to be better than the first.

‘Cat’ talked about a 4–3–3 ‘system’, because we needed the third striker to drop and strengthen the midfield. He expressed reservations about our team being full of attacking players, and he didn’t think I was tall enough to be a defender. A taller and stronger boy in midfield was brought back into defence, and because of my short height I was asked to play on the right wing and supply the crosses.

To be sure, we had a strength-testing match against another village team that had caused us problems. With ‘Cat’ in goal, we had plenty of confidence and we smashed them 4–0. The new system that he introduced seemed to be working miracles. He organised our attacks and our defence, and with him in goal we were ready to win the eagerly awaited game.

Days passed by quickly, and soon it was this big Saturday. The whole village stopped, except for the shebeens. It was not only money that was at stake here. Bragging rights were also at stake. Someone may also have said that there could likely be ‘rewards’ afterwards! The first half was a dull affair, and it ended without goals.

The visitors were also too defensive. The second half started the same way, until half-way through it ‘Cat’ decided to take out one of the Mozambican boys playing in defence and bring in another boy, a very good striker, but who had not played with us on a regular basis. Although most of us were unhappy with the substitution, we did not protest openly; after all, ‘Cat’ was the oldest, and the only one who understood ‘the system’.

Two rivers away from our village, there was another football team, which was well known and had beaten our village a couple of times in the past. Whoever introduced the idea is not important, but we discussed it at length, especially knowing that it would involve money.

We collected money from every willing adult in the village, as did the other team in their village. Added together, the money would be awarded to the winners.

The build-up was rife with rumours of members of both teams sleeping at the graveyard to boost their athleticism. We might have slept at the graveyard, I am not sure, but even if we did, it would not have been the first time. As a boost to our morale, a distant relative of mine, who had been living in the city, came for a short visit.

He had been a good goalkeeper when he left the village. We used to call him ‘The Cat’, because of the way he jumped to save shots that were almost going into the net. He had come back in time, but we suspected that the village storeowner had brought him back for the match.

All over the place, there was talk of this match. The women and men in the fields, the girls at the river, all talked about the game. We were pumped up because we had not lost on home ground in a long period of time. When he joined us, ‘The Cat’ started to act like our coach. It was the first time we noticed that we didn’t have a coach; it was something our group had never discussed.
A few minutes after the substitution, we scored. The women started singing praises to ‘Cat’. That goal, however, seemed to have made the visitors grow extra legs, and they equalised. ‘Cat’ started shouting at everyone. For the first time, we started blaming each other in the middle of a game.

To strengthen our defence, we tried to revert to our traditional pre-system system — pack the backline with bodies, and then deliberately hurt their effective players, which would eventually slow them down. ‘Cat’ insisted that we remain faithful to the ‘system’, and that meant going back into ‘our positions’. They scored. ‘Cat’ made a couple of changes. They scored two more. We lost everything.

The village blamed the whole team except ‘Cat’. If it wasn’t for him, the score could have been worse, it was being said. He openly criticised us after the match. We never talked about that match again, even when we went back to swim or herd goats together. Deep down in our hearts, we knew that we lost the game on the day when ‘Cat’ walked into our midst as the football expert.

We could not comprehend ‘the system’ properly, but the village blamed us for not understanding it. More painfully, ‘Cat’ seemed to have walked off the defeat as a victor. We saw him before he left for the city, drinking and laughing with village elders. I was about to leave for high school, still a virgin.

We believed that it was Cat’s expertise and the system that were the actual source of the defeat, as we couldn’t play to our strengths. If we had lost when playing our traditional system, we might not have won, but it wouldn’t have hurt so much, and maybe it would have propelled us to prepare effectively for another game.

Concluding thoughts
Like that lost game of football, the developing world is littered with what the respected communication for development scholar and practitioner, Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, describes as ‘cemeteries of development’. The modernisation paradigm continues its reincarnation within numerous participation-resistant models, which depoliticise questions of power, decision making, engagement, and local knowledge.

At the centre of this problematic perpetuation of civilizational modernisation and the resultant thingification of marginalised groups, is a network of what Escobar terms the transnational bourgeoisie experts; who are either external or internal, but without a comprehensive understanding of the local setting and aspirations of well living.

They then come in with their fancy ideas about economically deterministic models, strategies and initiatives that don’t build on local knowledge and strengths.

When development industries urge the developing world to build their initiatives upon advise from experts who don’t understand local contexts, when these experts enter the communities and begin to propose strange systems and strategies, you should get a pen and paper and immediately start writing an obituary for that development intervention.

Linje Manyozo Mlauzi is a Senior Lecturer in Communication for Development at RMIT University. He is also a development practitioner whose portfolio comprises international and grassroots development organisations.

He is the author of Media, Communication and Development (Sage) and People’s Radio (Southbound). An original version of this article was published in Development in Practice in 2010.
EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

‘A classroom’ somewhere in the south: Governments, organisations and communities need to come together to provide quality education services. Photo credit: Linje Manyozo

Wumen Bagung is a bi-annual Communication for Development and Social Change Bulletin published by RMIT University’s School of Media and Communication. It is published in collaboration with the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council Incorporated.

The Bulletin is a celebration of First Nation peoples the world over; their cultures, their stories, their ways of life and their hopes for the future. Articles in the Bulletin will highlight the struggles of First Nations as they face modernity, globalisation, structural violence and marginalisation.

For students of society the world over, indigenous values of respect and listening are central to how we collaborate, conceive and implement development with and alongside local people. This is the spiritual essence of communication for development and social change for both the global north and south.

Article Submission Guidelines

The Wumen Bagung Bulletin welcomes articles from scholars, practitioners and community representatives. Articles should reflect one’s experience with an intervention or an event, while providing the context in which this has occurred. We would like to publish conceptual reflections on the challenges of thinking about and doing development in the north and the south.

Length: Between 1500-2000 words.

Instructions: Please avoid references, and if critical, please attribute original ideas to original authors by making references within the text.

Photos: If possible please share one or two photographs (with relevant credits) to accompany submissions.

Photo essay: You can also submit a photo essay of no more than 5 photographs.

Submission email: wumen.bagung@rmit.edu.au or Linje.Manyozo@rmit.edu.au