

They Call it Sustainability:

Financing, localization and other
alternative futures for
communication for
development

May 15, 2024

Conference Proceedings



**Welcome to the ‘They Call it Sustainability’ conference.
This gathering of scholars and professionals aims to
engage in what Freire called ‘political dreaming’ –
critically examining our world and fostering a hopeful
reimagination of alternative futures.**

Conference Schedule

- 9:00 Formal opening: Prof Mufunanji Magalasi, Executive Dean of the School of Arts, Communication and Design
- 9:30 Opening talk: Dr Jessica Noske-Turner (20 mins+ 10 mins Q&A)
- 10:00 Panel 1: Donors, projects, and sustainability: the status quo and its alternatives (4x panellists, 15 mins each, followed by Q&A)
- 11:30 break
- 11:45 Panel 2: Making and Unmaking with Metaphors (2x Panellists, 15 mins each, exhibition launch).
- 12:30 Lunch, explore and participate in the exhibition. Create your own metaphor!
- 13:30 *They Call it Africa* scene performance, followed by a plenary discussion
- 14:15 Panel 3: Reimagining sustainable communication and development: Existing utopias and alternative futures (3x panellists, 15 mins each, followed by Q&A)
- 15:30 Break
- 15:45 Breakout Discussion: something that stood out as important; what was not said; what seeds can grow from today.
- 16:30 Plenary
- 16:50 Closing Remarks
- 17:00 Closing performance by YONECO Cultural Troupe
Finish by 17:15/ 17:30

About the They Call it Sustainability conference

This conference is part of the Un/Making CSC research project (AHRC grant number AH/W009242/1), which partners with the University of Malawi, YONECO and CRECCOM, as well as IT4Change in India. It is generously hosted by the University of Malawi. As a key activity of the research project, this conference will be recorded, and videos and photos from the event may be made available online and in publications. Some journalists are also amongst the conference attendees. If you do not wish to be included in video recording or photos please let the organisers or the camera team know.

Opening talk: Communication, Development and Social Change in a Capitalist World

Dr Jessica Noske-Turner, Loughborough University London

Questions of viability and sustainability have become urgent and existential for local NGOs engaged in development. Despite claims that we are in an 'Age of Choice', the current era of development funding is more accurately characterized as one of funding scarcity, rather than of abundance, and an age of competition and conformity to market demands, rather than of autonomy and choice (Taggart & Power, 2022). Communication practice is at the frontlines of these pressures. The same skills, tools and media that are potent for development, community mobilisation and social change are in demand for marketing and branding of development, making it a practice that is perpetually at risk of a deft switch from communication for 'doing good', to communication for 'looking good' (Enghel & Noske-Turner. 2018).

Dr Jessica Noske-Turner, an academic at Loughborough University London, has been undertaking a research fellowship exploring these themes, aiming to learn from and with local NGOs about how they are adapting to and resisting pressures to compete, conform, marketise, innovate and projectify their work. It connects these issues with longer standing contestations over buzzwords such as participation and sustainability. The research is particularly attuned to uncovering acts of resistance, and aims to contribute to conversations about the 'reimagining' of development. In this opening talk she shares some of her emerging conclusions from the past year of research.

Panel 1: Donors, projects, and sustainability: the status quo and its alternatives

Panel Chair: Madalo Samati, Director of Programmes Malawi, Imagine Worldwide

Rhetoric of localisation and sustainability: Experiences from Engaging in localisation movement in Malawi

MacBain Mkandawire, Executive Director, YONECO

NGO sustainability has been a buzz word over the years. Fowler (1997) observes that local NGO sustainability is a thorny issue because it threatens the existence of international development survival as their existence which is premised on the inherent lack of capacity of the local actors. The Grand Bargain and Charter for change in an effort to bring sanity to humanitarian work proposed some principles of localisation

which include effective partnerships and supporting local actors. However, these processes have been marred with local and international politics including the registration of international organizations as local organizations in effort to localize with a home office in the west. Challenging questions have been asked as to whether legal approach to localisation would be the most effective way. This paper shares some experiences of the localisation and sustainability initiatives in Malawi and how local organizations sustainability initiatives are challenged. The paper further reflects on the role of international development actors perpetuating the disparities while rhetorically in the opposite portraying a supportive role. It challenges local actors to have a unified approach to responding to issues of localisation, sustainability and enhancing capacities of local actors to remain relevant. The paper makes recommendations on building an effective locally-led movement that would advance the cause of localisation and sustainability in Malawi.

He who pays the piper calls the tune: Reflections on international donor dependency and localisation for HIV prevention communication in South Africa

Dr Mkhonzeni Gumede, Centre for Culture Media and Society, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

This title reflects the common practice in development projects where the authority and power lie with multinational funding bodies in not only setting the agenda but also in determining project objectives and accountability procedures. While these funding bodies are keenly aware of the broader issues that their projects aim to address, seldom are on the ground nuanced local realities understood or even considered. This disjuncture calls into question the sustainability of such interventions. At the heart of these funding arrangements is the political economy of international development. The political economy context of development shapes development narratives and determines resource allocation and associated ideological approaches (Dutta, 2020; Wilkins, 2014).

This presentation will discuss some of the effects and experiences of funding modalities in communication for social change projects. Participatory communication questions power inequalities in development projects and disassociates from top-down approaches (Chin, 2020). It emphasises the local community, dialogue, and the democratisation of the dialogic spaces of engagement in development projects (Malikhao, 2020; Servaes and Servaes, 2021). Researchers and project practitioners, even those who value voice and dialogue, enter a community, gather data and implement interventions, often at a substantial financial cost for funders and time cost for the community. But seldom do material realities ever substantially or sustainably change.

The presentation will draw on my doctoral study that explores the subtleties of power relations between local communities and external interest groups involved in community-led HIV/AIDS interventions within KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It also draws from my experience as the previous Director of DramAidE (Drama in AIDS Education), an outreach health communication program of the University of Zululand in South Africa. DramAidE applied arts such as drama, theatre, folklore, storytelling, poetry and community media to create awareness about AIDS and use the stage as a public platform to work out potential solutions to community health problems. Various international donors, including the South African government and corporate South Africa funded DramAidE.

Further to reflections on this experience, the presentation will raise pertinent questions that can be discussed at the conference to help reimagine alternative solutions to the conundrum of the complex interplay between sustainable development, power, agenda setting and community voice in development projects. It will look for pointers towards co-ownership of the development agenda by both the funders and communities.

Projectification versus core work in the Agriculture Communication branch: Agriculture development communication sustainability at Crossroads

Geoffrey Chilombo, Senior Agriculture Communication Officer, Agriculture Communication Branch, Department of Agriculture Extension Services, Ministry of Agriculture

The field of development communication is progressively adopting a project-based approach against the core work of the institution, influencing how developmental initiatives are integrated and sustained. The Agriculture Communication Branch (ACB) in the Department of Agriculture Extension Services (DAES) is one of the oldest development communication institutions that have been affected by the new paradigm. The over-reliance of projects rather than government funding (Other Recurrent Transaction, ORT) has led the branch adopting project based programming of development communication. The branch for the past decade has embraced project based approach in such a way that core work is not prioritised. This paper examined the shift from core activities to project-based approaches in agriculture development communication programmes at ACB and their implications for long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

The paper using a qualitative methodology analysed the content of radio programmes, publications and videos produced by ACB for the past decade. A random sampling technique was used to select radio programmes, publications and videos produced from 2014 to 2024 period. The findings showed that, while projectification allowed targeted interventions with measurable outcomes, it often led to fragmentation and

lacked continuity. The findings also showed that, in contrast to project-based, core work fostered deeper engagement and more sustainable impact. Furthermore, the paper revealed that core work faces challenges such as underfunding and institutional inactivity due to prioritization of projectification. The paper suggests combining the best parts of both approaches. The paper highlights that by incorporating project-based initiatives into a broader, ongoing framework, the field can benefit from the innovation of projects while ensuring long-lasting and sustainable development.

The Daunting Reality of DevCom Financing among local NGOs in Malawi

Thokozani Amanda Chiwandira, University of Malawi

Malawi as a low-income branded country heavily relies on external donor financing for the implementation of programs that respond to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). With sustainability considered as one of the fundamental aspects in successful implementation of most development initiatives within the UNSDG agenda, the need for most development program initiatives to align to sustainability of which Development Communication (DevCom) pivots on cannot be overemphasized. DevCom fosters the achievement of the UNSDGs as it is key for program designers, implementers, beneficiaries and evaluators to communicate and understand the different program goals that must be achieved. However it is arguable on the extent to which local organisations are strengthened to implement specific DevCom activities that respond to the different program design, implementation and evaluation needs in support of the UNSDGs.

The paper argues that even though the expectations for the implementation of development programs are high, little or no allocation is made towards implementation of DevCom activities and this negatively affects the successful implementation of such programs. This forces the local organisations to find other alternatives to implement the DevCom activities. In this paper, Bangwe local organisation which was founded in 1998 has worked with several donor organisations but has rarely received adequate support for the implementation of DevCom activities despite the high expectations to demonstrate impact through DevCom programming. In a specific example the organisation partnered with another organisation to have some Theatre for Development activities implemented as it was a requirement to meet donor expectations. In some cases the organisation collaborates with the private sector for free communication services and combines implementation of some activities in order to reduce the communication budget costs.

Panel 2: Making and Unmaking with Metaphors

Panel Chair: Peter Pangani, Executive Director, Story Workshop

Exploring Community Insights on Sustainability of Development Projects through Making Metaphors Approach

Lemani Makina, Media Advocacy and Networking Officer, YONECO

It is a common practice to look at sustainability issues from the lens of the donor and or the implementing partners. This leaves out community members who are, ironically, the targeted groups of the interventions. The presentation focuses on what transpired during community workshops on sustainability which YONECO in partnership with Loughborough University and the University of Malawi. The workshops were organised in Zomba, Mangochi and Ntcheu to create a platform for community members to use their experiences to describe their understanding of the long-term impacts of social change/development projects using creative metaphors. A total of 52 community members (20 males and 32 females) who were within the age range of 16 to 53 years attended the workshops. The insights that transpired from the workshops provide a rich array of information on sustainability presented in metaphorical coating and worth comprehension. The unique approach of making metaphors using various materials makes the study distinctive. The results are an invaluable mass of information that can inform the process of designing effective and sustainable social change projects.

Artistic Metaphor Construction: A strategy for facilitating dialogue and raising awareness among the youth

Jessie Akambadi, Strategic Communications Lead, Mbedza / Part-Time Lecturer, University of Malawi

Metaphors have been used to relate to the life history context, extend horizons of insight and create new possibilities in research. This article aims to explore the effectiveness of utilizing Making Metaphors through art as a means to stimulate discussions and cultivate critical awareness regarding sustainable development among young people. Through the Making Metaphors Workshop young people were engaged in imaginative, arts-infused techniques to contemplate and articulate concepts. Participants were prompted to conceptualize a metaphor for an idea or experience, or envision alternative futures, and translate it into a tangible 3D model using various craft materials. The outcomes of the activities revealed that the creation of artistic metaphors sparked discussions regarding individuals' experiences and comprehension of certain concepts like development and youth empowerment. Furthermore, the findings highlighted that by crafting artistic metaphors, young individuals were able to scrutinize the established structures within their

communities and governance. This tool not only facilitated participants in critically assessing their circumstances but also empowered them to take action.

Exhibition Launch

Making, unmaking and remaking with material metaphors

The exhibition showcases some of the material metaphors that were produced as part of the series of participatory and creative 'Making Metaphors' workshops with organisations and communities in Malawi and India. These were created in response to prompts such as 'our organisation is like...', 'communication for us is like...', 'social enterprise for us is like...', 'donors are like...', 'sustainable development is like...', 'empowerment is like...'

Add your own metaphor: 'If we could reimagine development, it should be like'

This is an interactive exhibition that invites you to create your own metaphor to add to the collection. Use the materials provided, take a photos and send a Whatsapp voicenote explaining your metaphor to +447400695489. Your metaphor may be included in the online exhibition currently under construction.

Drama performance

They Call it Africa

Written by: Joe Chimwenje and David Kerr, 1988

Director: Thokozani Kapiri

Actors: Mercy Ching'amba, Success Masauli, Nyokase Madise, Hambani Magalasi

They Call it Africa, written by Joe Chimwenje and David Kerr, was performed only once in the Great Hall at Chancellor College in 1988. Just one week after the debut performance Kerr's office was broken into and the permit from the Censorship Board granting permission to perform the play was stolen. *They Call it Africa* explores issues of power, class and colonialism in three historical periods (pre-colonial, colonial, and post-Independence) through the eyes of time-travelling alien researchers. Today we revive this dangerous play from the vault, performing the scene relating to the international development agencies' role in Africa, to consider how, if at all, debates about power and development have moved on. What would aliens report back to their leader if they came to observe Malawi today? What will they see if they come 35 years into the future?

Panel 3: Reimagining sustainable communication and development: existing utopias and alternative futures

Panel Chair: Robert White, Chief Executive Officer, Tilitonse Foundation

Sustainability of community radio stations in Malawi: the case of Chisomo radio station and its community experiences of sustainable projects

Jean Chinsamba, University of Malawi

Community radios are increasingly becoming vessels through which community development is advanced in most third-world nations. This is because these local radios broadcast content for the people at grassroots communities reflecting issues with a bearing also on local structures. In Malawi, the first community radio was established in 1998 following the liberalization of the media leading to increased media pluralism (Mhagama, 2015). Chisomo Radio Station (CRS) is one of the 34 community radios with a wide listenership in the central region of Malawi as revealed by the recent national ICT survey jointly done by (MACRA) and (NSO) in 2023. The radio's existence has depended exclusively on partnerships, collaborations, and experiences with stakeholders which also are what have shaped its sustainable growth and development. This sustainability can be categorized into dimensions namely: financial, Social, operational, technical, and environmental (Moffat et.al). This paper analyses how Chisomo Radio Station has managed to weather for 7 years since its establishment using the five dimensions propagated by Betina Moffat et.al allowing it to move from broadcasting within a 100-kilometer radius to a regional radio that is the most listened to in its area of coverage. It will also present the experiences the radio has had with the sustainable projects it has been implementing.

Placing Radio in the Development Dialogue: The Case of Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs)

Joshua Chirwa, Development Broadcasting Unit, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation

1.0 Introduction

Radio listening clubs (RLCs) have been used as forums where ordinary people can participate in development dialogue. The clubs play a collaborative role for igniting social cohesion in communities¹. Reimer defines social cohesion as “the extent to

¹ Khumalo, S.L. (2021). The Role of Participatory Development Communication in Social Cohesion: The Case of Masibumbane Listeners Club

which people respond collectively to achieve their valued outcomes and to deal with the economic, social, political, or environmental stresses (positive or negative) that affect them”². The RLCs under the Development Broadcasting Unit (DBU) have consistently managed to mobilize rural communities to proactively act and engage duty bearers on issues that affect them.

2.0 Methodology

DBU establishes and trains RLCs to act as forums where communities listen to developmental radio programmes and dialogue on issues that affect them. The DBU RLCs concept involves an organized and delegated community group that meets regularly to receive a special programme, after which the members discuss issues emanating from the same. As they interface, the RLC members identify challenges affecting their communities using participatory approaches. They then dialogue to identify solutions for the identified problems. The recorded dialogue which constitutes a community voice and a response from a duty bearer or a service provider is given to DBU for packaging for broadcast. The clubs are provided with recorders for capturing their dialogues.

3.0 Results

Through the use of these clubs, communities have addressed challenges affecting them through use of their own resources. In cases where they have required support from service providers, they have also demanded for such services. Their aired programmes have provided a platform for enhanced community participation and cohesion in addressing developmental challenges affecting them.

4.0 Conclusion

The RLCs have played a key role in promoting community participation and engagement of service providers. This has resulted in social change and addressing community development challenges.

Allying in Taxpayer Awareness

Caroline Nkhoma, Malawi Revenue Authority

The Communication for Development (C4D) approach has been widely applied in various sectors with the aim of promoting social and behavioural change. Tax administrations use C4D strategies to conduct tax education with the aim of enhancing tax compliance. Tax compliance has a direct impact of revenue mobilization and it is an important determinant of tax collection. However, most of the traditional C4D approaches used in tax education are long term requiring long term funding commitment by the tax administrations and availability of funding is a challenge for

² Reimer, B. 2002. Understanding and Measuring Social Capital and Social Cohesion. Montréal: Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation, Concordia University. Unpublished

most taxpayer education initiatives. In the presentation, I will explore an alternative way to conducting effective tax education initiatives by allying with strategic partners to mobilise funding and expertise. I explore how government agencies, educational institutions, community leaders, media outlets, technology partners, financial institutions and donors can be allied in advancing taxpayer awareness. I will highlight collaborative efforts that the Tax administration in leverages such strategic partnerships to mobilise funding and expertise in order deliver targeted and impactful taxpayer education initiatives. This approach has proved to have potential for sustainability of taxpayer education initiatives there by promising maximisation of tax revenue collection.

Breakout discussion

We want to capture the insights from today. In groups gather your thoughts around the following:

- Something that stood out as important;
- What was not said that should have been;
- What seeds can grow from today, what must we do next?

Closing performance: YONECO Cultural Troupe

YONECO Cultural Troupe is one of the advocacy and communication units of YONECO. The group is comprised of 14 artists who use theatre performances (participatory drama and traditional dances) to promote social change. Annually, the group conducts an average of 30 performances reaching over 70,000 people. Since its formation, YONECO Cultural Troupe has promoted social behaviour change interventions in a bid to contribute towards ending gender-based violence, preventing child abuse, trafficking in persons, and other rights-related issues. Additionally, the troupe has also been engaged by YONECO and other partners including the Malawi government in awareness-raising campaigns on various socioeconomic issues. Particularly, the YONECO Cultural Troupe has been engaged in Voter and Civic Education, awareness campaigns for HIV/AIDS and outbreaks of diseases like cholera. Over the years, the groups have also been used to strengthen the capacity of various local theatre groups across all districts in Malawi. All the group members have vast experience in community engagement, mobilization and edutainment through drama and fusion of thematic messages in various ethnic traditional songs and dances. In the last decade, the cultural troupe has also ventured into the production of audio jingles and radio drama plays that are aired on YFM Radio station which commands a listenership of 6,000,000 people across Malawi. The YONECO cultural troupe will perform two traditional dances.