~ Portrayal, Perception, Participation and Purpose ~

What of the Internet and New Digital Media in NGO Communications?

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master of Arts Degree in Development and Emergency Practice
Oxford Brookes University
Current communication processes regarding the developing world are undervaluing the voice and capacity to enact change of the communities they represent. They are also creating a distorted public understanding of the developing world as a place of doom and hopeless dependency (VSO 2002). This paper explores the possibility that new digital technologies, enabled by Web2.0 features of the Internet, can improve upon current processes, by facilitating more direct global communications between the developing and donor worlds, which centralise community voices and provide a more nuanced and realistically complex view.

A content analysis of NGO websites is conducted to understand how aid and development organisations are currently engaging in digital communication. This also explores examples which make full use of the interactivity of the web to put community voices and media on a global stage. Semi-structured interviews with practitioners from a range of organisations and backgrounds were also carried out to ascertain attitudes to the potential of such tools among development actors, based on their knowledge and experience.

These research methods are used to consider the following questions:

- How do NGOs currently use their websites and New Digital Media to communicate as regards the places and people with whom they work?
- Do agencies view NDM as a tool for more than fund-raising purposes? Are they perceived as an opportunity for community empowerment as well as supporter engagement?
- What are the challenges to facilitating more direct communications between the developing and donor worlds, in relation to both the process, and the introduction of new technology tools?
- Are agencies willing to take on the risks of fully accountable two-way information sharing on a mutually accessible platform?

The results identify the need for dialogue within the sector to discuss the potentials and pitfalls of new digital technology for communications about the developing world. The most prominent issues which emerge concern: the purpose of introducing digital communication tools and for whose benefit; the depth of NGO involvement in content and dissemination; the appropriateness of new technologies as a solution; and the practical implications of these tools, such as security and access.

Lastly, it is identified that there is a clear need to address the subject from the community perspective, to ascertain if there is an appetite for contributing to new communication processes, which involve people more deeply in their own development.
Statement of Originality:

This thesis is the result of my own independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

Signed ............................................................... Date .........................

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed ............................................................... Date .........................

Statement of Ethics Review Approval

This dissertation involved human participants. A Form E1BE for each group of participants, showing ethics review approval, has been attached to this dissertation as an appendix.

~ Acknowledgements ~

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### Abbreviations

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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN)</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<td>ICT4D</td>
<td>ICTs for Development</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>ITU</td>
<td>International Telecommunications Union</td>
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<td>NDM</td>
<td>New Digital Media</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<td>PEER</td>
<td>Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation &amp; Research</td>
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<td>PV</td>
<td>Participatory Video</td>
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<td>VSO</td>
<td>Voluntary Services Overseas</td>
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<td>WSIS</td>
<td>World Summit on the Information Society</td>
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~ Introduction ~

Rationale
This subject merits research for three reasons which stem from my own anthropological background and interest in the way in which societies perceive each other. In the world of aid and development, the representation of people in developing countries is significant because aid agencies hold an increasing monopoly over the information which is available about these places and the people who live there. Many people are not privileged to have travelled to such countries, whilst the explosion of the Internet and organisational websites mean that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are ever more involved in producing media about the places where they work, independently from the mainstream production channels.

This responsibility for the knowledge and impression of developing countries in the ‘developed world’ is now a cause for controversy, because recent reports have exposed the depth of misunderstanding argued to be contributing to a lack of enthusiasm and commitment to providing aid to these places. Research undertaken by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) revealed that 80% of the British public associate the developing world with “doom-laden images of famine, disaster and Western aid”, whilst 74% believe that these countries “depend on the money and knowledge of the West to progress” (VSO 2002: 5).

I was motivated to explore ways in which we might address these misconceptions, which clearly stem from inadequate portrayals of people and places by those who claim to act as their mouthpiece to the world. Hearing the voices of people living in poverty and appreciating their perspectives, needs and aspirations has become increasingly central to development practice. Advances in new technology might help advance this principle, to allow people’s voices, their alternative and nuanced views, to be heard directly in the wider world, not just by development practitioners.

Furthermore new technology, especially in Information and Communications (ICTs) has recently received a lot of attention in the aid and development sector, and simultaneously NGOs make a lot of information available via their websites, therefore it was suggested to me that the implications of communications via digital channels merited further exploration.

The aim of this paper, therefore is to stimulate a dialogue amongst practitioners about the current and potential uses of digital communications technologies. It was felt necessary to understand the NGO perspective about whether such tools could genuinely be used to share a more realistic vision of the developing world in communications with the public, and what the challenges might be.

Limits
This research only addresses the perspective of those working in the aid and development sector, rather than the people who might be on the receiving end of such communications.

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1 One need only search for the word ‘aid’ in the Daily Mail to come up with numerous articles with titles including “Foreign aid is wasted”, “How your money is squandered”, “Up to half the food aid… never makes it to those in need”, “Aid to Ethiopia being withheld from villagers who don’t support the regime” etc
projects. It is strongly suggested that understanding the perspective of people themselves on the opportunity or their desire to take more control of how they are portrayed is an essential follow-up to this research, however it was felt necessary to interrogate the purpose for NGOs of facilitating this. If the risks and challenges are felt to be so great that there is no genuine desire to assist the empowering of more authentic voices, then exploring this with communities in developing countries will certainly hold no benefit for them.

Discussions around research, in which digital tools may facilitate participation, refer largely to research for communications purposes, rather than policy or project assessments. Communications itself encompasses many things within development, however for this purpose I will use it to refer to NGO means of communicating about the developing world and their work to their donors and supporters, rather than communications practices in the field, although the uses of new technology here are also acknowledged.

**Terminology**
As ever in development, terminology is controversial and accepted norms are transient. Below are a few prominent terms in the text which it was felt necessary to explain:

- **‘Developing world’** is a convenient tag commonly used to refer to countries in which conditions – usually relating to poverty – are such that foreign governments and non-governmental organisations support projects intended to provide assistance and improve people’s well-being. It is acknowledged that this term is not at all accurate and has misleading connotations – considering that all countries are ‘developing’. Nonetheless it is considered preferable to the “Third world” which carries even more undesirable connotations, or the “global south” which makes no sense geographically.

- Likewise **‘Donor world’** is used as an alternative to the “global north”, to describe the countries which usually provide aid and support to others, and are at least generally not the focus of international development projects or websites. The **‘Donor public’** refers to citizens of these countries who are potential or existing supporters of aid/development organisations, and are the main audience of their websites.

- **‘Community’** is another unsatisfactory but unfortunately indisposable term of reference. A ‘community’ refers to “a collective or a group of people sharing common characters and / or interests”, they can be united **geographically**, or as a **social group** or sector (youth, women et cetera.) (Mtimde et al 1998: 13). The term is used as a short-hand for the people that are intended to benefit from aid or development projects. The terms “beneficiaries” and “recipients” commonly appear in the literature but were felt to be less desirable because of the power relationship and passivity which they strongly imply. Nonetheless ‘community’ is certainly not without its faults as a generic label: it is commonly used in development in a way which homogenises people and tends to ignore the differences and potential sources of division in any group held by geographical or social ties of variable

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2 Madge (1994: 91) gives some interesting justification for using the term “Third world”, however “developing world” was felt to be less political.
strength. I borrow an excuse from another researcher, that as with ‘developing’, the word is applied here as “the worst term, apart from all the others” (Madge 1994: 91).

- ‘NGO’: Although ‘non-governmental organisation’ has the potential for much wider reference, the term is used here for non-profit aid/development organisations working in developing countries. This can apply to both local and foreign organisations, although the term INGO is used to more explicitly refer to the very large International organisations which are essentially ‘multi-purpose’ in that they undertake a variety of aid and development programs incorporating disaster, development, advocacy et cetera, in countries worldwide.

- ‘New Digital Media’ (NDM) was coined to refer to technologies which can be employed to disseminate written and visual information across the Internet in a way that permits direct involvement of the subject in its creation and presentation. This includes digital photography and film, and online spaces for uploading content which can be accessed anywhere in the world with Internet connectivity. Due to the involvement of the subject and the features of the ‘Web 2.0’ phase of the Internet, these technologies tend to be more participatory and interactive than ‘traditional media’ used in communications, i.e. photographs and interview quotations presented by the researcher.

- The terms ‘empowerment’ and ‘accountability’ also recurred throughout the research process and therefore merit brief qualification. Accountability is used to refer to the potential outcome of employing NDM and online spaces for communities to present their own views and experiences of development projects to the wider world, and therefore hold the implementing agency publicly to account for their work. Empowerment is a favoured “buzzword” of contemporary development literature, with a range of semantic origins (Cornwall & Brock 2005: 5). It is usually used in the context of assisting people to assert their rights; in the following text it is closely related to agency (in the sense of a person’s capacity to act); therefore communications practices which recognise and encourage this capacity, of people to speak for themselves and choose how to share this with the world, are felt to be more empowering of individuals.

Model

A general model of how digital tools might be employed for communications to these ends was proposed to interview participants to guide a common understanding around which to focus discussions. This proposed the use of new digital media methods and platforms, such as video, digital photography, blogs and social networking spaces, exclusively by communities as an opportunity to have a voice, and present their stories completely on their own terms. Hypothetically this could involve participatory video and photography projects allowing participants to create and narrate their own visual media, and – vitally - access to a

3 ‘Web2.0’ refers to the emerging interactive web services and applications which are increasingly characterising the Internet, allowing web-users to participate in the processes of creating, sharing, collaborating on and publishing information online (Participatory Learning & Action 2009)
space for uploading such content, including written media to a platform or network accessible by audiences globally. The role of the NGO would be to provide the tools and online spaces, and also to secure an audience as a feature of their website.

The process of research intends to provide some answers for the following questions:

- How do NGOs currently use their websites and New Digital Media to communicate about the places and people with whom they work?

- Do agencies view NDM as a tool for more than fund-raising purposes, as an opportunity for community empowerment as well as supporter engagement?

- What are the challenges to facilitating more direct communications between the developing and donor worlds, both as a process, and as a result of the introduction of new technology tools?

- Are agencies willing to take on the risks of fully accountable two-way information sharing on a mutually accessible platform?

The research process through which these questions are approached is outlined in the following Methodology.
This section outlines the methods that were used to gather and analyse information regarding New Digital Media and NGO communications practices in order to answer the research questions identified above. The overall approach is exploratory rather than inductive, given that this is a new field for development it is premature to draw concrete conclusions. I attempted to follow the principles of Appreciative Inquiry⁴, an approach to stimulating change and improvements within organisations, which although not a formal research method, promotes a positive approach to investigation and change. In line with this, my data collection sought innovations, achievements, potentials, and opportunities in hope of suggesting future avenues or benchmarks. I also undertook to explore current experiences and understandings of NDM and communications practices amongst NGOs and practitioners, rather than focusing on failures (Cooperrider & Whitney 1999) or examples of unsatisfactory communication throughout. Nonetheless, the process raised several challenges to the proposed model, and being a new area, there were not many concrete examples of success to emulate. It was also still necessary, in the first chapter, to undertake a less positive appraisal of current communications practices and approaches to technology, to justify the need for change.

Literature Review
The literature review within the first chapter helps to explain the relevance of these questions for practitioners by situating them within current thinking about research and communications practices, the trend towards participatory approaches, and the growing excitement surrounding new, and especially digital, technologies for development and communications more generally.

Data Collection 1: Website Survey
Subsequently, a comparative analysis of websites provides a perspective on where and how New Digital Media (NDM) are currently being used by NGOs to communicate. Initial experimental research suggested that few large INGOs were using NDM for community empowerment and accountability, therefore case studies were sought from a wider field. Other online spaces by development actors were thus included, where direct links between developing and donor communities are being successfully fostered, and providing platforms for authentic community voices which NGOs might build upon. The study of websites as sources of data themselves is quite a new field with innovative approaches emerging all the time. Many draw on methods for interpreting documents, although it is important to be aware of the added complexity of the world wide web, in that it is live and constantly changing (Bryman 2001:469). Some websites which were chosen for their innovative use of NDM, and similar ‘special features’ on NGO websites where

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⁴ Appreciative Inquiry is defined as “a theory and practice for approaching change from a holistic framework” (Watkins, JM. & Bernard, JM 2001: xxxi-xxxii) which rather than seeking out problems for which to find a solution, begins by “identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy and vision for change” (Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. 2003: xvii-xix) (Both quoted on The Appreciative Inquiry Commons)
community voices are especially prominent, are briefly described to better inform the reader of what is ‘out there’ in NDM on the Internet.

**Approach**

I have undertaken a qualitative content analysis of these websites, a method which makes inferences from the data by “objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, quoted in Bryman 2001:182). This was informed by media monitoring techniques. The intention is to suppress bias by forming specified rules for categorisation, and where possible quantifying raw data, however it was necessary to supplement this with significant qualitative judgement given that the nature of the material and how people perceive it are not entirely measurable.\(^5\) Analysing imagery especially, unavoidably involves a personal reaction and is hence qualitatively judged, as are central research themes such as empowerment.

**Timing**

Analysis was conducted during a time of emergency (July 2011) when the East African food crisis and donation appeals were dominating web content across the aid industry. It is therefore possible that this influenced the results concerning the presentation of information to the supporter public through agencies’ webpages, however because the study is comparative this should not result in unequal bias.

**Sampling**

Achieving a reliable sample was somewhat challenging. Websites present, and indeed intensify, the problems faced in document analysis in that it is difficult to determine the universe or population being sampled (Bryman 2001:469), especially because the Internet is in a constant state of flux. Therefore the choice of websites for analysis was conducted along the lines of theoretical sampling, which does not aim “to sample in a way that captures all possible variations, rather in one that aids the development of concepts and deepens the understanding of research subjects” (Ragin 1994: 99). This allowed website selection to be directed by increased understanding of the subject as research progressed: having begun with some of the more familiar and obvious agencies to examine, I discovered or was directed towards other relevant websites, particularly of initiatives utilising NDM for communications in an empowering manner, by contacts and key informants. This greatly broadened my scope, even though the results are descriptive and thus statistical inferences about all NGO websites and NDM initiatives will not be drawn. The patterns identified relate only to this sample.

**Criteria coding**

When creating the indicators by which to compare the websites in the sample, I found that little formal criteria existed to guide my approach (such as the law provides convenient standards for media monitoring). The closest to a set of guidelines on web media content is the ICRC Code of Conduct for NGOs in disaster relief which requires agencies to uphold the principle that:

“In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects” (ICRC 1996 Article No.310, 10).

\(^5\) According to Berger (1998: 28): “Some theorists have even argued that readers play as important a role in finding ‘meaning’ in media as ‘creators do in making the material carried by the media”.
Unsurprisingly, having been written in 1996, the Code does not make specific reference to communications through agencies own web pages, suggesting that the consequences of the Internet for NGO media activities have yet to receive significant industry attention from. The most applicable principle in the article is the following:

“In our public information we will portray an objective image of the disaster situation where the capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted, and not just their vulnerabilities and fears” (my emphasis).

Therefore I have incorporated these values into the content analysis. Other indicators were decided according to the questions I wished to answer with the data. These were clarified during a piece of test research which surveyed general representation and digital media on NGO websites, and gave me a basis for understanding what the key issues were. I created a set of codified variables for each indicator according to the breadth of variation encountered, which were entered into a table so as to allow subsequent bi-variate analysis, between and within websites, of one or more criteria to try to identify potential patterns and commonalities.

**Data Collection 2: Key Informant Interviews**

The research was strongly informed by a series of key informant interviews with various development practitioners whose wealth of experience supplemented my own limited knowledge of the realities of working in the aid industry. This was to appreciate understandings of communications practices and the Internet within the sector, and to explore the potentials and obstacles to using NDM in an empowering way, from both a professional and personal perspective.

The process of interviewing was also important, as a key research objective is to stimulate dialogue within the aid sector to critically evaluate their motivations behind, and expectations from, the use of NDM.

Questions were organised around three key themes of Research, Communications and Technology. Some questions were also included to identify perspectives on the importance and possibilities of achieving empowerment, or accountability to people. Interviews were semi-structured to stimulate thinking and allow debate, therefore questions were not approached systematically; discussion revolved more around personal experiences and opinions which produced fewer measurable responses. Those patterns which did emerge are highlighted and presented visually to give some sense of the primary concerns related to NDM according to practitioners; the results also helped stimulate, inform and illustrate the discussion of potentials and pitfalls in the final chapter.

Practitioners from a variety of backgrounds were interviewed during July 2011, predominantly from mainstream INGOs, but also a number of individuals involved in organisations which undertake the use of new technologies for community ‘voice’ as their sole objective. Participants were generally identified through a snowballing technique, whereby a few contacts and interested persons suggested others with particularly relevant experience or interest. This proved more fruitful than [‘cold-calling’] the communications staff of well-known INGOs, particularly in light of the East Africa crisis. It also provided me with an interesting breadth of experiences and opinions (from within and outside communications) and richly informed the research with suggestions, experiences and challenges which may not have been identified otherwise.
Discussion
The paper ends with a discussion which attempts to bring together all the insights gained from the process of research to understand where NDM currently sit on aid agency agendas. This evaluates the potentials and pitfalls of attempting to use such technology for the purposes of empowering communities, greater accountability and creating more responsible and accurate communications with the donor public. Consequently I hope that this will generate discussion amongst practitioners within the sector as highlighted earlier.
This chapter presents the background to the ethical debates surrounding current research practices and ways of communicating about the development world. It also locates the potential of New Digital Media (NDM) within current theory and practice, i.e. the dominant paradigm of participatory research processes, and trends towards the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for development purposes. Four key strands emerge from the literature to which this research relates:

1) Concerns about the portrayal of people and problems in developing countries, ethically, and also in relation to the long term impact this is having on public perception and support of development;

2) The critiques of standardised ‘quantitative’ research methods for generating knowledge about developing countries which have culminated in the popularity of participatory approaches as a ‘best practice’ in the field;

3) A recent surge in interest around the importance of communications in development, and the growth of ‘community media’ as a tool for contributing to the “empowerment of the poor and marginalised in defining their own development objectives through fostering dialogue and participation” (Fust 2008: 5);

4) The related explosion of interest in the so-called ‘digital divide’ and the introduction of ICTs for development purposes.

1) Portrayals and stereotypes

“Starving children with flies around their eyes, too weak to brush them off”

(VSO 2002: 5 the image which a large proportion of the British public associate with the developing world)

Motivation

For me, the origins of this research lay in a deep-seated unease with the way in which communities in developing countries are ‘spoken for’, and the simplified, generalised and frequently negative impression of life in these countries which results from such communications. The tendency of the west in particular to portray different cultures, especially former colonies as ‘other’, has long been debated. Indeed as Edward Said argued in Orientalism, civilisations have been barbarising and stereotyping other cultures they encounter since the ancient Greeks branded the Persians as feminine, decadent, despotic - in every way their polar opposite and probably for a long time before this. However in the past such encounters between different cultures were frequently the source of open conflict and competition for power or resources, hence propaganda served to belittle the enemy. Yet this remains an oft-repeated critique of aid and development today, in African countries especially, where the relationship is supposedly based on support for common humanity. In addition to the mainstream media, aid agencies have been accused of exaggerating the negative aspects of the countries in which they work in their attempts to secure global

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6 See Terminology in the Introduction

7 See for example, Aeschylus’ Persae which Said credits as being the origin for more or less all subsequent discourse about the ‘East’ by the ‘West’.
A homogenised image of African - and other developing - countries persists today, following on a literary tradition with worrying reminiscences of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, which presents this diverse continent as one country, one of:

“*remote villages ravaged by poverty, disease, squalor, war and all sorts of [...] unimaginable misery. The people are usually shown to be wallowing in abject poverty; dying of HIV/AIDS, famine and hunger; are violence prone, superstitious, barbaric or exhibiting characteristics that are more or less sub-human...*”

(Zainab Usman, 05/2011)

**Image versus Reality**

Of course the intention of such depictions is usually genuine: to inform the public about predicaments elsewhere and remind them of their moral obligation to assist those less fortunate. However this task is becoming more challenging in the face of over-exposure to these messages (Shotsman, quoted in Mayer 2009: Part 8), as well as ‘aid fatigue’ and tightening budgets following the Global Financial Crisis. Those more sceptical suggest that images of people suffering and in need, although they have potential to evoke compassion, are more likely to strengthen the viewer’s position of power over ‘helpless’ folk, reaffirming our relative economic and physical security in relationship to the subject (Mayer 2011: Part 6). Furthermore this feeling of superiority and distance weakens the impetus to help.

It was dissatisfaction, in the first place, with the mainstream media’s portrayal of poverty, disaster and aid relief that coincided with the revolution in media technology to pressure NGOs into publishing their own stories and producing their own content (Mayer 2010). The ‘press’ are often blamed for “bad reporting of Africa” and aid agencies were quick to extend their role as the ‘mouth piece’ of the communities they worked with, citing as justification greater contact with and hence understanding of the population and their context than “helicopter journalists”. Yet on the other hand, the media created by aid agencies is counted as part of the problem. Commentators have expressed concern at the distorted portrayal of the developing world at least since 1993 when the Annenberg Washington Program concluded that:

“both the media and relief organisations unintentionally contribute to distorted images of the developing world because both focus on the unusual, the extraordinary, the dramatic”

(Cate 1994).

Despite the involvement of senior officials from several major NGOs in this year-long project little seems to have changed. In 2002 the VSO was prompted to publish a report (referring to the LiveAid events of the 1980’s) which again lamented that:

“For too long, development agencies and the media have been complicit in promoting an unbalanced picture of third world doom and disaster” (Foreword: Mark Goldring, VSO 2002).

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8 See for example Cate 1994, Darnton *et al* 2011, VSO 2002

9 The term ‘Pothole Theory’ has been coined to describe the idea that people are unlikely to act upon a problem until it is close enough to affect them directly. Erik Hersman writes an interesting post on this on the White African blog, suggesting the potential of a digital world to effect change even on events far away: [http://whiteafrican.com/2008/03/12/pothole-theory-lost-fingers-caring-and-crisis/](http://whiteafrican.com/2008/03/12/pothole-theory-lost-fingers-caring-and-crisis/)

10 Interview 12/07/11 (b)

11 Although in the context of disaster response, aid workers have come under similar criticism for their sudden descent upon a population without adequate understanding of the longterm context and consequences, or of culturally-determined needs
Both papers include worrying survey results betraying the extent of misconception by western audiences of developing world realities. Most recently in 2011, Oxfam, supported by DfID have built upon this assessment, calling for urgent action to find new ways to engage with the UK public on global poverty, whose current “uninterested and ill-informed” state they directly relate to the ‘Live Aid Legacy’ and its dominant message of the ‘Powerful Giver’ providing aid to the ‘Grateful Receiver’.

**Optimistic leanings**

It must be said that the recent media content of NGOs does imply a tangible shift in policy: where ten or twenty years ago images and adverts showing starving children in situations of desperate poverty were commonplace (See Fig.1), many agencies have since enforced stricter policies emphasising the need to uphold the dignity of their subject. A recent Plan Asia guideline (kindly shared with me by the author) instructs the communicator to: “Portray survivors with dignity and respect…Empower survivors instead of showing them as helpless...Conclude your story with hope” (Wilson & Sitko 2011)

Interestingly, it could be debated whether this is inspired by purely ethical concerns, or a growing scepticism of the effectiveness of such images to inspire public donation. Consequently web images in particular often show people in situations of hope and optimism (see Fig. 2), arguably a much more empowering portrayal, although Chapter Two suggests these more commonly focus on that organisation’s efforts to improve a person’s well-being, rather than their own efforts to help themselves.

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Fig. 1 Caption: Relief: A small boy eats an Oxfam Energy Biscuit at Bombe Feeding Centre near Addis Ababa during the mid-eighties famine


Fig. 2 results of an image search for ‘Ethiopia’ on Oxfam’s website today

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/where_we_work/ethiopia.html

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12 See Introduction
Even so, not all agencies adhere so stringently to the ‘optimism principle’, maintaining that it is our responsibility not to shy away from the reality of poverty and suffering, and ultimately emotive images are successful in inspiring people to action. Either way, websites created by NGOs, as specifically designed platforms for development issues, present an opportunity for more accurate, informed and multi-faceted portrayals of the developing world, however tension exists between this and their role in eliciting donor support.

**Global Village**

An interesting story from an aid-worker’s blog demonstrates the implications of global digital connectedness for our responsibility to communicate accurately when publicising development issues on behalf of another society: an aid organisation was mentioned alongside a photograph published in the press of a malnourished child, described in the caption as being from Ethiopia, the “hungriest place on earth”. This was inaccurate, as the child was Sudanese, and although the organisation had not supplied the photograph or the caption, the repercussions with the Ethiopian government were less than desirable. Of course accurate portrayal should be a concern on ethical grounds before becoming a practical issue of the Internet making images accessible, but as one media practitioner aptly commented, it is clear that:

> “we need to get away from a here Vs. there approach to NGO communications. We now operate within global systems and notions of local Vs. international are starting to collapse”

(Aric Mayer, photographer, private correspondence 03/2011).

The tendency to dichotomise, to revert to an ‘us and them’ mentality, referring to a commonly shared stereotype of what ‘them’ is, may be a natural human way of making sense of the world (VSO 2002:2). Yet the attitude behind it contradicts the message which NGOs are attempting to communicate to potential supporters: that humanity everywhere shares common bonds which oblige privileged individuals to support those less fortunate. One potential solutions to this contradictory process is to create a more personal connection between the world of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’(VSO 2002: 3, 14), triggering the desire for greater knowledge and understanding and responses based on empathy, not sympathy.

Both web research and interviews revealed that many organisations are making a conscious effort to tell more optimistic, personal stories to make their subjects more identifiable to donor audiences, also making extensive use of complementary visuals, i.e. photography and film. However this related to the second concern: the research practices that the gathering of such personal information involves.

2) Research with vulnerable people

> “The major objective of poverty research may be for outsiders to gain knowledge and understanding. This is classic normal, extractive professional practice. The aim of such research may be to change things for the better. But it may make no direct difference to those who are ‘respondents’ [to survey assessments etc]”

(Chambers 2007: 32).

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13 Private correspondence with a media manager at a major UK-based INGO (29/03/2011)
14 Private correspondence with a communications consultant (22/08/2011)
15 Interviews: 14/07/11; 15/07/11 (a)
Extraction
The above quotation from the strongest advocate of participatory approaches\textsuperscript{16}, Robert Chambers, neatly sums up the limitations of some poverty research practices. In terms of communications research, which increasingly seeks life stories complemented by photography and film, the sense of extraction is even more potent. Whilst ‘story-gathering’ is an improvement on vaguely conceived stereotypes portraying poor people as a homogenous, needy mass, the pursuit of personal information undertaken by foreign professionals ‘in the field’ has come under heavy fire from a number of commentators in areas including geography, feminism and anthropology. Generally, such methodologies have been described as “intrusive” and “exploitative” (England: 85). One critic has even coined the term “rape research” in reference to exploitative methods used exclusively in the interests of the researcher’s career (Lather, quoted in Storey & Scheyvens: 3). If the challenge for researchers seeking life stories to inform their work is to “incorporate the voices of others without colonising them” (England 1994: 81) then the attitude and intent behind such practices are more concerning than the actual methodology itself. One extreme is an attitude to research subjects as an ‘other’, whose experience is entirely appropriated to serve the purpose of the researcher, vividly outlined by feminist thinker, bell hooks:

\begin{quote}
No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own
\end{quote}

(bell hooks, quoted in Storey & Scheyvens: 167)

Clearly ownership of the information resulting from research is a concern. Often it is assumed that vulnerable populations are eager to share their stories with visiting researchers or agency staff, especially foreign\textsuperscript{17}. But this stems from the expectation that as foreigners we have some power to effect change in their favour (Pittaway \textit{et al} 2010), reflecting the “power gradient” between researcher and informer (Scheyvens & Storey 2003:150). One of the aims of participatory research is to address this imbalanced relationship – which allows “First world academics” to produce knowledge about “Third world people” in a “one-way flow of information” (Madge 1994: 95). Chambers discusses at length the question of ownership – of the process of research, the resulting information, and the outcomes - and posits a shift in the direction of learning whereby the researchers become the ‘students’, and the subject takes on a privileged position as the source of information and knowledge; hence their \textit{voice} becomes fundamental (e.g. Chambers 2008: 147).

The dilemma expressed by Chambers goes right to the heart of communications research ethics: what right have we to extract stories from a population, \textit{[appropriating them]} to inform domestic audiences, with no guarantee that those participating will receive any

\textsuperscript{16} Chambers defines participatory approaches as an evolving range of methodologies which can be described as “pluralist, interactive and multidimensional”, and are concerned with “poverty as expressed and analysed by local people” (Chambers 2007: 3, 9).

\textsuperscript{17} Indeed I experienced this myself in India when word spread among our host community that we were a group of students conducting research on the area rather than just another group of tourists. Suddenly formerly reserved locals were approaching us voluntarily wishing to share their experiences and express their dissatisfaction with the uncontrolled invasion of tourists on their environment and businesses.
direct benefit, regardless of whether a campaign succeeds in increasing awareness or funding? The injustice of this was brought home to me by the following passage:

You know many of the organisations came to the refugee camp and they see the refugees in many ways as the monkeys... like a monkey in a cage... and then they thought that if we show this monkey to... the big countries of power like the EU, they will have a lot of money and it will benefit us [the non government organisations] ... They documented things [stories] of the women that is oppressed, then when they get money they use some for the refugees but mostly they use for themselves

(Discussion with a refugee men’s group, Thai-Burma border, from Pittaway et al. 2010)

That research practices have clearly caused some to entirely lose hope in the ability and intentions of aid agencies to use their position for positive change is significantly damming and a far cry from Andersen’s ‘do no harm’ paradigm.

In response to Pittaway et al.’s research (during which refugee groups in Thailand listed numerous experiences which had made them wary of researchers) the authors developed a method of “reciprocal research” seeking to offset the costs of participating with tangible benefits. They argue that “the ethical challenge is for researchers to add value to the lives of the people they are researching, recognizing them as subjects in the process and not simply as sources of data” (Pittaway et al. 2010: 231). For example research participants were given advocacy training to be able to use the information generated for their own purposes, such as demanding their rights, and had control over how the researchers may use it. This is empowering because it recognises the subject’s capacity for action. As with Chambers’ methodologies it values community voice and empowerment to “enable them to do their own appraisals and analysis, and to gain voice and take their own action” (Chambers 2008: 102).

The Value of Voice

Various efforts have been made to put community voice at the centre of development research; notably the Voices of the Poor (Narayan & Petesch 2002) series was undertaken to inform the World Bank’s World Development Report 2000/01 with a greater understanding of the multi-dimensionality of poverty and ‘well-being’. Action Aid’s Listening to the People Living in Poverty Project (Asif 2005) also sought to privilege a ‘worm’s eye view’ of the “issues and concerns raised by the people; their solution and alternatives from the perspective of the poor and marginalised; [and] areas for policy changes” to “offset the depersonalising and distancing of conventional research” - i.e. the ‘bird’s eye view’ of development problems (Asif 2005: 5). The need to put people’s voices and experiences at least on a par with those more measurable aspects of poverty is certainly at least acknowledged by practitioners sector-wide, if not always put into practice. This paper looks

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18 Similarly the PEER research method (Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation & Research) trains members of the target community to hold in-depth conversational interviews with trusted individuals elected from their own social networks: “The resulting data describe the lived realities and perceptions of the peer researchers’ ‘social worlds’. (Norman et al. 2009)

19 Also in Chambers (2007) several successful initiatives and tools are discussed which have facilitated ‘people’s own research’
at New Digital Media in relation to this agenda, to potentially facilitate the dissemination of nuanced and complex realities experienced by people in developing countries, an enable better understanding of concerns and priorities by policy-makers and the public alike. Given that we are unlikely to ever really close the power gap between research and subject, open digital platforms also suggest a compelling alternative by reducing the need for an external researcher presence, and their subjective voice in the ‘written up data’ which results.  

3) Communication for Development

“Communication is a right, not just a development strategy”

(World Bank, FAO & The Communication Initiative 2007: 115)

The concept of “Communication for Development”, defined by the UN as: “a process that allows communities to speak out, express their aspirations and concerns, and participate in the decisions that relate to their development” (Gen. Ass. Resolutions 51/172, article 6) has recently grown significantly in the sector. This is related to the growing conviction that “policymakers need to know how communities perceive their problems before they can both develop solutions to those problems” (World Bank et al 2007: 64). That a World Congress on Communication for Development has taken place indicates that communication is now considered vital to people-centred development. With mainstreaming of approaches such as Amartya Sen’s - that progress and tackling injustice rely on public conversation, the space to voice needs and concerns (Sen 1999:148) – there is an identifiable slant in current development policy within major institutions, towards building democratic capacity and enhancing the accountability of governments to their people (Deane 2008: 18). A lesser part of the debate considers whether improved communications by digital means can also enhance the accountability of aid organisations to the people they serve, as well as the state.

A popular means of achieving these aims is community media, a tried-and-tested vehicle for “empowerment of the poor and marginalised in defining their own development objectives through fostering dialogue and participation” (Fust 2008: 5); for example the use of radio in Africa. Community media has a long history as an alternative to mainstream media, given that ownership lies with the community. The benefits of developing community media channels are closely aligned with many of those already mentioned:

- to facilitate increased awareness on development issues;
- allow for indigenous and international knowledge-sharing;
- to increase citizens’ participation in development processes;
- and encourage accountability and good governance (Fust, 2008: 5).

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20 The researcher’s own subjectivity is discussed by Mander 2005: 14-15; also the impact of processes of transcription: 19-20

21 For example a quote from DFID claims: “there is a general consensus among donors that voice and accountability interventions contribute to poverty reduction... through the achievement of other objectives, such as better governance and democracy” (O’Neill 2007, DFID, quoted in Travis: nd.: 3, my emphasis)

The ability of community media to make a difference in fighting poverty and achieving development goals has been debated at length in spaces such as the aforementioned Congress, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters\textsuperscript{23}, and the World Summit on the Information Society.\textsuperscript{24} An interesting perspective emerging from the increasingly global nature of communications, is Community Media’s potential to raise public awareness and debate about international responsibility, which might encourage “citizens in the industrial countries as well as in the developing countries [to] hold their governments to account for progress in poverty reduction” (World Bank \textit{et al} 2007: 42). Examples already exist, particularly of citizen journalism such as \textit{Pambazuka}\textsuperscript{25} and \textit{Global Voices},\textsuperscript{26} both of which bring local issues to a global audience through the voices of those affected. Clearly the Internet and NDM are considered an asset to this agenda: according to the World Bank “it is short-sighted not to view the Internet as essential” (2007: 96), which must contribute to the flood of literature on ICTs and development.

\textbf{4) New Technology and Development}

- “\textit{Positive change is the goal – not just introducing new technologies}” (Addison 2009:26)
- “\textit{Web2.0 technologies now make it potentially possible for every Internet user to have a voice and a worldwide audience}...” (Kreutz 2009: 28)

Despite the World Bank’s confidence in the Internet’s potential, it may be ambitious to claim that the mere introduction of new technology will empower people to define their own development objectives; at least the equation is not straight forward. Literature and critiques have abounded with the explosive vogue for ‘ICT4D’ (Information and Communication Technology for Development) initiatives, which illuminate some of the limitations to NDM’s potential. That this is very much a ‘hot topic’ in development is evident from the breadth of publication, with significant attention on the potential of social media to connect people around social causes.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Interest}

Along with copious topical blogs and websites, numerous organisations have emerged which specialise in adapting ICT tools to development purposes.\textsuperscript{28} There have also been various efforts to unite the sector for discussion and collaborative learning on the subject. These include the International Web2.0 for Development Conference – again hosted by the FAO – in 2007; the World Summit on the Information Society Fora organised by the UN and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); and other smaller-scale events such as those organised by OneWorldMedia and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Exploratory

\textsuperscript{23} www.amarc.org
\textsuperscript{24} WSIS, held in phases between 2003 and 2011, available at www.itu.int/wsis/
\textsuperscript{25} www.pambazuka.org
\textsuperscript{26} www.globalvoicesonline.org
\textsuperscript{27} This idea has been fuelled by recent history, such as the social unrest in the Middle East so called the ‘Arab spring’, protests after the elections in Iran (2009/2010) and the Burmese Saffron Revolution (2007)
\textsuperscript{28} Tactical Technology Collective and Kiwanja.net are two examples that are discussed further in this paper
publications, such as *African Women and ICTs* provide useful discussion about the potentials and also difficulties of the new technology approach based upon practitioner experience, giving thorough consideration of some of the practical impediments to actually implementing ICT-centred projects. This book exemplifies both the depth of sector interest, and the strength of the association between new technologies and the notion of empowerment. The Spanish Development Agency’s recent publication *Políticas, Redes y Tecnologías en la Comunicación para el Desarrollo* furthermore indicates that this is a topic of as much interest to donors as implementing agencies. The excitement about digital and communication technologies for development is significant enough to even be generating interest in the mainstream media: the *Intelligent Life* quarterly ran a feature on ‘Digital Africa’ this year, and a search for ‘Africa’ and ‘Technology’ on any mainstream news site produces innumerable hits.

Much of the excitement surrounding ICTs and development focuses on their ability to bring information to communities - strengthening the “knowledge and information systems of the poor” (Grimshaw & Talyarkhan 2008: 2) rather than sharing knowledge in a fully two-way, global and empowering communication process; nonetheless many of the same lessons apply. From the critical literature it quickly became apparent that although ICTs are advantageous, they will not automatically solve the ethical dilemmas in research raised earlier. These are reviewed more fully alongside conclusions drawn from the data analysis in the final chapter, although a few are highlighted below.

**People not tools**

Most importantly, we are repeatedly reminded that technology is merely a tool, a means to an end and not an answer in itself, therefore as with any tool, its potential lies entirely in the user and the purpose for which they employ it. Manji, for instance remains sceptical about the relationship between new technology and social progress. Drawing empirically evidence from experiments using mobile phones to address women’s rights and social development, he makes the memorable point that “it is people, not technology, that make history” (Manji 2008: 125). This was argued much earlier by Schumacher in his seminal book *Small is Beautiful* and yet is so often neglected when an opportunity to experiment with new technology presents itself. Goldstein & Rotich’s case study of events in Kenya post-election 2007 clearly illustrate the centrality of agents and the potential manipulation of digital networks for both positive and negative outcomes: as a catalyst to ethnic-based mob violence, yet also for the purposes of human rights campaigns, and citizen journalism challenging the information dominance of the mainstream media (Goldstein & Rotich 2008). As Nigerian blogger Zainab Usman says of social media in Nigeria:

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29 *Policies, Networks and Technologies in Communication for Development*

30 Schumacher posits many reasons for scepticism of the potential of new and foreign technologies throughout his theory in favour of locally-evolved technologies, appropriate to inherent resources. He goes so far as to assert: “There is nothing in the experience of the last 25 years to suggest that modern technology, as we know it, can really help us to alleviate world poverty.” I wonder if his stance would change had he witnessed the ICT revolution, rather than taking a rather Marxist view of technology only in terms of production, not communication.
It could potentially provide a platform for all honest, sincere and well-meaning Nigerians to tell stories as they are without misleading and false colourations, political and sectional interests; devoid of bias or stereotypes, or it could simply project and magnify these stereotypes on a larger scale, perpetuate prejudice and aggravate the fracture within the Nigerian society.

(Usman, Z. Blog post 13th May 2011)

Practicalities

Clearly issues of **content** and **responsibility** significantly challenge the creation of open, globally available platforms by development actors: for example Manji discusses the obligation to vet the content of aspirationally free and open fora in order to avoid the negative consequences of undesirable contributions (Manji 2008: 127). As one speaker at the Web2.0 for Development Conference pointed out: “Letting everybody speak to a potentially global online audience is extremely threatening” (Zuckermann, in Participatory Learning & Action 2009:16). Such implications become further evident from practitioner interviews below.

Another recurrent drawback which Manji highlights is that where new technologies are introduced into any society, questions of distribution and **access** are inevitably bound up with power relations and control (Manji 2008: 6,8). These are usually framed by social pressures already present - such as gender as discussed in relation to women and technology in Arab countries in a Toolkit for Online Activism created by the Tactical Tech Initiative (Cinco & Aquino 2011). Furthermore other empirical studies of interventions involving the use of technologies have convincingly demonstrated that these must work within the local framing and understanding of that technology already present (Slater & Kwami 2005: 8, on Internet and mobile phone use in Ghana). Their examples demonstrate that an initiative will not succeed unless this local understanding aligns with the intended development outcome which the intervening agency hopes to achieve by facilitating access to that technology.

This anticipates the need to confront how far aid agencies are willing to extend to communities an absolute right to use as they choose tools that have been provided for a particular **purpose**. Burrell & Toyama cite an example of an organisation which pulled support for a community radio project when local participants were more interested in tuning into music than discussions of ‘development issues’ such as agriculture or hygiene (2009:91). The tensions between community priorities and agency ‘development objectives’ is an unfortunate reality which confronts organisations daily and the question of purpose presents a potential challenge to optimistic visions of empowerment stated earlier.

Given that the Internet is widely conceived as potentially a very dangerous place **security** must also form a significant consideration for any agency wishing to encourage its use amongst their beneficiaries, and some useful discussions of this are included in a Tactical Tech toolkit on *Strategising Online Activism* (Chico & Aquino 2011: 34) and later in this paper. The range of issues already raised by this literature review, imply there is a need to approach NDM for communications with **caution**, and for the sector to seriously engage with its motives. The rest of this paper hopes to stimulate such discussions, looking at particular
examples of digital communication and drawing on practitioner insights and opinions in the hope of illuminating some significant points for debate.
This Chapter aims to give the reader a sense of what is ‘out there’ on aid and development websites in terms of NDM. A qualitative content analysis of the features present across a range of webpages, assesses the impression that they give the viewer, and considers the purpose for which they are present. Issues such as sampling, analytical method and subjectivity are discussed under ‘Methodology’ above.

**Websites**

Overall twelve websites were analysed: seven are major international disaster/ development NGOs, five which are less familiar are described in more detail below, included because they specialise in a particular digital medium or technology, or use the Internet to connect communities and supporters more directly. A few atypical features which stood out from particular NGO websites are also described as they may be unknown to the reader and affect the patterns emerging from the analysis.  

**Oxfam GB**[32](www.oxfam.org.uk) Leading UK aid and development charity fighting poverty

**Tearfund** ([www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org)) Leading Christian relief and development charity

**Save the Children (UK)** ([www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)) Charity focused on fighting for children's rights and improving their lives


**CARE International UK** ([www.careinternational.org.uk](http://www.careinternational.org.uk)) Organisation working for the poor and vulnerable “in some of the world’s poorest countries”

**Mercy Corps UK** ([www.mercycorps.org.uk](http://www.mercycorps.org.uk)) Organisation focussing on disaster response, sustainable economic development, health services, and emergency and natural disaster relief

**Community Albums** ([www.communityalbums.com](http://www.communityalbums.com)) is the online platform of a music and media initiative which “allows communities around the world to share and collaborate with each other using video, audio and images”. The organisation provides equipment for communities to produce music and film with the aim of “giving people a voice and being heard”; productions can be used locally for a particular purpose, and can be uploaded onto the website for comment on or contribution by other communities in the network. Ability to upload and interact on the website is limited to members.

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31 N.B. features which appeared on external websites such as YouTube are not included here, as the research focuses on organisation’s websites, rather than digital media platforms on the Internet more generally

32 Descriptions taken from organisation websites

33 These are analysed independently as each office of WV is responsible for the content of its own website, and indeed these differed quite markedly between the UK and Australia.
The Guardian Katine Project (www.guardian.co.uk/katine) is a unique initiative by the Guardian newspaper which documented a development project in detail, from many angles over three years with the opportunity for supporters, readers, reporters, development workers and community members to interactively express their views. The development work was implemented by AMREF in Katine, Uganda, and the website was intended to use new media to offer “people in the community ways of campaigning and commenting on what they saw”, as well as a new way of reporting on development (Jones 2010: 13, 3).

Kiva (www.kiva.org) is a non-profit organisation which “connect[s] people through lending to alleviate poverty”. The website builds on the successful microfinance model, adding a digital platform to allow “Internet lenders to connect with entrepreneurs”, providing direct financial support across the world. The website provides a profile space for both borrowers and lenders, and the technical means for money to be transferred.

Insight Share (www.insightshare.org) are facilitators of participatory video (PV) projects intended to assist “individuals and groups to grow in self-confidence and trust, and to build skills to act for change...and enable people to develop greater control over the decisions affecting their lives”. The organisation provides the tools and training for communities to produce films on any subject, and is increasingly developing community capacity to continue PV long-term. The website serves to showcase InsightShare’s work with the PV tool, hence videos are mostly used for illustration. The Projects Director explained that “amplifying voices to a global platform is not necessarily the end goal”34, although some videos feature which do have potential to stimulate change through reaching a wider audience.

Video Volunteers (www.videovolunteers.org) also employ PV in “empowering community voices through training ... communities to produce news, watch it, take action and devise solutions”. Again emphasis is on the process of PV as a development tool, although the website is also used to publicise certain community videos globally as a means of advocacy for particular groups in India.

Special Features:

Save the Children: Kroo Bay (www.savethechildren.org.uk/kroobay) is an initiative which presents a detailed picture of a community where they work in Sierra Leone. Webpages feature film and pictures taken by professionals to help the viewer “feel like you’re there”, gaining a more in-depth understanding of the struggles people are facing and seeing directly where their support could contribute.

Tearfund: See for Yourself (www.tearfund.org/en/get_involved/give/see_for_yourself) similarly presents supporters with an in-depth view of three communities who explain their needs and aspirations (again through professionally-produced digital media). The aim is to connect supporters directly to community churches and witness over time the impact of their support. Community voices feature strongly, presented directly to the viewer through video / audio interviews.

34 Interview 12/07/11 (b)
World Vision Australia: Virtual Tour of Bogotá
This interactive feature allows viewers to “Experience life in ... Bogotá and meet the people who, with the support of World Vision, are working to respond to the challenges facing their communities”. Viewers choose a category and are then presented with relevant video clips (produced by staff) featuring a person involved in WV’s work (community, staff or supporters).

Criteria
Table 1 shows the list of criteria used to assess each website (bold, coded with letters) and their potential variables (bold, coded with numbers). The number and percentage to the right of each indicates how many of the twelve websites featured each particular variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A) New Digital Media:</th>
<th>D) Direct Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Social Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Never</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Facebook</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Twitter</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Youtube</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Flickr</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Other Social network</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Other bookmarking</td>
<td>5 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Blogs</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. Sometimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Photos/film</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. Frequently</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Interactive feature</strong></td>
<td><strong>4. Heavily</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B) Prominence:</strong></td>
<td><strong>E) Communication Method</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Linked/ low usage</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Success / need stories</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Homepage/integral to website</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. Selected participant quotations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Dominates communication</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. Video interviews (Participant)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Website purpose</strong></td>
<td><strong>4. Community’s images / films</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C) Web content creators:</strong></td>
<td><strong>F) Image message</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Staff</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. “Vulnerabilities &amp; fears”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Donors/Public</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. Mostly “vulnerabilities &amp; fears”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. ‘Community’</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. A balance/ combination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4. Mostly “capacities &amp; aspirations”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5. “Capacities &amp; aspirations”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>G) Agency Role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1. Solely platform / technology provider</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2. Content watchdog</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3. Integral to translation</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1: Criteria for website analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integral to content</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeals for funds</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development problems</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions (NGO: people?)</td>
<td>8 (5:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday life / stories</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>2 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid workers</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large-scale donors (bi/multi-laterals)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual supporters/ general public</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other communities</td>
<td>5 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience/ public</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject / community</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency/ host org only</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination (Community &amp; Agency)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**M) How Empowering**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowering Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very empowering</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat empowering</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly empowering</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very empowering</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N) Space for Accountability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space for Accountability</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - space for community opinion</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - community control content</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

35 The Tearfund website and the Guardian Katine Project were not felt to emphasise either the agency’s or people’s own solutions in particular.

36 Where websites exhibited more than one criteria these were counted twice, therefore not every criteria has a total of 12. Furthermore websites can be very large digital spaces and it was unrealistic to investigate every page in detail, therefore it is very possible that particular features on less prominent pages may have escaped attention. These data cannot therefore claim to present an absolutely accurate judgement of what is on the Internet.
The next table (2) shows these criteria codes (left) specifically in relation to each website (top). The numbers in the table indicate which criteria variable (Table 1 numbers on the left) is present on this particular site, it is therefore helpful to look at this alongside Table 1 and to refer back to both tables throughout.

Organisations were classified (Type) as: 1 Large aid & development NGO  
2 Small aid & development NGO  
3 Specialised digital media organisation / project

\[37\] A more detailed description of web content according to these criteria can be found in the appendix (website analysis table).

\[38\] These may still be ‘NGOs’ but are not referred to as such here simply for the convenience of drawing a distinction with more generalised aid & development organisations. All are referred to within the label of ‘agency’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA ↓</th>
<th>Oxfam GB</th>
<th>Tearfund</th>
<th>Save the Children</th>
<th>World Vision UK</th>
<th>World Vision Aus</th>
<th>CARE</th>
<th>Mercy Corps</th>
<th>Community Albums</th>
<th>Guardian: Katine</th>
<th>Kiva</th>
<th>Insight Share</th>
<th>Video Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A) NDM Features</td>
<td>(a,b,c,d)</td>
<td>1 (a,b,c)</td>
<td>1(a,b,c,d,e,f) 2 3 4</td>
<td>1(a,b,c) 2 3 4</td>
<td>1(a,b,c,e) 2 3 4</td>
<td>1(a,b,c) 2 3 4</td>
<td>1(a,b,c,d,f) 2 3 4</td>
<td>3 4</td>
<td>1(a,b,f) 2 3 4</td>
<td>1(a,b,c) 2 3</td>
<td>1(a,b,c,e,f) 2 3</td>
<td>1(a,b,cdef) 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Prominence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Who Contributing</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Level of Direct Quotation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>E) Communication Method</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>1, 2, 3,</td>
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<td>1, 2, 3, 1, 2</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2, 3, 4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) Images</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>G) Agency Role</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>H) Content Theme</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>(A)**</td>
<td>1, 2, 3 (A)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3 (A)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3 (A)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3 (P) (A)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3 (P) (A)</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I) Tone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J) Audience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K) Who benefits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1, 2, 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L) Content moderator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M) Level of Empowerment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N) Space for Accountability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Content Analysis: Presence of criteria indicators on each particular website
* averaged: website generally = 2 (sometimes), Kroo Bay section = 4 (heavily)

** Whose solution? (A) = agency; (P) = people

**Analysis: What does this show?**

The following discussion identifies some broad patterns in relation to NDM in aid and development websites and provides some observations not immediately visible from the raw data. The reader is reminded that the research approach is exploratory and hence these results are descriptive rather than prescriptive of all NGO websites and NDM in general.

Firstly, it is worth briefly noting the types of NDM used, demonstrated in Fig. 3. All the websites discussed used some form of digital media: unsurprisingly all feature photography and film, and all but one employ social media, reflecting the popularity of digital social networks generally. Blogs and interactive features are respectively less frequent; also the vast majority of blogs were created by staff (with some comments from supporters), a trend which applies to the creation and uploading of website content more generally, as seen in Fig. 4:
Similarly, criteria ‘G’ seen in Table 1 indicates that the agency is in complete or near complete control of the content of all NGO websites, only playing a more limited role in those ‘specialised’ websites (type 3) explicitly intended to provide a platform for community content. Again on these same websites the community has some input to the moderation of content (Fig. 5), whilst all NGO websites (Type 1/2) are moderated only by the organisation.

Figures 6 and 7 relate to the kind of content websites displayed: Fig 6 shows that the use of direct community member quotation (reported in interviews or video/audio clips) is fairly mixed across the sample. As are the methods employed by organisations to communicate about the developing world (Fig.7) (i.e. the format in which information is given). Formulaic ‘success’ and ‘need’ stories, along with the inclusion of selected quotes\(^{39}\) from community-members are the most common.

What the graph doesn’t show is that those displaying community-produced media (Fig. 7, criteria 4) are again those that are specifically intended to publicise community voices, including the Katine project.

\(^{39}\) Selected by the agency
Images play a crucial role in communicating over the web and are greatly influential on viewer impressions of the developing world, as acknowledged by the ICRC Code of Conduct (see ‘Methodology’). Following from this, imagery (as a whole across the site) was judged along a scale of highlighting people’s “vulnerabilities and fears” at one end, or their “capacities and aspirations” at the other (ICRC 1996 Article, no.310). Figure 8 shows that people’s vulnerabilities and fears are never predominantly highlighted across the whole site; in fact more websites display people positively overall (see also Fig. 9) which supports the shift in NGO policy suggested in Chapter One.

Insight/Share is only considered to have a ‘negative’ tone overall because many of the videos are intended to present what is wrong as an opportunity for a community to document their problems. What is done subsequently is less explicitly publicised than in Video Volunteers for example, although there are some success stories given under ‘Case Studies’. This supports Insight/Share’s emphasis on process over outcome.
It is perhaps worth highlighting that only one large NGO (Mercy Corps) website is dominated by images of “capacities and aspirations”, and this same site is also the only NGO site to strongly present people’s own solutions to development problems, as well as the agency’s (criteria ‘H’)\(^1\). Fig. 10 actually shows that each website tends to display a variety of content, with everyday stories and solutions to development problems featuring almost as strongly as the problems themselves and appeals for funds, as again was discussed in Chapter 1.

It may be obvious to conclude from criteria ‘J’ that websites are more geared towards the supporter public as their audience, yet the intended beneficiary from NDM use on the website (criteria ‘K’) was very mixed. I found that generally NDM tended to be applied as tools for interacting with and engaging the public; arguably the intention is always that the community will benefit from this in the long-term, but as seen before this is a thorny issue.

How empowering a website was of people in the developing world was also difficult to determine and a qualitative judgement. The number of websites presenting different levels of empowerment appears in Fig.11. I endeavoured to be objective by adhering to the understanding of empowerment given in the Introduction and analysis was largely guided by my previous assessments in terms of imagery, direct quotation, involvement in the website content

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\(^1\) This distinction, between development solutions emphasising the NGO’s work, and solutions found by communities, is important to make because it affects how ‘empowered’ people come across on the website overall.
and whether there was any space for the community to hold the agency to account (Fig. 12).

It perhaps follows then that those websites which provided a space for communities to voice their opinions and to have a say in their content are precisely those which were felt to be the most empowering, as seen in Fig. 13:

Some of the most interesting results come from bivariate analysis like this of the concurrence of two criteria together on each website. Websites which are very empowering are much less likely to have no space for accountability – seen in the dramatic descent of the purple ribbon, and therefore much more likely to allow communities some input to website content (increase in the yellow ribbon) or to have a place for presenting community opinions (pink ribbon). This is supported by the fact that community contribution to content is always much lower than either agency staff or supporters, regardless of the type of NDM featured (Fig. 14)
Some interesting observations can be made about the methods used to communicate particular themes from Fig. 15: broadly speaking, communities tend to contribute more when the topic is everyday life stories (through their own images, or video interviews in which they speak directly). ‘Success’ and ‘Need’ stories tend to feature most where the content is appealing for funds, likewise community quotes selected by the agency. One can perhaps infer that development agencies tend to ‘package’ their information in a certain way to appeal most successfully for public financial support.  

Practitioner interviews will shortly produce interesting insights related to this
Lastly, although it was noted that ‘who benefits’ from NDM (criteria ‘K’) is not easy to ascertain it is worth comparing this with empowerment briefly (Fig. 16). At least it can be inferred that only when a website contains features that are ‘very empowering’ does the community visibly benefit more than the audience, which makes sense in light of the fact supporters are considered to be the main audience (criteria ‘J’). One might tentatively suggest that those agencies which portray subjects of communications in a more positive light are more likely to employ NDM explicitly for their benefit, rather than for supporter engagement alone.

The two principle areas of uncertainty revealed by this analysis are the purpose of NDM and NGO websites, and where the benefit tends to fall. Interestingly these same uncertainties feature prominently in the discussions with practitioners which follow.
~ Chapter Three ~

Outline
Presented here is a thematic review of interviews which were conducted with nine development practitioners in order to draw upon their experience in research, communications and technology-inspired approaches, and to appreciate their resultant perspectives on NDM. Interviews are listed anonymously in Appendix B to respect the wishes of those who preferred to contribute without being named; likewise quotations or opinions are not directly attributed. Although this analysis cannot fully represent all practitioner views, an effort has been made to include professionals with a wide variety of backgrounds and experience: some from large INGOs, some from grassroots or specialist organizations (including Participatory Video, media and ICTs for development), and practitioners involved in policy-making, communications and technology.

Interviews were semi-structured, organized around the topics of research, communications, and technology; the model proposed in the Introduction – suggesting how NDM might be used to directly communicate community voices - was explained to interviewees as a frame of reference. Aside from the directions suggested by the questions, some prominent themes were recurrently raised by the nine participants, and their frequencies are displayed in the table below. Although these themes are inevitably inter-connected and hence categorising comments can be limiting, it is nonetheless illuminating to elaborate a little on each one to provide a general impression of practitioner approaches to the potential uses and drawbacks of NDM. This graph does not constitute a quantitative analysis, but simply helps to visualise how many times a given theme recurred in discussions thereby adding a sense of priorities to the qualitative discussion which follows. What emerges are some patterns of consensus and dissent, many of which are borne out by the literature relating to communications, Web 2.0, and ICTs for development.
Fig. 17 Practitioner Interviews: Frequency of Themes

Themes

- **Programming** - the suggestion that NDM may serve better as a tool in programs than in communications - was unexpectedly the most recurrent theme during the interviews. It was suggested that technologies could improve relationships between NGOs and communities, for example by generating better-informed assessments, using NDM to facilitate the inclusion of community perspectives, and to share results between organisations and with
Platforms for eliciting community voices were also proposed as Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) tools, acting as a kind of virtual ‘complaints-mechanism’. Additionally, mobile phone technology in particular was seen as an up-to-date way of communicating information to project communities, particularly in disaster contexts. I was given the example of Oxfam providing information to single women on how to register for the government-introduced watan card following Pakistan’s floods. Facilitating access to and use of the Internet was also considered valuable by some purely in terms of broadening life-skills and information access. Where NDM was acknowledged to be a potential means of achieving community empowerment and accountability to them, this was overwhelmingly in terms of accountability of the state rather than the aid sector.

**Purpose** is of course related and was consistently agreed to be a vital consideration for NGOs. However the purpose of introducing NDM tools was not clear-cut, and involved also considering the purpose of websites and of communications generally. Regarding NGO websites, there was quite firm agreement that they exist to “engage with supporters”; they are therefore “about profile-building” and “externally facing” but not towards beneficiaries, which corresponds with the results of the web-analysis. Interestingly it was not commented that this may be problematic in a world of rapidly increasing web connectivity, in which “those being reported on in far-flung areas of the world are no longer disconnected from what we depict” (Palmer 2011). There was also consensus that aid organizations should be very clear on the purpose of communications with supporters, and that this should inform the conduct of research to generate the necessary materials. NGOs were urged to publicly articulate their communications strategies by Fred Cate back in 1994, and little clarity appears to have since been achieved. Interviewees raised different perspectives on what the purpose of generating more direct communications between communities and supporters would be: one participant felt quite strongly that the purpose of communications is simply not empowerment and accountability; meanwhile some identified a supporter desire for such interaction, others argued better and more empowering portrayals were achievable, and some wondered what the benefit from this process would be for communities. Those interviewees with specific experience in ICT projects emphasized the importance of not dictating the use of such tools, even should this

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43 Interviews: 14/07/11; 15/07/11 (a); 15/07/11: the interviewee referred to experience with World Bank-funded programs which put communities through rigorous ‘participatory’ assessments (although their input had limited impact on the direction of funding). These were repeated each time a new implementing organisation came along, to exhausting effect.

44 Interviews: 21/07/11; 13/07/11 (b)

45 Interviews: 07/07/11; 12/07/11 (a)

46 Interviews: 14/07/11; 15/07/11 (b); 15/07/11 (a) respectively

47 See Chapter One; some interviewees made comments which support the suggestion in that chapter that communications research methods were sometimes felt to be extractive, and driven by top-down strategies, particularly by field staff; Interviews: 14/07/11; 12/07/11 (a)

48 Interview 13/07/11 (a)

49 Interview 15/07/11 (a)

50 Interview 21/07/11

51 Interview 13/07/11 (a)
result in an unintended outcome. The rationale of FrontlineSMS\textsuperscript{52} for instance (echoed by the PV/media projects such as Community Albums and InsightShare which leave equipment and training behind) is to facilitate locally-determined solutions by providing the tool and allowing people to get on with using it as suits them best. As Chapter One argued, this can be a challenge for NGOs with strong accountability to donors (below), hence the suggestion that these initiatives are more successfully implemented by grassroots organisations.\textsuperscript{53} At the end of the day it was felt that there needed to be a clear purpose for the communities involved if the introduction of NDM was to request their input (see below).

- The term ‘Dual Agenda’ reflects these tensions, between NGO websites and their communications on the one hand, and the introduction of NDM technologies for the purpose of benefiting communities on the other. This stems from the fact that Fundraising and Programming departments have very different end goals: raising money and achieving results for the community. Empowerment and accountability are seen to fall under the programming side of NGO operations, whilst communications usually appear under the fundraising/marketing umbrella.\textsuperscript{54} Most interviewees were hesitant at least about the potential to integrate these two agendas. One participant puzzled “where does their joint motivation come from?”;\textsuperscript{55} in parallel with accountability (to donors and ‘beneficiaries’) the two agendas pull in different directions.

- Often potential uses of NDM to improve communications practices between developing and donor worlds, were met with a wistful response: it would be great, but it won’t raise funds. The term ‘Fundraising’ did not explicitly feature in questions, but was a constant presence throughout the interviews, almost an obligation which practitioners struggled to reconcile themselves with, especially amongst the field program-oriented staff. This reflects the well-documented “gulf” as one participant called it, between fundraising and policy across the aid sector. Although some were optimistic about NDM’s important potential to “enrich perspectives”\textsuperscript{56}, others suggested that community media initiatives actually posed an element of risk for NGOs because they were considered less appealing to public support. In fact it was suggested that experimental projects which had innovatively showcased direct community voices and daily realities were not being replicated because they failed to produce sufficient financial results; it was implied this was largely because communications initiatives fall under the fundraising department rather than field programs].\textsuperscript{57}

- **Platform Vs Action:** Several participants expressed reservations that using NDM for community-supporter communications – i.e. providing a mutually-accessible platform – risked being meaningless and disempowering unless concrete action results, especially as it

\textsuperscript{52} Frontline SMS is a tool from Kiwanja.net enabling communication with large groups of people through mobile text messaging, see www.frontlinesms.com

\textsuperscript{53} Interview 13/07/11 (b)

\textsuperscript{54} Interviews: 13/07/11 (a) The interviewee had been involved in a research project intended to embrace both aspects, but did not conclude any easy answers about how to satisfy both; 15/07/11 (a)

\textsuperscript{55} Interview: 14/07/11

\textsuperscript{56} Interview 21/07/11

\textsuperscript{57} Interview 13/07/11 (a)
is difficult to galvanise awareness amongst the public into actual action. This particularly relates to the use of the Internet for global advocacy and in the words of one participant: “is it just about creating noise, or actually having real impact on people’s lives?” \(^{58}\) The literature echoes these concerns, for example that “just blogging does not necessarily have a demonstrable impact on development”, not least because this always presents the challenge of finding an audience (Addison 2009: 31, 32). In terms of social networking, to ‘Like’ something on Facebook requires far less effort and enthusiasm than actually challenging your MP to act on that cause. Generally there was apprehension that simply facilitating better communications would have no visible and immediate impact on the people involved and hence little incentive for their input. This again relates to the purpose (above) of global connections and in fact one interviewee commented that “if it is just about linking or connecting people, the benefit tends to fall with the developed world”. \(^{59}\) More disquieting is the suggestion that introducing NDM tools actually burden communities more than empower them, creating just another hoop for people and staff to jump through. \(^{60}\) This again is symptomatic of the schism between fundraising and programming, discussed further in Chapter Four.

- **Push Vs Pull** refers to the approaches driving development, and the need for initiatives to be *community-driven* is seen as important. Those with experience in technology-oriented projects argued that where communities actively want and drive the pursuit of new technologies the initiative is more likely to see success. \(^{61}\) Closely related is *ownership* of the results which will subsequently impact on a project’s sustainability (below). It is therefore fundamental that an actual objective for that community has been clearly identified by the implementing agency, and that inappropriate technologies are not arbitrarily applied to [fulfil other objectives] such as chasing trends in funding. Certainly the objective is likely to be unique to each context. The consequences for *approaching* NDM are discussed in Chapter Four.

- **Bandwagon**: As noted earlier, NDM are somewhat in vogue in development and there was an awareness of the sector’s tendency to jump on the *bandwagon* of new technologies and approaches in their natural eagerness to discover a ‘silver bullet’ to communicating development problems. Several references were made to the “hype” around new technologies, especially digital and social media following the recent success of *Ushahidi* \(^{62}\) and the events of the ‘Arab Spring’ \(^{63}\) and general “peer pressure to get involved” \(^{64}\). One or two participants related that *donor influence* often added pressure for hi-tech tools

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58 Interview 12/07/11 (a)
59 Interview 13/07/11 (a)
60 Interview 14/07/11
61 Interviews: 13/07/11 (a); 13/07/11 (b); 15/07/11 (b)
62 *Ushahidi* is a crowdsourcing network set up following post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. It began by allowing people to send crisis information or reports of violence through digital technology which are then mapped on an interactive platform (www.ushahidi.com).
63 Social networks have been widely credited with catalysing social change and mobilising vast numbers of people to action (see e.g. Wild 2011, Usman 2011)
64 Interview 13/07/11 (b)
because institutional donors are “quite excitable” about new technology.\textsuperscript{65} Despite concerns about donor-funded projects which “focus on technology supply without fostering demand” (PLA 2009: 14), all practitioners were noticeably (perhaps self-consciously) very aware of the limits of mere tools and the need to put people at the centre.

\textbf{Sustainability} was quite a common theme; both of the technical tools that might be introduced (and break down) and of the participants to continue using them (see above). Regarding tools, most interviewees suggested that it was difficult to fund their provision in a sustainable manner, that protected accessibility. For example the Frontline SMS technology is currently provided free by Kiwanja.net, which relies on the funding of donors. Various experiences were related of maintenance difficulties, especially where the resources required were unavailable locally. The response of the PV facilitators so far has been to replace equipment at no community cost; it was admitted that this encourages donor reliance at odds with their model of ‘sustainable development’ in which they build local capacity to use the tool themselves rather than rely on professionals. Interestingly there was a strong contrast between the views of two interviewees (both with a background in technology initiatives) on the appropriateness of introducing new technology as a solution. One strongly agreed with Schumacher’s theory of “intermediate technology” – useful and accessible because it evolves \textit{in situ} from locally inherent resources (Schumacher 1973).\textsuperscript{66} Therefore contrary to the above, if the materials to sustain it are unavailable, then “it just isn’t the appropriate solution”.\textsuperscript{67} The interviewee was a firm believer that many communities very well get by without new technologies, and that their own solutions can be more effective than the interventions of foreign development workers introducing “unnatural” new tools in a kind of “technology colonialism”. This betrays a troubling attitude that “development as a whole doesn’t trust the recipient too much”.\textsuperscript{68}

The other interviewee asserted that Schumacher’s approach was a “nice idea, but not plausible”; there was no sense of ‘western ownership’ of new technologies, imposed on the developing world, but that “the more access we can give people the better”.\textsuperscript{69} Her point was that we should therefore be prepared to fund the provision of tools in the same manner as healthcare. Technology dependence and the world’s depleting resources are admittedly beyond the scope of this paper, but the debate does beg the question: what are the long-term consequences of our reliance on mechanical solutions, are we missing the capacities already at hand within communities to explore their own solutions?

\textbf{Safety and risk}, in terms of the Internet and identity protection as well as physical security (for example where expensive tools are provided) was frequently raised. Regarding the former, it was oft-repeated that a large responsibility falls with the NGO if providing communities with access to technologies - particularly the web-based, but generally any

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{65}Interview 14/07/11
  \item \textsuperscript{66}See further: footnote 30 (p.17)
  \item \textsuperscript{67}Interview 13/07/11 (b)
  \item \textsuperscript{68}Interview 13/07/11 (b)
  \item \textsuperscript{69}Interview 15/07/11 (b)
\end{itemize}
method of expressing their opinion - to ensure that participants are fully aware of the risks involved. This is especially vital in situations where oppressive authorities do not respond lightly to those voicing discontent. An example was shared about a human rights organisation which created a digital platform for people to publicly assert their rights through SMS or the Internet, potentially putting contributors at significant risk. Those with advocacy experience noted that there is always “risk involved in bringing about change”, therefore the agency must be sure of its role and the consequences of stimulating change by giving communities a voice. The impact of this on webpage moderation and community control of content is discussed later.

- **Informed Consent**\(^{70}\), a key requirement of taking people’s photographs or testimonies, is again related. Yet it was often admitted that truly ascertaining a person’s actual understanding of the implications of sharing these things over the Internet was challenging. Explaining the consequences in terms familiar to the participant is clearly crucial, but not straightforward; it can require originality, for example I was told of one researcher who secures a person’s understanding about their story being used in external (including digital) communications by likening it to “a megaphone in the market place”.\(^{71}\) I received the firm impression from interviewees that there is great variety in agency approaches to the principle of informed consent, and practitioners feel in need of “industry-wide standards” to guide them in ascertaining genuine understanding. Those involved in the use of NDM specifically for the purpose of giving people a voice had a very different approach: as their work involves significantly more community control over the diffusion of the media they produced, informed consent is central to the process and therefore re-visited several times throughout the project.\(^{72}\)

Other questions raised included access to new technologies, both physically (in terms of connectivity et cetera) and socially, restrictions to which are explored in the next chapter. Nonetheless some important limitations mentioned in the literature interestingly did not appear here, such as language and literacy (e.g. PLA 2009: 12).\(^{73}\) Public perception of aid and development (Chapter 1) was also touched upon and some discussion will be drawn out in the following chapter. Likewise the desire of communities themselves to communicate with a global audience was interestingly thrown into question, again suggesting the need to scrutinise the degree to which direct global communications would achieve community objectives.\(^{74}\) Some felt that tangible benefits are more likely to result where NDM are used as advocacy tools to target those accountable at a local level.

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\(^{70}\) Defined by Madge as treating the participants with respect, using easily understood language to inform them of the nature of the research, the time needed to be involved, the methods to be used and the way in which the findings might be used, before gaining their consent to take part” (Madge 2007: 657)

\(^{71}\) Interview 12/07/11 (a)

\(^{72}\) Interviews: 12/07/11 (b); 21/07/11

\(^{73}\) It was not felt their absence was significant enough to comment on, it is probably simply an inevitable limit of this research – a brief interview can only cover so much

\(^{74}\) Interviews: 13/07/11 (b); 12/07/11 (b); 21/07/11
Overall there was optimism and enthusiasm about new digital media and the Internet for development, mixed with a healthy dose of scepticism and a variety of opinions about purpose and approach. Most seemed to agree that images (broadly speaking) of “realism and complexity are long overdue”\textsuperscript{75}, but there was great uncertainty about what the right channels and platforms for presenting those nuances and difficulties in the words of the people themselves might be.\textsuperscript{76} Some reservation was also apparent regarding the sector’s commitment to voice and empowerment, at least within individual agencies.\textsuperscript{77} Optimism that the sector is moving towards approaches which increasingly value empowerment and holding duty-bearers to account finds support in the literature\textsuperscript{78}, but this is dominantly focussed on challenging abuses by the state; the accountability of aid organisations to the people they represent, providing the latter with space to debate about development proves a greater challenge for agencies to grasp.

Many unanticipated perspectives have been raised here, and the principle problems and opportunities for NGOs approaching NDM have been greatly illuminated by speaking to those with more experience. These insights have therefore been extremely useful in informing the discussion which follows.

\textsuperscript{75} Interview 15/07/11 (a)
\textsuperscript{76} Interviews: 14/07/11; 13/07/11 (a)
\textsuperscript{77} Interview 12/07/11 (a)
\textsuperscript{78} Interview 21/07/11; E.g. Solervicens 2008: 18; the growth in literature on communications for development was noted in Chapter One
This final chapter brings together the many threads that have contributed to this research to build a discussion about the features and strengths of NDM technologies that can contribute to NGO communications. Although no concrete solutions are proposed, some of the key challenges emerging from this exploration are put forward as subjects in need of sector-wide discussion.

**PURPOSE**

It is currently unclear where the sector is headed in terms of NDM and communications policies. Some are clearly using digital communications tools on their websites – from film footage to Facebook – purely to engage the public who support them. This is perhaps unsurprising given the donor world’s dominance of the Internet, and is borne out by the results of the web analysis in this paper. Nonetheless, others insist that platforms for direct communications between the donor and developing worlds are “something we have to achieve” \(^{79}\); indeed this brief survey has shown that some online spaces for community media have already been created (Community Albums, Video Volunteers and undoubtedly many other). Yet even on these platforms the purpose varies, including:

- NDM explicitly for **advocacy**, allowing people to assert their rights and expose abuse (Video Volunteers, Tactical Tech)
- The **process** of bringing communities **together** to explore a certain issue (InsightShare)
- A mutually enriching process of sharing different life experiences and **perspectives** (Community Albums)

A further suggestion was that aid organisations need to involve themselves in creating spaces for direct interaction so as not to become irrelevant in a world of increasing global networks; \(^{80}\) one might infer an element of self-preservation in wishing to remain the interlocutor for the donor and developing worlds.

Beyond this, it has been suggested that NDM has potential for:

- More **ethically** sound communications rooted in people’s experiences and complex reality
- Improved public **perceptions** of aid and the developing world
- Facilitating community **assessments** incorporating their views and experiences
- **Sharing** assessments between organisations and with donors
- **Feedback** mechanisms from community to NGO
- **Immediate**, accurate stories from the field to support policy/ global advocacy
- Disseminating **information** to communities about programs.

Perhaps despite the rhetoric, even in this research conversations are too preoccupied with a desire to make use of this particular tool, paying secondary attention to which of the myriad of purposes we wish it to serve.

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\(^{79}\) Interview 07/07/11; This participant affirmed that this was where the sector was heading, and that his agency, a major INGO was currently working on a global communications strategy, the third strand of which is focussed around “direct communication b/n communities and donors”

\(^{80}\) Interview 07/07/11
The primary intention was to explore the potential of NDM and the Internet specifically in relation to communications practices, as a means of achieving the first two points. Obviously, other uses of NDM are equally valid, but the issue of portrayal, particularly through digital media on the Internet, which increasingly dominates public information, affects and requires the attention of the sector as a whole. Although some major NGOs show signs of experimenting in this direction (see Tearfund’s ‘See for Yourself’, or Save the Children’s Kroo Bay) most are not yet exploiting the full potential for interactivity, and actual community participation in the whole process is limited.

**Small specialists vs big players**

Clearly international aid agencies have many responsibilities, intensified by their renown, which complicate their ability to provide a fully open space to amplify community voices. In view of the pressure to produce success stories and measurable evidence of impact, such platforms may be more empowering when they exist separately from NGOs and entirely for this purpose. The website analysis and qualitative insights of practitioners have already suggested some key differences between small single-purpose organisations (such as InsightShare, Community Albums, VideoVolunteers) and the major INGOs, which arguably see the former better equipped for the challenges of opening up communities to new technologies and global communications:

- **Process over outcome**: practitioners from small organisations highlighted this point of contrast with large NGOs who are under pressure to use their funds for measurable purposes.\(^8^1\)

- **People over product**: involving and prioritising people in creating media content over the product they create responds to the ethical discontent with communications practices which undervalue people and their abilities, and remove information for external use.\(^8^2\)

- **Problem-oriented**: it was suggested that grassroots organisations have more success applying NDM tools because they have been motivated to seek them out for a particular purpose;\(^8^3\) by implication, pressures on large INGOs may encourage them to engage with the technology first, then seek an appropriate application in reverse.

- **Ownership**: of the results follows from prioritising process and people; communities have much greater control over the presentation of their media to a chosen audience, which requires a deeper understanding of the process and implications.\(^8^4\)

This combination of factors fed into the suggestion in Chapter Two that these small-organisation websites appear more empowering, and create a more nuanced perspective on the developing world.

On the other hand, in the spirit of appreciative inquiry perhaps these projects provide positive examples which large INGOs can learn from, presenting the positive potential that NDM can achieve for empowerment and communications about the developing world if done a certain way. The question was raised at the outset: can NGOs afford to continue communication practices that

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\(^8^1\) Interview 21/07/07
\(^8^2\) Interview 12/07/11 (b)
\(^8^3\) Interview 13/07/11 (b)
\(^8^4\) In Community Albums, part of the workshop includes presenting and explaining the website to participants, showing them how to upload content and how it will look to other people once it is online; this kind of understanding is more akin to truly ‘informed consent’. Interview 21/07/11
contribute to an impression of the developing world as a “theatre of tragedy” dependent on donor world ‘charity’ (Adamson, quoted in Cate 1994:2)? The consequences of long-term public misinformation and uncertain impact on the people portrayed (their dignity, safety and well-being) are arguably too significant to be ignored.

If NDM are to be employed in fairer and more ethical processes to avoid these consequences, then the aid sector needs to ‘get to grips’ with the challenges presented by new technology itself.

THE TECHNOLOGY: CHALLENGES

As suggested above one of the primary challenges with any new technology is not to get caught up in the hype around the tool itself. As so oft-repeated technology is only a means to an end: the objective is not to successfully use NDM, but for it to contribute to the attainment of a specified goal. Putting this purpose first avoids the ‘push’ approach to development of ‘shoe-horning’ solutions into a program which don’t necessarily relate to the needs of those intended to use them and without clearly anticipating the impacts.

**Purpose and outcomes**

The challenges of sustaining an initiative which does not fulfil some direct purpose for the participants have been suggested prior. Uncertainty clearly surrounds the benefit for communities of direct digital communications: it proved difficult to identify in the website analysis and was clearly troubling for practitioners. If the purpose is addressing issues of ethics and misconceptions, producing tangible benefits for communities involved will be a lengthy process and is certainly not straightforward; not least because the Internet provides no guarantee of an audience, never mind one receptive to more ambiguous and complex messages about the developing world.

**What do the ‘community’ want?**

Can we expect that the satisfaction of presenting their lives, concerns and aspirations on their own terms will suffice to secure community buy-in? The immediate benefits relating to dignity and public attitudes – and simply the empowerment of being heard - are highly intangible; meanwhile improving public understanding to a degree that will shift overall support towards more appropriate ‘poverty solutions’85 is inevitably a long-term process. Is there a need, therefore, to guarantee some short-term tangible output to justify asking communities to contribute to the media we produce about them?86 This is the rationale of the ‘reciprocal research’ method (Chapter One), but is it symptomatic of limited attitudes which conceive successful outputs in strongly transactional terms Darnton & Kirk (2011: 7)? This can detracting from the value of wider results such as better communications might offer, such as dignity.

A large part of the problem is simply not knowing what communities might expect, where their representation to the wider world (and NGO accountability for this) features on their hierarchy of priorities. A natural follow-up to this research would be to investigate this and interestingly, I was made aware of a unique piece of research by a major UK-based INGO which asked exactly such

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85 See below ‘Time to Change’

86 The Nata Village Blog ([http://natavillage.typepad.com](http://natavillage.typepad.com)) provides a very interesting example delivering on both the tangible and intangible aspects. Visitors to the website learn about Nata village, life there and in particular the area’s struggle with AIDS. They can also donate directly online to provide people with enough money to travel to the nearest clinic. This is not unlike Kiva but with donations to a village, not loans to individual borrowers.
questions as how do communities feel about their portrayal in NGO media, but unfortunately the results have not been made public.87

Clearly this gap in our knowledge needs to be addressed before we can consider applying NDM to projects in the field. Without identifying some community value we risk adding to the burden of people with little time to undertake valueless activities, which is no improvement upon extractive research practices outlined at the beginning.88

Access

Another testing issue is access, both physical and social. Some perspectives were briefly raised in Chapters One (section 4) and Three (Safety & Risk) and are expanded here. Physically, practitioners’ experiences have demonstrated that minimum resources need to be available for this kind of initiative to be appropriate and realistic. As one interviewee stated the Internet simply isn’t available in many places in the world, particularly within Africa89, and others shared stories of intermittent and limited connectivity which make it unwise to mainstream the Internet in development work.

Even where the necessary resources allow us to introduce Internet facilities, it is essential to recognise that NGOs do not work in a vacuum, and that existing social power structures mean that “equal access” is probably not feasible to expect anywhere.90 This affects how far the resultant media is representative of the whole ‘community’91, particularly if an entire marginalised group is excluded. One participant referred to her own experiences in Sri Lanka, concluding that the best we can realistically do is promote completely open access to the tools, actively anticipate what might hinder the participation of certain groups, and be realistic about whose we can and can’t address.92 Community Albums for example, negotiated the limited involvement of older people by encouraging young people in their media project in Uganda to go out into their communities (with video-cameras et cetera) and interview elders for their views, which were incorporated into the end product.93 Nonetheless, authentic community voices cannot claim to provide a purely accurate illustration of the developing world; we must continually ask whose reality is being promoted, and whose voice has been excluded. Acknowledging the subjectivity of the resulting material reminds us that NDM are not the answer to better communications, they can merely help fulfil more nuanced view. One interview raised an interesting point that relying on community perspectives alone may glance over significant underlying causes, particularly where stigma is involved such as with HIV/AIDS or marginalised groups.94 Although it is debatably desirable to eliminate the NGO/researcher’s subjectivity, they may still have an important role in facilitating the process, to stimulate conversation beyond the ‘felt need’ and bring root causes to the surface, both for the community and for the audience.95

Consent

87 (See Introduction) Private correspondence with INGO media manager, 29/03/2011
88 Addressing the ‘burden’ will be continued below under ‘Approach’.
89 Interview 13/07/11 (b)
90 Interview 15/07/11 (b)
91 Interview 12/07/11
92 Interview 15/07/11
93 Interview 21/07/11
94 Interview 15/07/11 (a)
95 The tension between NGO input and free / open expression appears below.
Recognising the subjectivity of what community members contribute to online platforms makes it all the more vital to obtain their full understanding and consent to the global availability of this information. The Internet has made informed consent an even more complicated issue for NGOs, particularly with communities who are unfamiliar with the concept of digitally shared information globally. Chapter Three noted fairly widespread scepticism regarding the extent to which truly ‘informed consent’ is successfully achieved, and it examples suggest that where communities are actively involved in creating and uploading their media content, exposure to the technology can facilitate their understanding of the potential consequences.

Security

The risks of sharing information online still require a great deal of attention as the accessibility which the Internet affords, whilst one of its greatest attractions is also one of its greatest threats. It is unsurprising that the Internet is widely conceived of as a very dangerous place\(^\text{96}\) (Cinco & Aquino 2011) given its complete openness to a vast array of users with very different intentions and levels of understanding of its potential. The responsibility which falls to aid organisations to ensure the safety of those who they facilitate to access the online digital ‘universe’ is perhaps the greatest challenge of introducing NDM tools.\(^\text{97}\) Even as daily users, our own understanding of the potential risks (for example leaving traceable personal information) are limited. NGOs must therefore make rigorous efforts to understand exactly what we might be exposing others to by undertaking activities online, particularly where this relates to advocacy (Notley 2011, see Chapter Three).\(^\text{98}\) As one interviewee commented, people are only truly empowered by using such tools if they know the risks in advance and can make the choice whether to contribute.\(^\text{99}\)

Open / Moderated Platform

This responsibility can hinder organisations from being able to provide fully open platforms for community voices. Previously cited experiences with digitally shared information show that some content moderation is necessary to prevent undesirable consequences (e.g. Manji, Chapter One) and most practitioners concurred that a degree of monitoring and implementation of policies (for example Child Protection) would need to fall to the agency hosting the platform. The safety of the Community Albums site is greatly enhanced precisely because it is fenced: only community members upload and post comments, and community leaders have control over what goes online from their community.\(^\text{100}\) This quickly raises again the dilemma of whose views are being represented: what does being a ‘member’ of a community require; and what does the community leader (essentially a gatekeeper) consider appropriate? Notably, none of the other websites analysed actually placed this much content control in community hands, but even so final editorial control remained with the organisation, in order to maintain the safety and supportive atmosphere of the online ‘community’

Accountability

\(^\text{96}\) Participatory Learning & Action provide some useful cautions regarding intellectual property, privacy and security (PLA 2009: 17)
\(^\text{97}\) A recent article in the Guardian discussed some of the hidden threats to privacy and security on the Internet, such as invisible tracking files, and relates the intensified danger this poses for those who use digital technology to fight for transparency and expose corruption (see bibliography: Notley 2011)
\(^\text{98}\) The Tactical Technology Collective have very helpfully made use of their specialist familiarity with the Internet to provide those with a lesser understanding with guides to its potential uses and dangers www.tacticaltech.org
\(^\text{99}\) Interview 13/07/11 (a)
\(^\text{100}\) The online space has in fact been referred to as “YouTube in a walled garden”, Interview 21/07/11
It is very possible, that a supervisory agency role may detract from the aim of fully empowering communities to speak as they wish: it would be challenging for both the NGO and community members to publish content which openly criticises the organisation’s work, if either felt that this would affect the support upon which they depend. One interviewee was extremely sceptical of any platform, regardless of how open, to transcend the power imbalance between agency and community. From her experience, the depth of community dependency was too great to risk the agency’s reaction. There is cause for debate whether any public platform directly provided by the agency – particularly related to their organisational website - can ever promote real accountability for its work, which significantly limits the empowering potential for communities in this regard.

**Katine**

The Guardian’s Katine project, credited with opening up “controversial discussions about development aid” and showing “the complexity of community-driven development” (Kreutz 2009:31), presents some very interesting examples of the tensions which result from providing a platform for many voices. The newspaper occupied a difficult position playing simultaneous roles as “sponsor of the project and also as host of the online space where the project was debated” which created pressure in different directions (Jones 2010:8). A direct consequence of the effort to present an unadorned ‘warts-and-all’ view of a development project was the often hostile criticism of AMREF, the NGO, by readers sometimes unprepared for an alternative insight to the familiar success stories. A review noted that the project staff themselves were certainly unprepared for the consequences of blogging and the ability of everyone to access information and upload their views (Jones 2010: 8). One example is the building of Amorikot primary school. Another incident demonstrates very clearly the consequences for the community of participating in a global conversation. A story about a Katine couple and their finances prompted a “vigorous exchange” on the site during which the couple were accused of hiding their wealth; this had consequences for them with other community members as well as being offensive and a source of anxiety. The result was that the Guardian felt the need to remove the article and its comments, although the damage was already done. The Katine project editors observed that “conversation with strangers all over the world can be very direct and even rude when compared to a culture in which politeness and areas of privacy are very important” (Bunting & Ford 2009). This implies that exposure in our own culture may have reduced our sensitivity to strongly expressed views which subsequently become more permissible, a sensitivity more intensely felt by those new to the Internet.

This example highlights two further cautions. The first relates again to security: publicising opinions has clear potential to inflame tensions within the community itself, by amplifying individualism and division rather than collective benefit. This is partly a result of the tendency within development to treat ‘community’ as one homogenous group, and can be minimised by good contextual understanding. The important message is again the immediate and real security threat to participants in their offline lives should the views they express online prove undesirable – to other community members or indeed to the authorities.

101 Interview 15/07/11
102 This interesting episode demonstrates the controversy the site was capable of sparking, and the difficulty faced in trying to convey the many challenges for NGOs implementing programs in developing countries. For an interesting snapshot see Kavuma, R. ‘Were Amorikot school building costs justified?’, 29th September 2008 in Katine: It Starts with a Village, available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/katineblog/2008/sep/29/education?INTCMP=SRCH; accessed 15/08/2011
103 Interview 15/07/11
Cultural Contrasts

The second matter relates again to content and appropriateness and negotiating the NGOs role. In Katine, both community members and readers/bloggers shared English as a common communication medium, in other geographical areas, language clearly has the potential to limit global communications. Physical linguistics alone however, are only one part of communications. Many other aspects of literacy and culturally-shaped ideas of what is acceptable and relevant will affect the content shared, and crucially how it is understood by other people. With this is mind the significance of the NGO in shaping the content that community members produce is an area of debate: how extensively should it be edited to facilitate understanding by supporter audiences, or framed to make it a “compelling” or “strong” story? Aid agencies occupy a thin line between assisting and enhancing direct communications, as quasi-translator, and denying the agency of participants to express themselves. Again, the answer is dependent upon the particular context, but certainly in some circumstances one can imagine participants needing support in articulating what they want to share in a way that donor audiences can engage with; having a voice can only have an impact “if there is clarity in the message being conveyed” (Deh 2009: 43). To flip the coin however, this can limit the empowerment of communities to express themselves as they wish, leaving the agency with significant influence over what is ‘appropriate’. Empowerment [therefore] encapsulates not only having a voice, but also **choice** in how to use that voice, and balance this freedom with a purpose. Admittedly it is a difficult task to manage communications between two very different contexts, but it easy to lose sight of the purpose and revert to the ‘aid-giver’ role of “problem-solver for not with”. As with technology (Chapter Three, ‘Sustainability’) it is an attitude which encumbers the capacity of those experiencing a problem to explore their own solution.

Programming: the safe option?

With all the concerns about security and responsibility that accompany empowerment and global interaction, one can understand why many agencies seem to favour using NDM and ICTs for programming or supporter relations. Supporters are much less vulnerable than communities, the organisation has no responsibility for their understanding of the Internet, and their website content is not designed to have any (unsought) impact on their lives. NDM as a development program tool has a strong success record (particularly mobile technologies), largely due to its use for sharing information locally as with Frontline SMS, but also globally. Kiva, as a platform, communicates the need or potential of aspiring borrowers to prospective lenders, providing a direct link serviced by digital technology in a purely operational way (the transfer of money). NDM’s value for advocacy programs was also discussed, providing people with public voice to generally hold others accountable for their actions. Video Volunteers, for example, have had

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104 Interview 13/07/11 (a)
105 One interviewee (12/07/11 (a)) likened this to public radio talkshows (like TalkBack in Northern Ireland) – suggesting with amusement that many people can benefit from a little assistance in articulating their views better.
106 The World Bank defines empowerment as: “the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes…” (quoted in Travis (nd), also available at www.worldbank.org/empowerment; accessed on 20/08/11)
107 Interview 13/07/11 (b)
108 The ‘My Society’ model (www.mysociety.org) is another example of this, which facilitates transparent government by making information available on the Internet that is otherwise not widely disseminated. The model is highly adaptable and transferable, and has also been used to allow people to request official information (www.whatdotheyknow.com) and report local problems direct to councils (www.fixmystreet.com)
ample success in using visual media this way, listing on their site several examples of improved local
government thanks to community videos which exposed corruption, or repaired disconnections
between residents and local officials.\textsuperscript{109}

Chapter Three also noted that NDM as an interactive means of information -sharing could
strengthen NGO programming and relationship with communities by improving assessment
procedures and feedback. Even these purposes are affected by challenges like access, and
connecting voice to action: for instance it is vital that a virtual complaints mechanism comes with
the capacity to deal with the resulting feedback, merely voicing it achieves nothing.\textsuperscript{110}

**Responsible Communications**

The above are all convincing uses of NDM in development, but this paper began by identifying an
urgent responsibility to address the current state of *communications* about the developing world.
Chapter One proposed that the recurrent donation appeals and stereotypes of helpless and
dependent populations in the developing world are contributing to a sense of aid fatigue, in the UK
at least (VSO 2002; Darnton & Kirk 2011). They are also entrenching negative and simplistic public
misconceptions of these places so deeply that aid organisations seem to feel unable to deviate from
accepted formulaic models for communicating with the public. One expression of this is the
recurrence of ‘success and need stories’ revealed by the web data analysis, a model described by
one NGO media practitioner as a reductive formula of “need + agency = successful outcome” which
usually centralises the agency’s role in bringing about change.\textsuperscript{111} In her view this did not do justice
either to the reality of people’s lives and capacities, or the work of field staff, and reflects the
discomfort of field practitioners with communications research practices that feel top-down and
extractive.\textsuperscript{112}

**Challenging the public**

Fear of the repercussions of challenging established world views seems to be holding agencies back
from displaying the realism and complexity that is lacking; one participant commented: “how do you
get supporters to be aware of the impact of our history on the wealth of the world” and at the same
time ask for their support?\textsuperscript{113} As the Katine project has demonstrated, it is a risk that more
“ambiguous messages” about development and NGO achievements will be less well-received;\textsuperscript{114}
people have become accustomed to the paradigms and predictable stories and an intimation of
anything less positive could easily lose organisations support. In the words of another interviewee:
“we are not yet in that place as an industry or a society... [we are] not used to telling stories in that
way”,\textsuperscript{115} There is an atmosphere of weak public confidence which leaves aid organisations feeling
they have no leverage with public opinion. Nonetheless some remain optimistic about the public
appetite for a direct connection to the communities they support\textsuperscript{116} and for “well-crafted, accessible
stories on poverty reduction that explain the complexities of the topic and also humanise it” (Jon
Barnes, quoted in World Bank *et al* 2007: 46). I was told of a practitioner’s blog on protecting human
rights in the DRC which had – unusually - promoted local actors and their solutions, celebrating their

\textsuperscript{109} \url{www.videovolunteers.org/impact}

\textsuperscript{110} Interview 12/07/11 (a)

\textsuperscript{111} Interview 14/07/11

\textsuperscript{112} Interview 13/07/11 (a)

\textsuperscript{113} Interview 15/07/11 (a)

\textsuperscript{114} Interview 12/07/11 (b)

\textsuperscript{115} Interview 14/07/11

\textsuperscript{116} Interview 15/07/11 (a)
agency rather than portraying passive recipients, and which subsequently provoked readers to express gratitude at being provided an alternative view to the dominant stories of atrocities and dire need. Furthermore, the VSO’s research suggested that audiences were in fact angry at being misled, blaming both the media for selective reporting and charity fundraising materials which promoted ‘victim’ images for giving a very distorted view (VSO 2002:9).

**Time to change**

In this light there appears to be even less excuse for producing communication materials in the same vein, if we are indeed “heading towards a crisis” in terms of public perceptions of aid and the developing world (Darnton & Kirk 2011) The sector is well aware of the need to address the complex root causes behind poverty and disaster but this requires an entirely different approach to the dominant “transaction frame” (Darnton & Kirk 2011), upheld by the caricatures of ‘powerful giver’ and ‘grateful receiver’, which conceives of development only in terms of financial assistance through NGOs. Aside from the fact that this unnecessarily eulogises the donor, it entirely sidesteps the need for public awareness of injustices – unfair trade laws, discrimination, international corporate corruption et cetera – which are the most common cause of poverty and development problems. This kind of awareness and sense of global solidarity is needed to invigorate active support for change, rather than a weak financial band-aid. Indeed, for one interviewee, this was the most exciting prospect of ICTs and digital communications to be explored: more realistic NGO communications can humanise the developing world and build an atmosphere more receptive to global responsibility and solidarity. This opens up potential for significant change through “linking communities worldwide around values of global citizenship, working together for global social justice”.

**An approach?**

For NDM to achieve success in this way for both audiences and communities requires a co-ordinated approach from within the NGO; especially if this is to avoid becoming a meaningless added burden, or simply an alternative means of NGOs extracting the information they require for communications. The schism discussed earlier between fundraising (public-facing) and programming (“beneficiary-facing”) is a divide that must be bridged to cater for the needs and expectations of both groups: on the one hand communications traditionally falls within the fundraising sphere, where staff will have a better idea of what will engage public audiences; on the other hand, because this necessitates community participation, thereby requiring time, effort and directly impacting on people’s lives the same processes should be undergone as in any project, i.e. consultations, opportunities for feedback etc. In other words as much value must be given to the process of communications as to the results, and schemes involving significant community input cannot be treated in the same manner as information-gathering exercises.

In addition, the principle frequently raised by practitioners is certainly relevant that when providing new technology, particularly access to the Internet, we should not dictate its use. If NGOs limit their role to facilitating access to and use of digital tools and networks, communities may be more freely

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117 Interview 12/07/11 (a) see Hastie (2010)
118 Interview 15/05/11 (b)
119 This is not a new idea: “justice not charity” was indeed the message of the Make Poverty History project, but for some reason we have failed to make it sit (see Darnton & Kirk 2011 for a discussion)
120 Interview 07/07/11
121 Interview 15/07/11 (a)
able to identify their own objectives and purposes for technology. One interviewee, describing her ideal model of empowerment envisaged a ‘mobile media centre’ for community members to access the Internet and other NDM resources in this way. As such individuals would be free to choose – a crucial feature of empowerment - whether to create globally accessible media about their lives, to use the resources to establish a connection and means of interacting with the wider world, or simply to access information for other purposes. As with all development work, needs should define the means, and it falls to the NGO to judge the context and their own capacity to meet the obstacles.

~ CONCLUSION ~

Of course NDM and promoting community perspectives are not ‘the solution’ to achieving this aim; digital communication networks are only one technology-based tool that present an opportunity to do things differently. Significant change in approach and public attitude will require a long-term commitment to scrutinising all forms of media, mainstream and NGO-distributed, and indeed to attitudes among development-workers to communications research. It is naïve to treat NDM as a ‘silver bullet’, and assume that simply by modifying the nature and processes behind our online media we can empower community voices to take on global stereotypes. Ethically however, there seems little excuse for not employing these tools: the means of immediate global interactivity are cheap and at our disposal. Therefore if, as a Rwandan saying goes: “a person who has had an experience is the one who narrates the story well” (World Bank et al: 68), how can we not, privilege their narration and the realistic complexity which comes from experience, when the resources exist for it to be appropriate and where they simultaneously serve a community purpose. The challenge is to meet these conditions, but the reward could involve better understanding of priorities as well as a dialogue for seeking locally-appropriate solutions.

Communications: the last stand of the top-down?

The current modus operandi in communications, especially on the web - where media staff dictate and illustrate stories, select words and images to feed into their own media, portray development to the agency’s advantage, often emphasising need and powerlessness – is also even harder to justify because it so flagrantly contradicts two core principles of development: participation and dignity. Chapter One considered how learning from the ‘bottom up’ and listening to community experiences have become an essential feature of routine practice for designing development policy and programs. Yet when it comes to communicating these same issues and approaches to the donor world, community voices quickly become subordinate to top-down agency control in trepidation for the supporter relationship. Likewise concerns for the dignity of the people we work with, so strongly emphasised in fieldwork guidelines (such as the ICRC Code), appear forgotten in the persistence of horrific images, exposing people at their most vulnerable to an increasingly numbed audience in the hope of a reaction.

Admittedly, this is a pessimistic view and does not give credit to the trends noted earlier that already feature in some NGO media: for example better effort to include more community voices and invest in long-term involvement over time, whilst engaging the public increasingly deeply on a “supporter journey” with a particular community (Darnton & Kirk 2011:10), as seen in ’See For Yourself’ (Tearfund) and ‘Kroo Bay’ (Save the Children). The growth in Participatory Video projects also partly
stems from greater interest in daily reality and the value of individuals’ subjective views and experiences as an alternative to the familiar perspectives. Such efforts to bring real voices to international attention may be the beginnings of an undoubtedly long and delicate journey to combine empowered and ethical communication with supporter engagement\textsuperscript{122}, whilst maintaining consistent values in all aspects of development. Yet the Internet makes this uniquely possible if, as proposed in the Introduction, communities are facilitated to use NDM tools and platforms (such as digital photography and film, blogs and social networking spaces) to create and disseminate their own media, narrating their lives, experiences and perspectives on their own terms for audiences to relate to. This may not be appropriate everywhere, but it is hoped this research will stimulate \textbf{dialogue} within the sector about where and how this might work, and its capacity to deal with the challenges of such an approach. One purpose has been outlined here but it is only one view (although informed by a breadth of sources); it is vital for discussion to determine if this purpose is held in common within the sector. This will determine if ‘development’ is indeed committed to empowering community voices to speak, beyond asserting their rights from local actors, to assert their right to be portrayed as “dignified humans, not hopeless objects” (ICRC 1996 Article No.310), their right to a voice.

The results described here have suggested that because NGO websites are strongly oriented towards engaging with their supporters, it will be challenging to use these spaces to provide an alternative view to that which promotes the organisation, and to allow communities to voice experiences which might challenge their successful image. It remains to be seen whether gradual change to established forms will succeed, or whether the creation of entirely separate spaces are necessary to achieve a change in purpose. Nonetheless practitioners generally expressed timid optimism about the potential to use NDM tools to introduce audiences to more detailed and vibrant perspectives on the developing world, which was supported by the tentative steps we have acknowledged to involve communities in digital media as much as supporters.

Several challenges to the creation of truly direct communications between the two have been outlined, principle among which are security and responsibility to ensure understanding of completely new technologies; access; and the ability to balance realism and complexity with positive stories which encourage support whilst conducting communications in a way that is of tangible benefit. It is proposed that these challenges, as well as positive experiences or lessons learned, should be debated by practitioners within the sector, to seek some consensus or at least suggest a way forward. Should the outcome support embracing the challenge to bring about direct communications which celebrate complexity between the developing and donor worlds, the next step, as alluded to above, will be to explore the perspective of communities who would be involved, to gauge the true potential of this model to serve them.

\textsuperscript{122} Interview 15/07/11 (a)
~ Bibliography ~


(2008) Revolutions in Development Inquiry, Earthscan (London)


De Laine (2000) Fieldwork, Participation & Practice: Ethics and dilemmas in qualitative research, Sage:London


(2008) ‘Mobile Activism or Mobile Hype?’ in Gender, Media and Diversity Journal, No.4: 125-132


Norman, K., Hemmings, J., Hussein, E., Otoo-Oyortey, N. (2009) FGM is always with us: Experiences, perceptions and beliefs of women affected by female genital mutilation in London. Results from a PEER study, Options Consultancy Services and FORWARD


Travis, S. (nd.) Music and Media Technology, and the needs it addresses that will reduce poverty, Community Albums


**Websites:**

(Included in analysis:)

CARE International UK www.careinternational.org.uk

Community Albums www.communityalbums.com

InsightShare participatory video www.insightshare.org

Katine: It starts with a village www.guardian.co.uk/katine

Kiva www.kiva.org

Mercy Corps UK www.mercycorps.org.uk

Oxfam GB www.oxfam.org.uk

Save the Children www.savethechildren.org.uk

Tearfund www.tearfund.org

Video Volunteers, empowering community voices www.videovolunteers.org

World Vision (Australia) www.worldvision.com.au

World Vision (UK) www.worldvision.org.uk

(Used in research:)


World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, at www.amarc.org


Finding Frames: New ways to engage the UK public in global poverty, a report instigated by Oxfam and supported by DfID, at www.findingframes.org

My Society – builds and runs democracy websites: www.mysociety.org; see also www.fixmystreet.com and www.whatdotheyknow.com

The vast array of websites and blogs which were looked at throughout the process of this research are too many to count, therefore only those which have featured in the final document have been included here.
### Appendix A: Website Analysis Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Oxfam (GB)</th>
<th>Tearfund</th>
<th>Save the Children</th>
<th>World Vision UK</th>
<th>World Vision Australia</th>
<th>CARE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) What kind of New Digital Media is in use?</td>
<td>1. (a, b, c, d) 2. (staff and activists??) 3. (via Youtube mostly adverts/campaigns) 4. (information for supporters)</td>
<td>1. (a, b, c, d) 2. (staff, some community quotations in ‘Voices from the Field’) 3. (extensive, website &amp; Youtube) 4. (maps and Kroo Bay site: viewers can ask residents questions)</td>
<td>1. (a, b, c, d, e) 2. (staff, steady use of community quotations) 3. (limited, mostly via Youtube; balance of staff&amp; community voices)</td>
<td>1. (a, b, c, e) 2. (staff &amp; youth ambassadors) 3. (information items, quite extensive throughout site, community voices frequent) 4. (whole site encourages interaction and exploration)</td>
<td>1. (a, b, c, e) 2. (some blog responses)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) How prominent is the use of NDM or communication?</td>
<td>2. (quite integral feature, live updates)</td>
<td>1. (mostly accessed in specific areas; links to social media prominent throughout)</td>
<td>2. (integral feature throughout)</td>
<td>1. (doesn’t feature widely)</td>
<td>3. (Almost more than text, ‘See What We See’ dominates home page)</td>
<td>1. (‘Let’s Talk About It’: opportunity to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Who is creating / uploading content?</td>
<td>1. 2. (blog responses)</td>
<td>1. Community are involved in content (esp. ‘See 1. 2. (blog responses, comments on) 1. 2. (some blog responses)</td>
<td>1. 2. (‘Let’s Talk About It’: opportunity to 1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D)</strong> How frequently are direct community voices presented (quoted in text or speaking in films)</td>
<td>3. (esp. In blogs; some filmed interviews)</td>
<td>2. (more in particular initiatives e.g. ‘Inspired individuals’ / ‘See for Yourself’)</td>
<td>2. generally; 4. in Kroo Bay/ You tube videos</td>
<td>post comment on issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E)</strong> How are the lives of people developing world generally communicated on the site?</td>
<td>1. (fewer personal stories)</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1. (Who what where &amp;why)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>(extensive use)</td>
<td>(frequent, esp on Kroo Bay)</td>
<td>(often with photo story)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. (most personal stories told through interviews, e.g. ‘See for yourself’)</td>
<td>1. (Many personal stories)</td>
<td>3. occasional (e.g. SEE solutions)</td>
<td>3. (Occasional, partic in latest news/staff blogs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. (Gaza Trilogy)</td>
<td>1. (lots of photo stories, subject input limited)</td>
<td>2. (extensive use)</td>
<td>3. (usu neutral/positive images)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>3. (But v much a balance of the 2 extremes)</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4. (usu neutral/positive images)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F)</strong> What do images highlight about their subject?</td>
<td>3. (allowing for more freq vulnerabilities of EAfica appeal?)</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1. (quite strong)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G)</strong> How instrumental is the agency?</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H)</strong> Content theme?</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1. (child sponsorship focus)</td>
<td>1. (v educational site)</td>
<td>1. (very educational focus on who what where &amp;why)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2. (often quite hard-hitting)</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2. (often quite hard-hitting)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.(mostly achieved by)</td>
<td>3. (what you can do through WV)</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>(esp. ‘See for yourself’)</td>
<td>4. (through child)</td>
<td>4. (what CARE has done)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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123 Explain Gaza Trilogy
| I) Content tone?  
(broadly: positive/negative) | 1. Particularly regarding Oxfam’s response | 1.  
1./2. Often hard-hitting stories of desperate situations, as well as celebrations of success | 1.(Generally positive) | 1. (emphasis on potential to change) | 1. |
| J) Who is the audience? | 3. Strong emphasis on encouraging public to interact with content | 3. Emphasis on churches, and seeing the results of your contribution | 3. Emphasis on what support can achieve & beginning interaction with communities | 3. Emphasis particularly on what child sponsorship can achieve. | 3. Emph on learning | 3. emph on support |
| K) For whose interest/benefit? | 1. Most features present focus on engaging and informing the viewer | 1. Mostly for audience to witness the value of the contribution | 1. Very focussed on engaging viewer 2. Also strong emphasis in video interviews on having voices heard. | 1.Mostly informative for audience | 1.  
2.? Implies direct connection – see a story, donate to that person; reality? 2.?micro-loans? Direct connection for financial support? | 1. Mostly informing the viewer |
<p>| L) Who moderates web content? | 2. | 2. | 2. | 2. | 2. | 2. |
| M) How far does the website present an empowered image of communities overall? | 3.(emphasis is on how Oxfam has helped) | 4. (emph on the church which people are a part of) | 2. | 4.? | 3. (emph on what we can do) | 3. (emph on CARE’s work) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N) Accountability: Is there any attempt to provide an open platform for better accountability between agency &amp; community?</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>1. (potentially See4 Yourself but this is authored by professionals)</th>
<th>1. (Kroo Bay like S4Y – not an open space for thoughts)</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>1. (interviews only express gratitude)</th>
<th>1.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Features / Initiatives?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>See for Yourself</td>
<td>PV in Gaza etc on YouTube; Kroo Bay</td>
<td>Microloans ‘Filming the Difference’</td>
<td>See what we see (mostly photos) Connecting Lives (exhibition, photos) Bogota: Virtual tour</td>
<td>Lend with CARE (even here subjects are described, no space for own voice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is the organisation behind the website?</th>
<th>Mercy Corps (UK)</th>
<th>Community Albums</th>
<th>The Guardian Katine</th>
<th>Kiva</th>
<th>InsightShare</th>
<th>Video Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>3. Single Purpose NGO</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>A) What kind of New Digital Media is in use?</th>
<th>1. (a, b, c, d, f)</th>
<th>3.(site for sharing video,audio,images)</th>
<th>1. (a,b,f)</th>
<th>1.(a,b, c)</th>
<th>1.(‘share’ option: a,b,c,e,f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. (Main method of communication)</td>
<td>4.(communities comment on each others uploads)</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2. (news &amp; loan updates)</td>
<td>3. (photos, no video)</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (film v limited)</td>
<td>4. (online session for villagers to ‘chat’ w ppl in UK)</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4. (purpose is direct connection)</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| B) How prominent is the use of NDM for communication ? | 1. | 4.(sharing site) | 4. | 4. | 3. | 4. |

<p>| C) Who is creating / | 1. | 3. | 1.(audience presented) | 1. | 1. | 1. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>uploading content?</th>
<th>with entire project: assessment of needs &amp; project objectives for meeting them 2. (comments &amp; questions)</th>
<th>2. (lenders and communities)</th>
<th>3.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D) How frequent are direct community voices presented (quoted in text or speaking in films)</td>
<td>3. 4. 3. (esp in videos, but written content mostly by Guardian)</td>
<td>1. 4. (in films)</td>
<td>4. (in films)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) How are the lives of people in the developing world generally communicated on the site?</td>
<td>1. (mostly personal stories through blogs) 2. 4. Community films 2. 3. (narrated films dominate) 4.</td>
<td>1. 4. (films made by the community)</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) What do images highlight about their subject?</td>
<td>5. 5. 3. (very open &amp; honest, about problems and successes)</td>
<td>5. 5. vulnerabilities presented but communities taking action by making film,</td>
<td>5. (as CA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G) How instrumental is the agency?</td>
<td>4. 2. 4. (Guardian newspaper, Amref aid agency is a subject as much as community)</td>
<td>4. (appears to write borrower profiles)</td>
<td>1. (just provide the skills/tools for community to say what they want)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H) Content theme?</td>
<td>1. 2. 3. (Dominantly solutions, as much by people as by MC 4. (Through blogs) 2. (limited e.g. ‘Hear My Cry’) 4. (whatever is relevant)</td>
<td>1. 2. 3. 4. (Dominant: Whole process open to scrutiny, emph on aid agency solutions more than people)</td>
<td>1. (lending site) 4. (whatever is community priority, e.g. cl/ch–impact on everyday life) 2. (very much advocacy on a particular cause)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<p>| | | | | | |</p>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **I)** Content tone?  
(broadly: positive/ negative) | 1. Strongly positive | 1. Strongly positive | 1./2.  
Very matter of fact | 1.  | 2. (often portraying problems from community PoV, in hope of stimulating change) |
| **J)** Who is the audience? | (1.? Blog appeals more to colleagues?)  
3. | 4. (only communities can comment) | 1.?  
2.?  
3. (Guardian readers)  
4? Certainly Katine community | 3.  | 4.  
(Depends on project)  
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
International community  
Local/national government  
(community choose who to direct to, can be:  
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  |
| **K)** For whose interest / benefit? | 1. | 1.  
(enriching community experience for both) | 1.(learning about development)  
2.(accountability) | 2. | 2.  
(for the people making the films)  |
| **L)** Who moderates web content? | 2. | 4. (community first, then CA) | 2. (the Guardian) | 2. | 4. (community decide video content, I/S responsible for what goes online)  
4. (community create videos, VV creates website) |
| **M)** How far does the website present an empowered image of communities overall? | 5. (emph v strongly on what people are doing to help themselves, blogs express a lot of admiration for the people they work with) | 5. (people actively telling their own story, instantly more empowering) | 4. (real people w real individual problems, context behind their poverty, complexity of everyday life;  
they do pay back; would be more empowering if spoke for  
5. (people explain in their own words & make own suggestions/demands about future)  
5. (people taking action for a cause of their choice)  |
| N) Accountability: Is there any attempt to provide an open platform for better accountability between agency & community? | 1. (no real space for community voice other than quotations) | 2. (can express themselves) | 3. (control over uploads) | 2. (upload videos, articles give residents opinions but usu reported by Guardian – quoted 2nd hand; article & blog comments) | 1. (has been used for M&E w NGOs) | 2. (community have absolute final say on content) | 2. (has been used for M&E w NGOs) | 3. (community have absolute final say on content) |
| Special Features / Initiatives? | X | The CA website itself | The Katine Project website itself | Kiva itself: direct microfinance, from public supporter straight to community. | I/S itself – empowering process communities go through speaking for themselves. | VV itself – process of using digital media/ video & Internet for advocacy |
Code: **Organisation:**

1. Large aid & development NGO
2. Small aid & development NGO
3. Specialised digital media organisation / project

**A)**
1. Social Media (a) Facebook; b) Twitter; c) Youtube; d) Flickr; e) other social network; f) other bookmarking site
2. Blogs
3. Photos/ video/ film footage
4. Interactive features (e.g. maps)

**B)**
1. Linked access / low usage
2. On homepage / integral feature across website
3. Dominant form of communication
4. Purpose of website (using Internet, photos, film & platforms to create direct communication)

**C)**
1. Staff
2. Donors/Public

**D)**
1. Never
2. Sometimes
3. Frequently
4. Heavily

**E)**
1. Success / need stories told by staff
2. Selected quotations from participant interviews
3. Video interviews with participants/ beneficiaries
4. Community’s images / films

**F)**
1. ‘vulnerabilities & fears’ (ICRC Code of Conduct)
2. mostly vulnerabilities & fears
3. A balance/ combination
4. Mostly ‘capacities & aspirations’
5. capacities & aspirations

**G)**
1. Solely platform / technology provider
2. Content watchdog
3. Integral to translation
4. Integral to content

**H)**
1. Appeals for funds
2. Development problems
3. Solutions (Agency or people?)
4. Everyday life / stories

**J)**
1. Aid workers
2. Large-scale donors (bi/multi-laterals)
3. Individual supporters/ general public
4. Other communities

**K)**
1. Audience/ public
2. Subject / community

**L)**
1. No-one
2. Agency/ host org only
3. Community only
4. Combination (Community & Agency)

**M)**
1. Not at all
2. Not very empowering
3. Somewhat empowering
4. Mostly empowering
5. Very empowering

**N)**
1. No
2. Yes – space for community to voice opinion (about agency’s work)
3. Yes – opportunity for community to control the information presented about them.
PARTICIPANTS

14/07/11: Erin Gray, Senior Media/Communications Officer at [Mercy Corps] an International NGO (INGO)

13/07/11 (b): Ken Banks, founder of Kiwanja.net, which provides ICT-related services for NGOs and is responsible for the mobile technology initiative Frontline SMS.

07/07/11: Deputy Head of Advocacy, Policy & Research at a large INGO

15/07/11 (a): David Bainbridge, International Director of Tearfund

12/07/11 (a): Rachel Hastie, Protection Advisor at OxfamGB

13/07/11 (a): Media Manager for Photography and Film at a large INGO

[UshaKar] Operations Manager and [Gareth Benest] Projects Director at Insight Share, an organization specializing in the use of Participatory Video tools. 12/07/11 (b)

21/07/11: Rob May, Co-founder of Community Albums, a music and media communications initiative.

15/07/11 (b): Programme leader at Tactical Technology Collective, an organization which mobilizes information and technology for rights advocacy

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction
- Me
- Interviewee
- Consent & procedures (data collection; voluntary; confidentiality; recording; results)
- Reason for this topic
- ‘New Digital Media’: “the use of new technologies to disseminate information across the Internet in a way that permits direct involvement of the subject in its creation and presentation. Usually more participatory and interactive than ‘traditional media’ (standard research practice of photo/interview presented by researcher, not always direct quotes)

- Aim of research: “I hope to discuss the possibility that new platforms for global communication utilising new digital media may offer an opportunity to drastically change the current relationships between subjects, agencies and audience; however I also wish to interrogate the many pitfalls of such an approach, and assess the motivations for engaging in it.”

- Aim of interview: “To draw on practitioners’ experiences to understand the lessons they have drawn from involvement in research and communications practices, or the introduction of new technologies in their work; and to understand from an agency’s perspective the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet and New Digital Media in portraying the people involved in the work that they do.”

- Process of interviews: stimulating dialogue in the sector (views are part of data and will not be plagiarised)
1) Interviewee
   - A) Role in organisation
   - B) Relationship to: Research, Communications, Technology
   - C) What experience do you have of/ Does your work / your agency involve the use of New Digital Media in the ways outlined above? (who, what, where, when, why and how; results)
     - How are beneficiaries represented? Organisational policy? What is communicated to donor? ‘Direct’ community input?

2) Research (in communications)
   - A) What is usually the purpose of research undertaken by practitioners in your agency?
   - B) In your experience, what is the relationship between research of communities and their empowerment? (/ what are the main deficiencies of current research practices?)
   - C) How do communities normally react to the process of research?
   - D) How would the Internet affect the principle of informed consent?
   - E) Do you think a digital platform, contributed to directly by communities, will create more ownership of the results of the research and the strategies for action?

3) Communications
   - A) Who do imagine would be the audience of such an initiative?
   - B) Do you think information directly created by the community will (be more accurate?;) have any bearing on supporter understanding? Positive or negative? (examples of supporter interest?)
   - C) Does such an approach have the potential to be empowering?
   - D) What consequences might such openness entail for the accountability of the organisation? Positive? Or negative in terms of supporter relations and continuing to be able to assist? Too big a hurdle?
   - E) What are the political implications of agency involvement when communities are assisted to voice their opinion? (experience, examples?)
   - F) Does this contradict agency principles of impartiality?

4) Technology
   - A) What difficulties have you experienced in introducing new technologies to a community?
   - B) What concerns does the Internet currently present - in terms of identity protection? Of personal information feeding back into the community? How can these be protected against
   - C) Would community responsibility for content improve or worsen this?
   - D) How much control of web content might be needed? (and how might this be done?)
- **E)** By providing access to tools, how can agencies maintain sustainable and equal access to new technologies over time?

- **F)** Is the use of digital technology appropriate to addressing development problems? (Is it a ‘western’ intervention that might leach attention from more familiar community-led solutions or is it fulfilling a need to engage with tools familiar to donor world but do this in a better way? Agree / Disagree

**5) Reflections**

- **A)** What does it mean to create more empowering and accountable processes of communication? What do you imagine this might look like?

- **B)** Do you see NDM as a source of potential or as a great challenge? Is it a challenge aid agencies are ready to take on?

- **C)** Any reflections on accountability: for community /or/ for donors demand for aid efficiency? i.e. what is our purpose – is it for the community’s benefit or introducing yet another box to be ticked?

- **D)** Do you believe your agency *would* engage in NDM purely for empowerment of and accountability to communities?