

Communicating *about*
development:
Examining the impact of development
discourse

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October 22, 2016

Some definitions

- **Communication for development (C4D) & Communication for social change (C4SC):** Using communication strategies and tools to promote positive social change
- **Communication about development:** The discourse (typically of outsiders) surrounding development interventions¹

Outline of presentation

1. Issues of communication about development in the news
2. Reasons for problematic coverage
3. A new way forward? The role of academics in changing discourse about development

Communication about development in the news

- Public is exposed to this discourse, even if unintentionally²
- Potential for political disengagement via:
 - Exposure to assumptions about the beneficiaries of aid (e.g., that they are incapable of change)
 - Exposure to assumptions about the potential success of development programs (e.g., that there is little potential for success)
 - Exposure to assumptions about the nature of poverty in certain parts of the world (e.g., that it is inevitable)

Institutional factors influencing news coverage

- Relevance³
- Development is not “new” – takes place over time
- Concern about biased coverage⁴
- Lack of resources; reliance on government⁵

3. Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2, 64-91.

4. Kogen, L. (2012). *Suffering through the news: How the news cover hunger in Africa and at home*. Dissertation.

5. Bennett, W. L. (1990). Toward a theory of press-state relations in the United States. *Journal of Communication*, 40(2), 103-125.

Directions for scholars

1. Analysis of mainstream news media discourse

- How often and under what conditions solutions or positive change are presented
- *Who* is framed as responsible for change
- *What* kinds of solutions are offered (and who benefits)
- *Where* solutions are offered

2. Scholarly evaluation of development projects

- Unbiased position of scholars beneficial for journalists
- Information gathering at little cost
- Solutions journalism

Questions and comments welcome

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