Communicating about development: Examining the impact of development discourse

Lauren Kogen
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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 interventions

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 unintentionally\(^2\)
• 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

• Relevance\(^3\)
• Development is not “new” – takes place over time
• Concern about biased coverage\(^4\)
• Lack of resources; reliance on government\(^5\)

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

Lauren.Kogen@Temple.edu
www.LaurenKogen.com