

Who Gets to Speak?: Access and the Electronic Mass Media in Development
Communications

In a speech to delegates at a 1994 international conference on community media and development sponsored by Australian NGO Community Aid Abroad, Eugenie Aw remarked, "Very often those who talk about the age of information are really talking about the age of transnational culture" (8). By "transnational" Aw, an African who was the Honourary President of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) at the time, refers both to "institutions dealing with a particular development model" and "companies dealing with international trade" (9). She then goes on to assert that the development models presented and promoted by organizations such as the World Bank to the citizens of the "Third World" ultimately treat them as the "object[s] in these models that have been designed by others for us" (9), a view that has been affirmed by Bella Mody (26). Many development models originating from the Western world, as Aw and Mody see it, offer little in the way of empowerment to populations in places such as Latin America, Asia/Pacific, and Africa, not to mention indigenous populations in the industrialized North. The flow of power follows a vertical route that travels only one way, from the Northern top to the Southern bottom, imposing upon the majority of the world's people a highly paternalistic structure comprised of systems, methodologies, and ideologies that are usually not in their best interest. One aspect of development that has proved to play a particularly significant role in fortifying this power structure is communications.

As Article 1 of The Milan Declaration on Communication and Human Rights--a Declaration put together by the members of AMARC--states:

The Right to Communicate is a *universal* [italics mine] human right which serves and underpins all other human rights and which must be preserved and extended in the context of rapidly changing information and communication technologies. (20)

Furthermore, Article 2 contends that "All members of civil society should have just and equitable access to all communications media" (21). Similar declarations to these are made in The MacBride Report (1980) and the People's Communication Charter (2000). In this current age, however, the right to communicate is frequently at odds with the information systems put in place by the corporatized North, systems that control the who, what, where, when, why, and how of information dissemination. In particular, the elites use their electronic mass media to transmit images and sound bytes to communities in developing nations that have little or no utilitarian value to them. Such material may include entertainment or news items that do not reflect the reality of citizens' lives in the non-Industrialized world, and may even serve "to undermine national forms of cultural expression" (Reeves 2). This unidirectional flow of information has become so entrenched in the mass media that it has led to a perpetual cycle of subordination, in which the "underdeveloped" regions have no mechanism to respond to what they are being told by the North and, thus, are denied the ability to give voice to their own representations and to how their lives should be organized..

What is needed is a new approach, a way of looking at and using the mass media that subverts the producer-audience hierarchy--an "emancipatory communication," as Oskar Negt terms it (qtd. in Bruck and Raboy 11), whereby "the objective conditions under which the human being can become more of a subject and can build more autonomous and more comprehensive relationships to reality" are created and fostered (11). Consequently, the flow of communication would no longer be one way; instead, it would flow in many different directions, thus making empowerment a possibility for the disenfranchised. This cannot be accomplished, however, without a re-conceptualization of access, in which access is viewed as an active process rather than a passive one. Access, in this sense, allows citizens of the Third World the opportunity to disrupt oppressive hegemonic structures that are perpetrated and perpetuated by the Northern mass media, especially the electronic mass media. The two specific types of electronic mass media that are most conducive to achieving this access are community radio and the Internet.

True communicative access in the Third World presupposes endogenous development; that is, "the capacity of the people to decide their own future from their own point of view" (Aw). This attitude has been theorized as being part of a so-called "new International Information and Communication Order" (NIICO), which, in turn, has been indoctrinated into an UNESCO initiative titled the NIICO Resolution. Among the most important goals of this resolution are:

- the removal of the internal and external obstacles to a free flow and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and ideas;
- plurality of sources and channels of information;

- the capacity of developing countries to achieve improvement on their own situations, notably by providing their own equipment, by training their personnel, by improving their infrastructures and by making their information and communication means suitable to their needs and aspirations; and
- respect for the right of the public, of ethnic and social groups and of individuals to have access to information sources and to participate actively in the communication process. (Keune 17)

UNESCO recognizes the important role that access can play in development communications. It is the only way that ordinary people can have a voice in our mass media-oriented society, that permits them to become subjects instead of objects and, thus, "gain...social, cultural, and political agency, an increase in expressive possibilities and competencies, and a strengthening of the power to manage one's life within the conditions of society and history" (Bruck and Raboy 11). In short, access is a "reflection of a desire to overcome media inertia" (Berrigan 16).

Given the goals outlined in the NIICO Resolution, one can look at access in two ways:

1. Access can be viewed in terms of *availability*. That is, availability insofar as the tangible structural elements that are necessary for communication to take place are within reach. These elements can be broken down into *funding, technical infrastructure, training and education, and language*;
2. Access can also be viewed in terms of *participation*. This refers to the public's opportunity to be an active agent in the communicative process--to step out of the position of information recipient and step into that of

information contributor. Here, participation can be subdivided into two categories: *feedback* and *production*.

Both of these kinds of access are dependent upon each other, and so consequently both need to exist in order for true pluralistic and egalitarian public involvement in communication to take place. As far as development communications is concerned, without the availability of the structural elements of communication, then participation cannot exist. In turn, without the participation of the masses in the communicative process, then there is no point in making the effort to make these structural elements available to those masses. It is important, then, to ensure that governments and citizens alike recognize this interdependent relationship between these two primary categories of access, and prevent any obstacles from obstructing their individual and combined progress if democratic communication is truly to take place.

Access as Availability

Availability is an issue of the "haves" versus the "have-nots," in which the latter are left with very little to work with because the former monopolize everything. This is not just a North-South issue; it is also due to factors agitating from within developing countries. According to Bella Mody, "continuing internal inequality in wealth and economic resources..., social status..., and political power are causes of continuing fatalism, apathy, and low aspirations among the *have-nots* in countries of the South" (18-19). NGOs will need to focus on making sure that the resources that are not available to the non-elites in these areas of the world become accessible to them, particularly when it comes to communicative structures. As mentioned above, there are several key structural

elements that citizens of these countries will need access to in order to become full participants in the communicative process.

1. *Funding.* Looming over many of these structural elements is the spectre of finances. The availability of adequate funding to initiate projects, purchase equipment, pay staff, and underwrite other expenses is key to the success of development communications initiatives. It is important enough that the committee behind The MacBride Report saw fit to classify funding as a basic need to communication (Article 16). Regardless of whether the money comes from the government, NGOs, or the private sector, funds must be made available to the general populations of developing nations to institute their own communications plans and projects that will be useful to them.
2. *Technical Infrastructure.* For the electronic mass media to work in favour of the communication plans of non-industrialized countries, there must be in place within those countries a solid physical foundation consisting of equipment, wiring, and networks. However, the present situation indicates that a lot of work needs to be done before this can happen, particularly in rural areas. As Bruce Girard noted in 2001, "one third of the world's population has no access to electricity and three quarters has yet to make a telephone call," while "by 2005 the number of U.S. households with highspeed Internet subscriptions is predicted to reach 36 million" (2). Similarly, a 1985 study found that "there were 911 radios per 1,000 inhabitants in the industrialized countries and only 142 in the 'Third World' ones" (Reeves 15). The disparity in technological accessibility between the

North and the South is astonishing. Much of this is a result of economics; the costs of setting up the infrastructure are prohibitive for countries with little money to spend, particularly when they find themselves in such horrendous debt (Mody 17). Yet without this infrastructure, there would be no technical mechanism available with which to communicate.

There are some marginalized communities that manage to make due with what they have, including Native Canadians who used to set up transmitters using, as Evelyne Foy says, "pieces of wire" (IDRC 8); but certainly matters could be facilitated with better infrastructure. It is the most practical concern for access in development communications, and will require immediate attention once any funding is in place.

3. *Training and Education.* Article 8 of the Milan Declaration states that "Access to the means of communication must be supported by education and training to assist a critical understanding of the media and to enable people to develop their media and communication skills" (AMARC:1998 21).

Training, then, is important in the sense that gaining skills in the communications field means putting the power and control of communication into one's own hands. However, the right kind of training programs must be available for successful communication to occur. As Guy Bessette of the International Development Resource Centre (IDRC) contends,

The problem is that people who work with communities have not been properly trained. They are often natural communicators who do the work with lots of good

intentions, but who continue to use a vertical approach which can be summarized as simply transferring information. (IDRC 9)

It is imperative that those from the North who enter the Southern regions for the purpose of training others in communications do not end up reinforcing the same top-down structures that have inhibited them. These trainers must recognize that "people are experts in their own context" (Naughton 80) and, therefore, can become excellent communicators as long as that is taken into account.

Moreover, the availability of general education, specifically in literacy, is paramount. Although certain media such as radio and television do not necessarily require the ability to read, fast-rising technologies such as the Internet will. This will be further explored later on in this paper; for now, though, it must be reiterated that access to education and training programs--including the requisite funding to support them--is absolutely necessary if full participation in communications is to become a reality for developing nations.

4. *Language and Culture.* Because of the Northern dominance of the mass media, information tends to be relayed to the Third World in languages and through cultural idioms that are not those of the audience. As John A. Lent asserts, "Mass media in many Third World nations literally did not use the language of the masses because the language of the former colonial master became the medium used by the press" (32). Therefore, producers of content

for the media "must be aware of cultural differences that might impede communication and understanding" (32). Language and culture are integral to human identity, yet both are frequently taken for granted. Without the representation one's own language or culture in the media, then whole societies risk miscomprehension of vital information or, worse, losing their identities outright. Any development communications strategy must include linguistic diversity and cultural sensitivity. Individuals in developing communities should be able to access information in their own languages and understand it in the context of their own cultures.

Incorporating forms of indigenous folk media into those of the mass media is one potential way of solving this. Lent cites India and Thailand as examples of developing countries where experiments with the folk and mass media have met with some success (42-43). The availability of these idiomatic representations in the mass media aid communication by helping to get important messages out to indigenous populations in languages, signs, and symbols to which they can relate.

The objective behind all of these availabilities is to make information accessible to the masses. Communication in the truest sense of the word becomes possible when people are fully informed, for then they have a greater motivation to respond. C.V. Rajasundaram contends that "motivation is a key element in development communication. The success of a communication programme...depends on motivating people to WANT TO ACT ON THE INFORMATION [caps his]" (18).

People will not have access to any of these available structural elements, however, without the political will of the government to make them available in the first place. Politicians in developing regions have to *want* to fund communications projects. They have to *want* to invest in a communications infrastructure. They have to *want* to allow a diversity of languages and cultures on the airwaves. Enacting a development communications strategy requires political vision, and not every politician is willing to give himself or herself to that. Africa is a case in point. According to Jefkins and Ugboajah, "African politicians, without exception, see the function of the mass media as a significant factor working quite directly to create a new political order in a pluralistic and ethnic society" (198). As a result, governments in many African countries control the flow of information from within and without, the fault of "nationals emerging from colonial influence" (198).

This does not apply to all African countries, of course. For example, Namibia and South Africa have passed legislation that protects and even fosters the development of community radio stations in their countries (AMARC: 1998 1). There are also many other nations in Africa that exhibit similar attitudes towards community broadcasting and the necessary structural elements to make development communications happen. More than just political support is needed, however; average citizens in developing nations must be active in the process, as well. They must be participants in communication. This presupposes that they have access to the mass media.

Access as Participation

Once citizens of the Southern countries have access to the necessary communicative elements, they can begin to work actively on involving themselves in the communication process through greater interactivity. Many international communication rights declarations call for this more self-reliant form of information dissemination, including the Milan Declaration (Article 9) and the UNESCO Declaration of Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, Apartheid and Incitement to War (Articles 2.2 and 2.3). This speaks to Aw's contention that "the present global situation supports the views of those who criticise (sic) the Western model [of development communication] and demand a participatory approach to global development and to global communication" (10). Thus, such participation is crucial to what Everett M. Rogers terms "self-development" for marginalized countries, in which "self-development implies a completely different role for communication than in the usual top-down development approach of the past" (139). Audience members can participate in the communicative process in one of two ways, as previously mentioned: through *feedback* and through *production*.

Feedback, according to Josiane Jouët, "implies interaction between producers and receivers through regular feedback systems, participation by the audience during programme transmissions and the 'right to comment and criticise (sic)'" (Lewis and Booth 182). Thus, audience members can verbally respond to what they are viewing or listening to, adding information or opinions to the media mix, thereby creating a dialogue between the producers and receivers that puts both groups on an equal footing. This aligns itself with Paulo Freire's theory on the "pedagogy of the oppressed," in which "the

teacher (media producer) is no longer the authority, but a learner-cum teacher" (Mody 27). It is essentially a two-way street of communication, though the parties involved are driving different cars, so to speak.

In the developing world, this kind of accessibility can take different forms. Media production centres, for example, can allow and enable audience members to walk into the studio to make their views known. There are more social forms, as well. These include "farm forums (sic)" in India, where organized groups of farmers meet in each other's homes to listen to broadcasts and discuss them (Lewis and Booth 167). There are also radio clubs in Franco-Africa, which involve club members sending back the group's view on certain problems, recording their discussions, or sometimes even producing their own programmes (168). This latter activity overlaps into the second category of participation, *production*.

Production takes the democratic process of communication one step further. It incorporates not just a verbal participation, but a physical one, as well. This is especially applicable in the electronic mass media, which are much more hands-on, technical kinds of media than others. Consequently, this means that ordinary people living in a subordinated state can have access to production tools to put together programming on their own and have their voices heard on the airwaves (Berrigan 17). Furthermore, these citizens can also be active in the management and administration of their local media production centres on a communal level, so that control of information creation and dissemination, as well as decision-making that affects them (17), remain in the hands of the people rather than the government.

This approach does not offer a clear delineation between broadcasters and receivers; instead, the relationship should be redefined as that between, as René Berger calls it, "intercasters" (Berrigan 16). Instead of even a two-way street, then, we can view this approach as a completely open, flexible space in which there exists the possibility of a multi-directional flow of information. It is very much in keeping with a poststructural perspective on power dynamics, particularly that of Michel Foucault. Indeed, a theme that runs through much of his work is the idea that power is in a constant state of flux and, therefore, unstable. For example, in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* series, Foucault asserts that power should be viewed as a "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (92). Although Foucault is speaking specifically in reference to power and definitions of gender, his theory fits in perfectly with the access concept of development communication. By giving the disenfranchised citizens of the Third World full access to the modes and tools of communication, empowerment becomes a constantly shifting process where no one person controls everything, yet everyone has the opportunity to control something. The hegemonic structures that the North has imposed upon the rest of the world can then be subsequently thrown off kilter and opens up the possibility of resistance to elitist corporate and governmental domination. As Aw contends, "If we want to be really powerful we have to walk into visibility and...communication and create information to share our own vision and our own knowledge, from our own experience" (11). The two best modes of electronic media that allow for the kind of accessibility that could lead to such empowerment in the Southern regions of the world are community radio and the Internet.

Community Radio

The year 2001 is significant in terms of communications, as it marks the one hundredth birthday of radio. Within those one hundred years, we have seen radio grow from its humble, scratchy beginnings with Marconi and company to a powerful worldwide force in the dissemination of information and culture. However, in the past thirty years or so, radio has lost some of its influence in the communications technology scene. In terms of development communications, this can be attributed at least in part to the rise of television, which the elites in the countries of the South have encouraged (Mody 24). Despite this apparent changing of the guard, radio still plays a prominent role in the communications process. According to statistical data compiled by Koen Dittrich on various United Nations Human Development Indicators as they pertain to ACP countries--a loose conglomeration of seventy-one developing nations in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific--radio still has a much higher penetration at 28 radio receivers per 100 people than television does at 10.4 per 100 people (Communex 2).

The still-prolific nature of radio in these regions makes it the ideal electronic mass medium for enacting a proper development communications strategy, particularly given the overwhelming expense of television in comparison (Rajasundaram 44). Specifically, those advocating and involved in the planning of such strategies should focus their attention on community radio, which offers the greatest possibility for ordinary people to gain full access to the communicative process. This medium is said to have begun its existence in Latin America in the 1940's, according to Rafael Roncagliolo, "when Radio

Sutatenza was created in Columbia" (174). What distinguishes it from other media "is its commitment to community participation at all levels" (Girard: 1992 2).

Indeed, community radio offers many advantages over other forms of electronic mass media, especially corporate forms. One must first take a look at radio in general to see its superiority in terms of its applicability to development communications with respect to access. Rajasundaram lays out several reasons for this superiority in his *Manual of Development Communications*, including: the *oral nature of radio*, which is obviously of most use to the non-literate that comprise much of the South's population base; its *emotional resonance*, which reflects a basic element of humanity that is shared and understood across cultures and regions; and its *low expense* in comparison to other media, which has already been discussed (42-44).

Community radio adds further advantages on top of these. Primary to this in terms of access is the kind of multi-directional involvement community stations offer to common people that corporate and state radio stations cannot. As Girard explains, "[C]ommunity radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors, evaluators and even the owners of the stations" (Girard: 1992 2). What this does, in effect, is ground communications at the local level, thereby putting control of communications into the hands of the people instead of governmental or commercial interests. Thus, community radio permits the issues discussed to remain localized; so too the perspectives given and the languages spoken. Girard cites Latin America as a successful example of this. Most radio programs there are produced locally or nationally, while an indigenous language called Quechua can be heard regularly on Peruvian radio, but not on television (2001 3). In South Africa, community radio started to take the country by storm as the apartheid

system crumbled into dust. Bush Radio, Radio Zibonele, and Radio Pretoria all planted themselves firmly within their communities and have been active sites for local production and community involvement in information gathering and dissemination (Naughton 79-81).

The picture is not all happy for community radio. There are certain obstacles that can hinder the successful implementation and maintenance of some stations. Management structure can be troublesome, for starters. John L. Hochheimer, paraphrasing Karol Jakubowicz, notes that, although access leads to democratic participation, "inherent in the difficulties of attempting to establish and maintain democratically-based media is the problem of what constitutes a 'communicative democracy' and how to realize one in practice" (3). The key difficulties he outlines are too numerous to mention here in detail, but in essence they deal with questions like "who is serving whom" (5)? "Who decides what voices are legitimate" (7)? "How does a democratically-instituted managerial hierarchy come to be" (10)? And "how should entrenched power relations be dealt with" (9)? It appears that some community radio stations can be just as vulnerable to hegemonic power structures as the elitist-dominated societies they are trying to escape.

Another problem that many community stations must deal with is the lack of access to the radio spectrum. This is one of those technical infrastructural elements that everyone should have access to, but does not. The culprit behind this blockage is the American government, who wishes to limit the number of available frequencies in the Third World because it does not want to "impair her military communications flexibility" (Jefkins and Ugboajah 208). In trying to escape American media domination, many

developing countries end up hitting an unexpected brick wall, one that is tremendously difficult to knock down. The governments of these countries need to stand up for their sovereign rights to gain a piece of the spectrum pie so that more indigenous radio stations can be established.

These governments, however, can also be part of the problem. Some states do not feel comfortable with the presence of these stations that give their citizens such a strong voice. As Lewis and Booth observe with respect to the situation in Africa, "locally-controlled radio production can create troublesome pressure from the periphery on the centre, and has rarely been allowed by African governments" (171). Homa Bay Community Radio in Kenya exemplifies this difficulty. This station was initially established by UNESCO in concert with the government's plan for development; however, the programmers at the station began to raise issues concerning family planning and other socio-political matters, which created some tension in conservative Kenya. The Kenyan government closed the station down soon after (171-172).

Community radio, like any media, has its share of problems. However, its unique participatory nature makes it something worth pursuing and preserving. NGOs and pro-indigenously-controlled communication advocates need to pressure governments in both the North and the South to loosen the rules on broadcasting regulations that hinder the development of and access to local community-based radio stations, and even to go further than that and actively encourage and foster their proliferation. Citizens with a voice are much more useful to themselves than those voices imposed upon them from the outside. Such access can be a pathway to empowerment. This is true as much for the Internet as it is for community radio.

The Internet

The impact of the Internet's presence in the communications field has been astounding. Although it has existed for approximately twenty years, its ascension into the daily fabric of human existence within the last decade of the twentieth century has been unexpectedly lightning quick. It is a medium that cannot be ignored; it has been socialized into our future vision of the world in a communications context, and so we must acknowledge its existence and try to work within the parameters it has set out for us as best we can.

The Internet has some important ramifications for development communications as far as access is concerned. More so than community radio, the Internet provides the opportunity for as many voices and perspectives to be heard as there are people living on this planet. In theory, it is the most democratic of all electronic mass media. As Hawisher and Selfe write,

the global network is portrayed as a culturally-neutral medium built to support a larger global community, one that transcends the problems of race, geopolitical borders, national interest, and culturally specific values that hinder communication, free exchange, and shared understanding.

(8)

Thus, everyone is supposed to have an equal voice on the Internet. That means that people in the developing world should have as much say in their own affairs through this medium as would anyone in the industrialized nations.

According to Phillippe Béchamp, there are four main reasons to get hooked on to the Internet:

1. *To obtain* information;
2. *To share* information and resources;
3. *To exchange* materials; and
4. *To produce* websites and other new media materials that display information.

(34)

This ability to access information and circulate it so readily makes everyone on the Internet both subject and object simultaneously. Hierarchy as far as the Internet is concerned should not exist. Furthermore, time is irrelevant in the world of new media, as information can be accessed in "real-time" or asynchronously (Samarajiva 4). Thus, individuals in developing countries would not have to feel that they are missing out on something, but the information will still be there at any given time, if not on one particular website, then certainly on another. As Girard points out, the Internet is "a store of useful knowledge and among its 300 million pages there is a substantial amount of information relevant to development issues" (4). This is most likely why the right to access "Cyberspace" is included in the People's Communication Charter text (Article 12).

An example of how the Internet can work positively for a developing community is the tiny Pacific island nation of Palau. Here, as Karla Saari Kitalong and Tino Kitalong describe it, Palauans, who gained their independence in 1994, built a very strong sense of community and identity via the Internet following the collapse of a major bridge in 1996. This tragedy galvanized Palauans, both resident and ex-patriate, around the world. By using the Internet to post websites and to create discussion groups to talk

about the disaster, Palauans from within and without built a much stronger sense of national identity and pride in their culture than American websites such as that of the Discovery Channel would allow them. Palauans were able to exchange information and talk with and console each other about the collapse in a collective way through the Internet, which then inspired Palauans to take further action on other issues, such as battling against a prostitution ring that was discovered operating in the islands. This has helped Palau to reaffirm and, indeed, strengthen its status as an independent state (95-113). The very idea of Internet usage and what it can do for communication and national identity puts a whole new spin on Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined nations (59).

As with community radio, however, the use of the Internet for development communication does have its drawbacks. Much of this has to do with problems of infrastructure. Rohan Samarajiva says that "an overwhelming majority of people living in developing countries...are not connected to any form of electronic network..." (1). Cesare Ottolini backs this up by noting that, in 1997, "The Third World [was]...participating with a mere 3 per cent, while the USA accounts for about 60 percent of all the Internet hosts" (345). Moreover, "[i]n many developing countries, full Internet connections, with all services, are available only in capital cities" (345), which marginalizes the rural communities even further. Ottolini attributes this inadequacy to the lack of three prerequisites for Internet connectivity in the South: "a telephone connection, a computer and modem, and electricity" (345). Without the proper technical set-up available, access to the Internet will not be a reality for most of the world's citizenry for a very long time.

This disparity between the have and have-not countries also leads to fears that the Internet is merely another colonial domain. Hawisher and Selfe warn that "American users seldom notice or question the use of English as the primary language of the web (9), while "many cultural groups...may consider computer technology a negative influence on the quality of their lives, language use, identity formation, and cultural practices" (9). The dominance of Western influence on Internet content and their incongruity with the literacy practices of developing countries could have a negative impact on those countries in terms of how their populations are depicted, what the quality of the information is, and whether or not that information is relevant to them.

Again, as with community radio, NGOs and development communication advocates must push governments to invest in the infrastructure for the Internet and give free access to their citizens. This should lead to greater amounts of online indigenous information production to counter the dominance of Anglo-American content on the World Wide Web. Just as with any such communicative undertaking, there has to be at least a modicum of support from the government to allow any of this to happen. Should governments in the South actively pursue this endeavour, their citizens will be that much closer to achieving some semblance of equality in a global context.

Conclusion

The concept of access with respect to development communications is important because it empowers individuals by blowing apart the barriers between subject and object. Power structures are destabilized, thus providing these individuals with the opportunity to have their points of view--their voices--heard. It then becomes possible to

resist the Northern domination of information flow, that which descends from the top to the bottom, and reverse it. In terms of the electronic mass media, community radio and the Internet come closest to offering this kind of pluralistic, multi-directional access to developing communities. The governments overseeing these communities should make the effort to improve this kind of access if they wish to pull themselves out of the cycle of information marginalization which has greater consequences for other aspects of their societies.

Looking towards the future, it is possible to see the fusion between community radio and the Internet as a potential means for greater accessibility in the context of development communications. Girard calls this "Next Generation Radio," and essentially synthesizes the best aspect of community radio and the Internet: their "ability to involve communities and individuals in an interactive communication process" (4). Already, there are several projects that are experimenting with this, including the UNESCO-supported Kotmale Internet Project in Sri Lanka and AMARC's Moebius website. These projects combine radio broadcasting with direct online interactivity and, as Girard puts it, make "*useful information meaningful*" (8). This is exactly what development communications should be striving for.

In the end, though, "making useful information meaningful" is not about the technology. The technology is actually secondary to the process. Aw notes that, "Today, when the technological means of doing something exists, that technology becomes the message. We forget that technology is only *a way* to present information" [italics mine] (10). McLuhan's legendary maxim "the medium is the message," then, does not and should not apply to development communications, lest it reduce human beings living in

the South to a lifetime of stereotypes. Development communications is really all about a person's ideas, and his or her right and ability to voice them. Still, technology certainly does go a long way to helping people around the world from all walks of life spread their messages around--as long as they have access to it, that is.

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