

Development communication: an alternative growth and development measurement tool

Abstract: Sustainable development discourse arose to point us to the indiscrete use of earth's resources. Focusing on stemming the tide away from so-called developments that are short-term and reactive without recourse to the long-run implications of them. The use of GDP as the universal standard for assessing the overall progress of a nation, when it does not measure the welfare and social well-being of a nation's population is indicative of the era when sustainable development had not yet entered the development dictum. Scholars insist that Gross domestic product was not originally designed to measure overall national progress and well-being but only economic activities. Hence this has given birth to the Beyond GDP scholars crossing disciplinary boundaries who insist that the time for a substitute measurement tool is now. Development communication came to be due to a reverse turn in development initiatives by Official development actors ODA which was without consideration to involve those who would be the beneficiaries of those projects and as such most of the projects were a failure. Now development communication would point us to the right approach to development. This study focuses on taking the lessons provided by the turn by development actors to engage in participatory communication for development as evidence to propose a new direction for measuring national progress as against the overall GDP instrument. An interdisciplinary approach to more accurate measurement tools, to which the development communication discipline makes an ample contribution.

Keywords: GDP, Sustainability, C4D, ODA, Development, Wellbeing, Measurements.

Összefoglalás: A fenntartható fejlődésről szóló diskurzus azért született, hogy felhívja a figyelmet a Föld erőforrásainak gátlástalan kizsákmányolására. Arra összpontosítva, hogy megfékezzük az olyan úgynevezett fejlesztéseket,

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[1] Schmelzer, M. (2016): The Hegemony of Growth. In: *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Economic Growth Paradigm*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

amelyek rövid távúak és reaktívak, anélkül azonban, hogy azok hosszú távú következményeit figyelembe vennénk. A GDP használata egy nemzet általános fejlődésének értékelésére szolgáló univerzális mérceként, amikor az nem a nemzet lakosságának jólétét és szociális jólétét méri, akkor azt a korszakot jelzi, amikor a fenntartható fejlődés még nem került be a fejlesztési diktátumba. A tudósok ragaszkodnak ahhoz, hogy a bruttó hazai termék eredetileg nem az általános nemzeti fejlődés és jólét, hanem csak a gazdasági tevékenységek mérésére szolgált. Ezért léptek színre a Beyond GDP (GDP-n túli GDP) tudományos határokat átlépő tudósok, akik ragaszkodnak ahhoz, hogy most van itt az ideje egy helyettesítő mérőeszköz bevezetésének. A fejlesztési kommunikáció fogalma a hivatalos fejlesztési szereplők (ODA) fejlesztési kezdeményezéseiben bekövetkezett fordulat következtében jött létre, amely nem vette figyelembe, hogy bevonja azokat, akik a projektek kedvezményezettjei lesznek, és így a legtöbb projekt kudarcot vallott. A fejlesztési kommunikáció most a fejlesztés helyes megközelítését mutatná meg nekünk. A jelen tanulmány arra összpontosít, hogy a fejlesztési szereplők részvételi kommunikációra való áttérésének tanulságait felhasználva új irányt javasoljon a nemzetek fejlődésének mérésére az általános GDP-eszközzel szemben. Ez a pontosabb mérőeszközök interdiszciplináris megközelítése, amelyhez a fejlesztési kommunikáció tudományága bőségesen járul hozzá.

Kulcsszavak: GDP, fenntarthatóság, C4D, ODA, fejlesztés, jólét, mérések.

Introduction

Gross Domestic product as the paradigm for measuring modern growth dates back to the intensive capitalist industrialization of the 18th century developing in three stages [1] followed by the political reaction to the great depression in the 1920/30s and third the post-Second World War reconstruction. It was adopted as the primary measurement of countries' economies at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 when the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were created.¹

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/archive/history/exhibits/Bretton-Woods-and-the-Birth-of-the-World-Bank> (Accessed October 21 2024)

The challenges associated with it go back to the period of its adoption, Kuznets its architect gave a warning note that it is inadequate in gauging the welfare of a nation, and Policymakers seemed to be hasty for an easy way to justify their policies and would rather decide on what is easy than what is right became hooked on using GDP as the measurement for everything even though it was only supposed to measure economic activities like market production with monetary valuation of things which are priced and marketed [2, 3, 4]. It hinges on a faulty foundation of competitive rivalry between the communists and capitalists during the Cold War period; Khrushchev Nikita the Soviet communist leader proclaimed in 1958 that "Growth of industrial and agricultural production is the battering ram with which we shall smash the capitalist system" [1]. However, in 1968; 24 years after the adoption of GDP by the International Monetary Fund, J. F. Kennedy during his campaign at the University of Kansas strongly criticized GDP emphasizing that it measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile. The worthwhile things are such as having no prices like government-sponsored free health insurance, social harmony, community capital, natural resources, household child-care housewife services, and more.

The duo emphasized that with such huge limitations identified, we had carried on applying GDP as the gospel indicator for measuring a nation's success. Remaining the most globally accepted statistical indicator for measuring economic activities.

Other services not measured are related to volunteering for charities, a huge part of civil society success; company's CSR activities that could drive community and societal stability, and illegitimate transactions where industries like drugs and trafficking are undeniably huge income earners for perpetrators. Doing the easy but not the right thing informed the generalized use of GDP for measuring everything. Stiglitz et al. [5] make a case for GDP as not being wrong in itself, however, application has been the bane of it; incorrect use. The criticisms that have trailed this wrong use go back to the vocalizations that Kenedy began to pay to it, another is the reference to the turn made by the 4th king of Bhutan; Jigme Singye Wangchuk who declared at the UN assembly that he is adopting GNP-Gross National Happiness for measuring his country progress 1972, which validates Kennedy's

[1] Schmelzer, M. (2016): The Hegemony of Growth. In: *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Economic Growth Paradigm*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[2] Banerjee, A. V.–Duflo, E. (2019): *Good economics for hard times*. Juggernaut Books.

[3] Kapoor, A.–Debroy, B. (2019). GDP is not a measure of human well-being. *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2019/10/gdp-is-not-a-measure-of-human-wellbeing>

[4] Kubiszewski, I.–Costanza, R.–Franco, C.–Lawn, P.–Talberth, J.–Jackson, T. –Aylmer, C. (2013): Beyond GDP: Measuring and achieving global genuine progress. *Ecological Economics*, 93., pp. 57–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2013.04.019>

[5] Stiglitz, J. E.–Sen, A.–Fitoussi, J. (2010): *Mismeasuring our lives, why GDP does not add up*. Book well Publications.

[1] Schmelzer, M. (2016): The Hegemony of Growth. In: *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Economic Growth Paradigm*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Kaufmann, R.–Barth, J.–Steffens, L.–Le Lannou, L.–A.–Gerer, A.–Kiecker, S. (2023): *Mainstreaming wellbeing and sustainability in policymaking: technical and governance levers out of the institutional GDP lock-in*. Cologne: ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies.

reference to the things that are worthwhile not represented in GDP. Why appropriate everything that matters most with a fraction of it?

These examples mark the beginning of the Beyond GDP turn which has brought about the introduction of other measuring tools like (Beyond GDP Metrics, Green growth/GDP, measurement convergence, impart assessment tools, SEEA, System of Environmental Economics Accounting, SGNA System of Global and National Accounts-comprising environment society economy and distribution, Human Development HD) indicative of the existence of other progress Indicators, but they face severe challenges in overcoming the intellectual and institutional lock-in of GDP and a lack of methodological consensus. [6, 1].

Just like the reverse trajectory that gave birth to sustainable development which has garnered global partnerships where the affluent adopt lifestyles within the planet's ecological means (Brundtland 1987) as a result of evidence that created this need, Communication for Development or Development Communication paradigm to check Official Development Agencies development interventions in developing countries which where largely unsuccessful due to the lack of stakeholder engagements. C4D became the participatory initiative to ensure project success.

Apart from ODA, governments especially in developing countries were/are guilty of this method of development as well which adopted a diffusion hypodermic needle system of information spread that assumed that populations would adapt information shared through the mass communication channels, this was only assumptive as the results will later show. The success of participatory communication in motivating development is why communication for development qualifies to join the growth measurement hopefuls to substitute for GDP. Stakeholder engagement is the strength of development communication and qualifies it for a place as an instrument for national progress measurement. However conceptual challenges yet beguile communication for development paradigm as expressed both in theorization by scholars and implementation by development actors. Achieving a sustainable future is dependent on getting the right measurement tool, and since development communication is an undeniable development measure, it deserves systemic attention and adaptation.

Methodology

The research adopts a systematic literature review (SLR), designed to synthesize meaningful knowledge from a cross-section of studies, suitable also for studies that are interdisciplinary like the topic in question. Following a systematic transparent, and reproducible process for identifying academic literature about a clearly defined topic or research question [7, 8]. In their paper Fisch and Block recommend following the six-step process which includes the motivation of the topic by stating the research question, systematically identifying relevant literature, choosing a balance between length and breadth, focusing on related concepts, and deriving a meaningful conclusion following a coherent structure. The search triangulated across titles with GDP, well-being and development communication, and sustainable development.

Two questions are identified in this research the first is; (1) Why have we continued to use GDP as the global measurement tool? Measurements are supposed to help us set performance indicators, which should help to identify progress. Going by several calls for more salient ways of measuring national growth, the present common GDP for measuring growth has long moved into the rhetoric zone. It has outlived its purpose which was in the words of Khrushchev for communists to smash capitalism and vice versa. Following the above the study identifies ease and the challenge of lock-in as the reason for the reluctance to adopt other measurement tools that have been identified and proposed by other disciplines.

Can development for communication discipline have its own measurement paradigm that can be adopted as a global measurement indicator?

The Search for Alternative Measurements

The session examines scholarly proposals and alternatives for the measurement of national progress. Immanuel Kant's insistence that there is no such thing as a good theory that doesn't work in practice (cited in [9]) is a compass to access the practicability of countries' GDP display in comparison to their well-being and poverty levels.

[7] Fisch, C.–Block, Joerc H. (2018): Six Tips for your (systemic) literature review in business and management research. *Management Review Quarterly*, 68., (2), pp. 103–106. DOI: 10.1007/s11301-018-0142-x

[8] Clark, W. R.–Clark, L. A.–Raffo, D. M.–William, Jr. R. I., (2020): Extending Fisch and Block's. (2018) Tip for a Systematic Review in Management and Business Literature. *Management Review Quarterly*, 71. (1.). DOI: 10.1007/s11301-020-00184-8

[9] Black, J. K. (1977): Development and Modernization Theory: a critical review. *CrossCurrents*, 27., (1.), pp. 41–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24458299>

[10] Ranis, G.–Stewart, F.–Ramirez, A. (2000): Economic Growth and Human Development. *World Development*, 28., (2.), pp. 197–219. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(99\)00131-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(99)00131-X).

[11] O'Donovan, N., (2024): Turning less into more: Measuring real GDP growth in the green transition. *Ecological Economics*, 224., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2024.108293>.

[12] Stjepanović, S.–Tomić, D.–Škare, M. (2022): A new database on Green GDP; 1970–2019: a framework for assessing the green economy. *Oeconomia Copernicana*, 13., (4.), pp. 949–975. [doi:10.24136/oc.2022.027](https://doi.org/10.24136/oc.2022.027)

The Brundtland Commission believes that widespread poverty is not only an evil in itself, but sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life. A world in which poverty is endemic which misappropriated measurement promotes, will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes. [10] When levels of poverty in a country are high, either because per capita income is low or badly distributed, then there is a problem. They proposed Human Development defined as enlarging people's choices in a way that enables them to lead longer, healthier, and fuller lives as the central objective of human activity and economic growth, and a potentially important instrument for advancing it. While this two-way relationship between HD and EG may now be widely accepted, the specific factors linking them have not been systematically explored.

Nor has the question of priorities in the phasing of policy. They decry that in policy phasing assumption that EG takes precedence over progress on HD, they insist that human development should be given sequencing priority. [11] Examines how tensions between the pursuit of growth and the pursuit of sustainability might be reduced using conceptual resources drawn from established approaches to national accounting and GDP. Using data from 1970 to 2019, Stjepanović–Tomić–Škare [12] examine the convergence of Green GDP and the presence of convergence clubs for 160 nations worldwide.

They present Green GDP as an alternative measure of a country's economic activity that incorporates correcting numbers for environmental degradation, exploitation of natural resources, and waste production. As a result, the legislation aims to adjust the current GDP to address these vital environmental factors. The challenge of escalating global pollution, and expanding environmental effects, examining economic activity to include all significant aspects is crucial. Green GDP is a metric that corrects the traditional GDP and provides a new picture of economic growth and development.

Creating a positive association of stringent ecological policy with the growth of Green GDP indicates that proactive policy measures towards the environment are not only helpful for the environment but also raise better economic conditions in the long run [12]. As part of their results, utilizing each country's GDP as the observed parameter reveals the existence of ten clustering clubs; however, when Green GDP is employed as the observed parameter, only nine clustering clubs are identified common language.

Others are the System of Global and National Accounts (SGNA). The SGNA has four system accounts (environment, society, economy, and distribution), which describe how the systems are developing.

However, this does not yet tell people whether the developments are good or bad [13]. More measurements exist than the allowed space for the study

Communication for Development as an Alternative Progress Measurement Tool

Development communication is essentially about the deliberate use of communication to promote development [14]. As simple and straightforward as this definition seems in settling the salience of communication for more sustained development, conceptual challenges are an obstacle to reaching a consensus. Among other issues, unequal power relations impact psycho-socially in manifestation regarding the two main terms that make up the concept of development for communication. Conceptual parochialism in the way that development has been viewed as modernization. Black [9] takes a swipe at Western scholarly perspectives on their conceptualization of development from a modernization perspective as ethnocentric.

The dichotomy of developed and underdeveloped nations as seen from the lenses of modernization and GDP measurement gave room for emotional detachment and gave the further advantage of maintaining *that we are examining a phenomenon too complex for the poor and uneducated to understand* [9]. The power relations also is the foundation of interplay in the communication aspect of the dictum. Identified in vertical communication, with inherent characteristics unsuitable for effective communication. A presumptive superiority; manifests itself in certain characteristics which Gálvez-Casanova [15] explain as (1) the presumptions that the sender holds all the necessary knowledge for the ongoing communication (2) the sender has information that the receiver does not have (3) because the message is sent through channels holding codes common to the sender and the receiver that the message has been effectively communicated. Also the age-long admonition by Bernard Shaw that the biggest error in Communication is the assumption that it has taken place.

[9] Black, J. K. (1977): Development and Modernization Theory: a critical review. *CrossCurrents*, 27., (1.), pp. 41–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24458299>

[13] Hoekstra, R. (2019): Replacing GDP by 2030. In: *Replacing GDP by 2030: Towards a Common Language for the Well-Being and Sustainability Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[14] Odoom, D. (2020): Understanding Development Communication: A Review of Selected Literature. EHASS by Noyam Publishers. pp. 37–48. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2020054> [Accessed: Nov 17, 2024].

[15] Gálvez, R. O.–Casanova, J. V. (2019): *Voices with Purpose; A Manual on Communication Strategies for Development and Social Change*. Windhoek: Freidrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Fesmedia Africa.

[16] Ibid

[17] Inyang, M. J. P.–Alegu, J. C.–Maku, B. S. (2020): Development Communication Process and Theories: An Overview. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 3., (1.), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3883592>

[18] Mefalopulos P. (2008): *Development Communication Sourcebook: broadening the boundaries of communication*. Washington DC.: The World Bank.

[19] Todaro, M. P.–Smith, S. C. (2015): *Economic development*. 12th Edition. New Jersey.

[20] Moemeka, A. A. (1989): Perspective on development communication. *Africa Media Review*. 3., (3.).

This assumption is inevitably obvious in the assumptive one-way traffic of information sharing when the intent is for a two-way sending and feedback between the sender and receiver. Mindfulness is required for communication to be established, it helps the communication expert avoid unintended consequences which are the bane of communication errors [16].

Regardless of the misinterpretations of these terms that make up Communication for Development; correct application can make for the best solution to development dilemmas and progress measurements. The first challenge of development tackled by communication for development is that projects mindfully superintended via development communication would not have been misappropriated, rejected, abandoned, or avoided by the beneficiaries because the communication stages of the project are grounded in the needs assessment. Because of the role of ownership in the project conceptualization.

Historically grounded in the post-World War 11 rebuilding of nations and the United Nations Organization and development initiative for developing nations. Intervention failures led to the advocacy for the participatory aspect of effective communication for development an indication of fluidity of the concept and its grounding as a discipline of its own. Noted to have been conceived by Childers of the UNDP in the 1960s. He posits that development programs would be successful if done with development support communication with communication experts at the core of the mobilization of the beneficiaries of the proposed projects.

Communication for Development is a sustainability-driven approach which accounts for why scholars of the concept are mostly all caught up in sustainability discourse [17]. According to Mefalopulos [18], its interdisciplinary nature makes development communication an extremely effective cross-cutting investigative tool, making a difference in enhancing project results and sustainability.

Development from the lenses of development communication scholars is a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, *culminating* in the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty [19]. Moemeka [20] calls it “a change for the better in human, cultural, socio-economic and political conditions of the individual and consequently of the society”.

For Israel (2018) it is a process that creates growth, progress, and positive change, *with evidence* of physical, economic, environmental, social, and demographic components". Similar to the position of Inyang et al. [21] "a process of positive change, transformation or improvement of the overall wellbeing of an individual, a people, nation or society at large." A popular proverb, 'experience is the best teacher' by Julius Caesar, comes apt to justify the following definitions from ODAs. It is necessary to understand development communication from the perspectives of this group because they learned from experiencing the failure that comes with imposing development on a population. A form of conceptual parochialism, led to the reversal and embracing of communication for development. According to the World Bank [22], it refers to the integration of strategic communication in development processes, and programs based on a strong understanding of indigenous realities. Through the creation of mechanisms to broaden public access to information on reforms; strengthening clients' ability to listen to their constituencies and negotiate with stakeholders. FAO [23] conceives it as a social process, intentionally designed to seek a common understanding among all the participants of a development initiative, to create a basis for concerted action. That assists with dealing with social processes based on dialogue using a wide range of tools and methods. To seek change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating, and learning for sustained and meaningful change.

The various areas of intervention and the applications of development communication go beyond the traditional notion of behavior change [24].

Development communication is concerned with using communication to change or improve the lives of people it plays a very significant role in explaining the development process to the common people in such a way that it finds acceptance [14]. Development communication is concerned with the dissemination of relevant information that increases people's stock of knowledge and changes their attitudes and values to enable them to undertake and participate in their development process [25].

Inyang Alegu and Maku [17] outline some operational core attributes of C4D as Responsiveness, democratic participation, common ground, education, and simple and relevant language. in addition to these, I identify value orientation, ownership protection, and maintenance

[14] Odoom, D. (2020): Understanding Development Communication: A Review of Selected Literature. EHASS by Noyam Publishers. pp. 37–48. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2020054> [accessed Nov 17, 2024].

[17] Inyang, M. J. P.–Alegu, J. C.–Maku, B. S. (2020): Development Communication Process and Theories: An Overview. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 3., (1.), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3883592>

[21] Inyang, M. P.–Alegu, J. C.–Iorlaha, L. Y.–Adelaja, K. I.–Maku, B. S. (2019): *Fundamentals of development communication and national development*. Abakiliki: Mcee Graphics Nig.

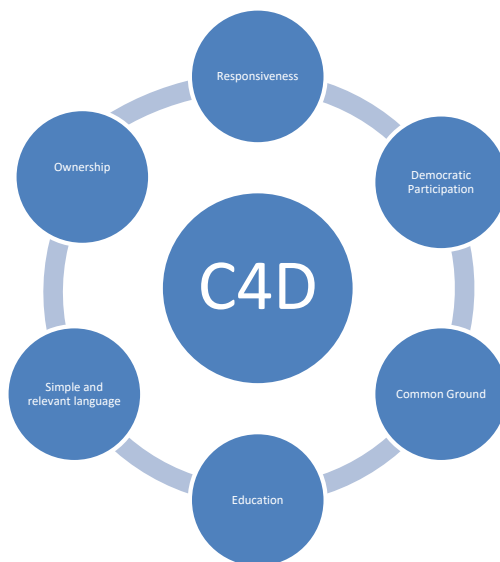
[22] The World Bank (2006): *Information and Communication for Development 2006*. Washington, D. C.: World Bank.

[23] FAO (1984): *Expert Consultation on Communication for Development*. Rome: FAO.

[24] UNICEF (1999): Towards better programming. A handbook on behavior development communication in Water and Environmental Sanitation Programmes. Unpublished document, *UNICEF WES Technical Guidelines Series*, 4., Programme Division Guideline Series, New York.

[25] Anaeto, S. G.–Solo-Anaeto, M. (2010): *Development communication: Principles and practice*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.

Figure 1. Attributes of Communication for Development



Conclusion

The important place of progress measurement for growth cannot be overemphasized, results of measurements show where the present state of things so that improvement plans can be made. It however is a big challenge when the measurement tool does not measure what is relevant, then there can be no room for improvement. A real commitment to a sustainable future is to insist on using the right measurement tools to gauge the state of growth. While there is no existing research calling for development communications systems to be developed as an alternative measurement tool for measuring the progress of a nation. The concept and its attributes which are stakeholder-centered are suitable to be adapted into such a measurement tool for more sustainable growth measurements. GDP does not measure worthwhile things. It is time to begin to adopt the right tool for the right things. The attributes of development for communication puts it in the class of providing instruments of measurement.