

Localizing UNSCR1325 through grassroots communication in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effectiveness of a *communication strategy* aimed at promoting the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) initiated by the New York based International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC) in Sierra Leone. The paper aims to share results of a broader IWTC commissioned evaluation (which included projects in Uganda) carried out in Feb – April 2009. Four levels of analysis are pursued here: *a) the media choices and rationale* i.e. community radio; *b) content* – radio drama series on UNSCR1325; *c) processes* – the nature of participatory and public deliberative processes involved and *d) Outcomes*. The aim is to examine the individual *impact* and interrelationships between the focal community of interest, i.e.: *a) women's peace advocacy organizations; b) responses from the main stakeholder institutions¹ and d) the general public* studied within the complex local and national political, socio-cultural and legal frames and context. The role and impact study aims to establish the scope and nature of change the initiative has caused in terms of: *action on UNSCR 1325; capacity development; awareness rising, attitudinal change and so on.*

Keywords: International law, community radio, mobile telephones, feminist activism

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Sierra Leone country context

With a population of over 6,440 million (July 2009 ests.), Sierra Leone is a war scarred country that experienced severe atrocities between 1991 to 1998 by “hordes of thugs” under the control of Sierra Leone's leaders and their regional allied in surrounding countries. The motivation for the war was the control of the diamonds production. Proceeds from its illegal possession and sales helped warlords fuel the civil war between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh (Businessafrica.net, Newsletter ISSN 1563-4108). This resulted into tens of thousands of deaths, physical maim and the displacement of more than 2 million people (well over one-third of the population) the majority of whom fled into the neighboring countries. After a decade of civil war (1991-2001), today, Sierra Leone appears to be settling into peace. On May 15, 2002, a presidential ballot - the first time since 1973 - brought to power Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone's People's Party (SLPP) signaling new beginnings. Ernest Bai Koroma became the current president after winning the most recent elections held in 2007.

¹ The focus here is on local hospitals, police, legal and cultural institutions that are in direct contact with the media initiative and proponents.

On the socio-economic front, according to the latest UN Human Development indices, Sierra Leone is the poorest country out of the 179 global rankings, which also placed Sierra Leone is reported as an extremely poor nation with tremendous inequality in income distribution. The fate of the economy depends upon the maintenance of domestic peace and the continued receipt of substantial aid from abroad, which is essential to offset the severe trade imbalance and supplement government revenues.

The mediascape (see table below) in the country is indicative of higher access and ownership levels of radio as compared to other media. The statistics also indicate growing levels of mobile telephones, which can be seen as a positive factor in exploiting radio as a participatory communication tools. It is important to note that despite these high levels of radio penetration and increasing mobile communications in both countries, women especially in the rural areas are still lagging behind in accessing information, even through radio. Despite the dominant understanding that radio ownership in the household is "a family affair", the number of women having control over radio sets is low.

<i>Table showing selected media facts for Sierra Leone</i>	
	Sierra Leone
Percentage of access to radio	80%
Radio stations (private and community)	16FM (2006)
Ratio/Percentage of male and women radio listeners	80%, 68% respectively
Literacy levels	35.1% <i>Men – 46.9%; Women – 24.4%</i>
Television broadcast station	2 (1999)
Internet subscribers	13,900 (2009) 0.5% of population
Pay phones	24,000 mainlines (2001)
Mobile telephones	420,000 (2007) (Wikipedia)
Source: BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, 2007/9 (Sierra Leone). CID country facts.	

1.2. IWTC and its communication program

The International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC) is an international non-governmental organization established in 1976 following the United Nations International Women's Year World Conference in Mexico City. IWTC's work centres on "empowering people and building communities through the provision of

communication, information, education, and organizing support services to women's organizations and community groups working to improve the lives of women, particularly low-income women, in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Western Asia". Access to information and the ability to communicate are considered basic to the process of women's empowerment, to women's ability to re-defining development paradigms, to women's participation in the public policy arena and to the building of democratic societies. The organizations work is focused in four program areas: (1) human rights, (2) information access and communication capacity-building; (3) networking and organizational support; and (4) Women, Ink, a knowledge-brokering service. Most relevant for this analysis is IWTC's pursuit of *participatory approaches* to their work and the need to make *explicit the linkages between global policies and the everyday realities confronting women living in poverty*. Through workshops and training programs, information materials and services, networking and enabling linkages, IWTC attempts to build bridges between the international and the national, between the abstract and the concrete, between policy and people, and between ideas and actions².

Following the above stated ambitions, the IWTC program activities in Sierra Leone focus on the dissemination of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – a crucial resolution passed in October 2000, that marked the first time the UN Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and recognized their contributions to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace-building. This same document stressed the importance of women's equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security³.

The overall aim of the project in Sierra Leone was to simplify, demystify and bring this global resolution (R1325) to the grassroots levels on the one hand and to amplify and give voice to war and conflict afflicted women on the other hand – the country/and regions targeted for this exercise because they were emerging from war and conflict. The emphasis was on *participation, ownership, understanding, relevancy, empowerment, advocacy* and *action*. IWTC would achieve this:

- Through participatory approaches namely; (write shop, storytelling, focus group discussions during the training workshops participating partners would generate real life stories and
- Develop radio drama episodes in local languages on R1325 – that would help raise awareness levels among the communities of interest. These activities aimed to:
- Create better understanding of the R1325 among partners,
- Create a sense of ownership thereby fostering relevancy of the message,
- Boost partner organisations' advocacy capacity beyond the program frames.

² You can find more detailed information on IWTC's work here: <http://www.iwtc.org/63/index.html>

³ See simplified version here: http://www.iwtc.org/1325_text.txt

These objective would be achieved by using community radio as the preferred medium for awareness raising on UNSCR 1325 and the engagement of the critical mass of women's voices and community perspectives at the local levels on the issues of peace-building. Radio was chosen mainly because of its comparative advantage over other media in reaching the target masses. Some of the advantages in using radio as a tool for social change and participatory communication include the fact that: radio is cost-effective; conveys the spoken language and can therefore reach the huge illiterate population in rural areas (also a target for IWTC work); its outreach and geographic coverage are better than those of other media; it is relevant to local practices, traditions and culture; it's sustainability is feasible; and radio allows for the convergence with other media such as internet, (mobile) telephony and so on (Gumicio-Dagron 2001; Jones & Lewis 2006).

The workshops in Sierra Leone were also aimed at creating a space for participants to discuss SCR 1325 and locate it within their own contexts and realities with the ultimate goal of producing radio programs, it allowed participants to choose the themes for the programs, based on a discussion among participants about the major issues that women face or find important in their post-conflict country. Further, once the themes had been decided, participants divided into groups and came up with a drama, based on the realities of women's lives in Sierra Leone, which they then acted out. Dialogue and plot from these skits made their way into the final radio productions. The workshops in Sierra Leone were a day long at 3 different locations, and the end-goal was 3 radio dramas (see appendix 2).

1.3. Methodology, constraints and limitations of this assessment

Telephone interviews were carried out with respondents from Sierra Leone. In addition, questionnaires were also prepared and administered online (for those that the researcher was unable to access by telephone). Both interviews and questionnaires were administered to participants of the participatory methodologies. Respondents included representatives of women's organisations who took part in the workshops (see appendix 1). The researcher also talked to the consultant who worked with the projects.

It was difficult to reach some important respondents either because they had changed jobs/contacts, were travelling abroad or simply had no telephone contacts. This probably denies this analysis a holistic insight into the program experiences. What follows now is a detailed analysis of the programs strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. Before the conclusions, a theoretical uptake and analysis of the program is undertaken to help situate the IWTC programs within the scholarship of current trends in development communication – with a focus on the dominant principles of *participatory communication* for social change and gender.

2. THE PROGRAM

The three drama episodes were repeatedly aired on twelve radio stations (see appendix 3 on coverage and partner organisations) for the period under contract i.e. as long as payment lasted. After each drama, the phone lines were opened for public participation – an initiative undertaken by Talking Drums, a partner organisation and not IWTC.

2.1. Strengths of the programs

2.1.1. Importance and relevance of content/issues highlighted

Respondents from the Sierra Leone program acknowledged the positive benefits from the use of radio as a mass media to relay the “Women Talk Peace” production asserting that radio is the most common, cheapest and most accessible medium (80% of general population) for this wide outreach. They all acknowledged the importance and relevance of issues raised from the drama. These, they agreed were good in bringing the messages of R1325 down to the common person.

In addition, the message or content of the three drama productions were appreciated as clear, simplified, well expressed, clearly defined and the focus well communicated an attribute to the participatory approach used to generate the stories during the workshop earlier.

All three themes of the productions were relevant to the needs and plight of the women that the organizations I spoke to dealt with in their day to day activities, namely issues of education, empowerment and gender based violence (SGBV). However, the most appreciated theme and perhaps most troubling was the message embedded in Episode 3 “Woman Wahala” – i.e. the recurrent problem of gender based violence against women in Sierra Leone. For instance, the respondent from Makeni said, in just one month alone (February 2009) fifteen women had been raped and four of them killed and police had no culprits signifying SGBV and impunity of culprits as the relevant theme to the R1325 program. From the call-ins, the episodes were generally received with “mixed feelings” represented by both supportive debates and calls for justice and a rejection of the messages, the latter emanating mostly from male callers. This duality can be seen as a strength for the program as it enable a society emerging from traumatic experiences to face-up to the true realities and debate the contentious issues - a step towards forging positive common grounds. Change is often resisted by those negatively affected by it. It is not surprising then that most of the negatives in the “mixed feeling” emanated from the men and particularly cultural leaders – signaling the need to mobilize more strategic episodes to bring these opposing factions onboard and also drive the point home.

On the other hand, the messages were very well received especially by the women. A good sign because for them who were often the victims of heinous crimes and inequality; “enough was enough” was the

recurrent resolution by the partners. This resolve, manifested in the unexpected high turnout in Kailahun and the complete ownership and sense of empowerment and free speech the participants felt and expressed during the workshops was evident during the collection of data for this assessment.

The timing of the episodes (March 8 – women's day 2008) was also seen as a great strategic decision as it happened at a time when there were ongoing activities and sensitization around issues of women and the R1325. As such, the public's attention and interest had been aroused.

2.1.2. Strengths of the participatory approaches and of production elements

The participatory methodology of storytelling, FGDs and the write shops gave the participants a strong sense of ownership of the story and of the processes. According to one of the respondents; "the atmosphere was friendly, the consultant was warm and that energized and relaxed us – she (the consultant) made us believe that we could do it and when we did it, it was a great feeling" - Adama Kamara from the *Network Movement for Justice and Development*. For another participant the workshops helped bring together partner organization to work together for a common cause; "We bonded with my fellow colleagues in other organizations/civil society partners and together we knew we could achieve a lot"- Martha Chigozie from the *Thorough Empowerment and Development for Women and Girls in Sierra Leone* - also referred to as "Thorough Life". For Brima from the *Women's Partnership for Justice and Peace*; "through the participatory methods of storytelling and focused discussions, we were able to bring to light the very important issues affecting the bulk of our women such as education, violence and empowerment. This way we were able to give a voice to women with no voice".

In regards to the production elements, the use of the three local languages was useful and very appropriate in enabling the respective communities, fraught with high illiteracy levels to receive and understand these very important messages. This point is particularly supplemented by the fact that radio as the chosen channel of dissemination reaches further and wider than any other medium in Sierra Leone.

2.1.3. Advocacy and capacity building

The experience was a learning lesson and a boost to the advocacy work of all the partner organizations as they worked with similar issues in their day-to-day operations and programs. Firstly, the workshop empowered them with a better understanding of the R1325. "Before the training we didn't really grasp the issues around SCR1325, the workshops and the radio drama helped increase our awareness as women's group advocates, we got better educated and gained insights into this very important legislation - now I can stand up and fearlessly talk about it" says Adama Kamara.

One of the most useful skills out of the drama generating workshops was the use of drama as a tool to disseminate important messages and sensitizing people on many issues – not just R1325 – Adama Kamara.

For Nancy Sesay from *Search for Common Ground*, the IWTC program on R1325 brought added value to advocacy groups like her own and instilled a sense of responsibility for the education of other women, and the fact that other countries in Africa are far ahead in its implementation “created renewed interest in us to lobby and ensure our government stops giving it lip service.” Sesay adds that; “The experiences from the IWTC program was quite positive because most women engaged in local organizations hardly use international instruments for advocacy and lobbying, now most of them refer to R1325 in forums than ever before.”

Some organisations took the experiences of the program to to new heights. For instance, Martha Chigozie’s organisation, *Thorough life* raised own funding to discuss the R1325 on radio. For instance, Thorough Life bought airtime on Sky and Citizen (both private radio stations) and Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) the government-owned radio station to promote their outreach programs on R1325, get feedback through call-ins and clarify/discuss issues arising from the programs with the public. This feedback was then relayed to the Coalition of NGOs a parent organisation that also work with promoting the R1325.

Also, between october-december 2008, as part of their advocacy work, *Thorough Life* carried out awareness campaigns on R1325 in;

- Meetings with local leaders;
- Religious leaders; and in
- Market places.

For the market place awareness campaigns which coincided with the run-up to the 2008 local council elections, *Thorough Life* printered flyers and diagrams and spoke about the role and importance of having women in decision making positions. This particular campaign relates to the drama episode “Side by Side” which deals with the representation of women in achelons of power and decision-maing.

In Addition, Thorough Life organised training for local women leaders. See case study for other examples of further advocacy work inspired by and undertaken after the IWTC programs.

2.2. Gaps and challenges of the program

The biggest weakness of the program was that it was too important and yet too short to deal with the dimensions of the problems R1325 addresses. More specifically:

2.2.1. Socio-cultural barriers

Respondents highlighted the fact that people's perceptions in the target communities are still deeply rooted in cultural and patriarchal practices that are unfavorable to women. As a result, partner organizations pursuing further advocacy were shunned and worse still accused of bringing to Sierra Leone "the white man's ways and teaching our wives to be rebellious" by the male members of the communities. This was coupled by the fact that although radio was the most accessed medium and seen as "family property" fewer women listened to radio either because of the triple roles of women or because of the family power dynamics that meant men had an upper hand deciding what to listen to when and where thereby disadvantaging women access and listenership.

2.2.2. Time and financial gaps

Having some of the women come for rehearsals and recording on time was a challenge as most of the partners had other work responsibilities and other pressing but normal work schedules. Secondly, reports from *Talking Drum*, who organised for women partners to spearhead post-episode discussions on R1325 had trouble getting women on air as they often did not show up as it was not part of the IWTC planned and funded activity for Sierra Leone. Partner organisations mentioned deficiencies in financial remuneration for these activities but perhaps more importantly, the fact that the community radio stations stopped airing the dramas as soon as the payment for airtime finished - was detrimental to the program objectives.

2.2.3. Language issues

While some reports regarding the production elements indicated that casts doing local languages were not of the ethnic group and therefore most words were not pronounced right, other reports pointed out that the language was "too pro-youth" with slangs and youthful jargon that put off older publics who did not appreciate "casual and street colloquialism".

2.2.4. Sustainability of activities

All the respondents disapproved the split and long wait for the next drama episodes. Just like in the case of Uganda, continuity was highly and *urgently* desired in addition to maintaining contact with the partners.

2.3. Recommendations and suggestions for way forward

All respondents wanted the program to continue but had advice on several aspects. One of them was the use of more radio stations to convey the message, over period of time and not just on the 8 March and the

weeks thereafter. The emphasis was on the need to design a program that lasts over a longer period to allow the message to sink. Following more specific recommendations:

2.3.1. Broaden scope of program

Expand message and content

The message needed to be expanded to include a wider range of thorny issues afflicting women and to focus on other areas of the resolution other than those covered in the first three episodes. These include but not limited to:

- Female Genital Mutilation – one of the most serious problems especially in Makeni.
- Teenage pregnancy and early marriages
- The Gender Based Violence should be multi-angles to drive the point home
- Former child soldiers – program should include post-traumatic and therapeutic situations.

Expand target audience and channels of dissemination

As earlier mentioned under weaknesses of the program, one of the biggest challenges facing advocacy work on R1325 was the debilitating perceptions and cultural barriers to social change. An increase therefore, in sensitization and education to target a wider audience and employ more channels of dissemination in the next episodes would be very useful. For instance, the respondents mentioned that further sensitization activities around the Resolution should not just focus on women (and men) but also more stakeholders some of whom are mentioned below:

- *Duty bearers* - or the first actors who sign the Resolutions and shelf them i.e. police, parliament, court system etc.
- *Cultural and religious leaders*
- *Grassroots people*
- *Go to market places and reach out to those too busy to listen to radio*
- *Reach out to schools*
- *Use men to reach out to fellow men etc.*

In addition, as mentioned by Adama Kamara, it is fundamental to consider and work with national regulations in addition to the UNSC Resolution 1325. For instance, the Gender Act that is being negotiated currently brings together the three important issues a) Devolution of Estate, b) Regulation of customary marriage and c) the Domestic violence act - these pieces of national legislation tie together with the UNSCR 1325.

2.3.2. More training and better time management required

Training was deemed necessary to solidify knowledge and mastery of the R1325. Training needs were also tied with time issues as the time allocated for the preparatory and dissemination phases (i.e. the one-day workshops and time drama as aired respectively) was insufficient. In the words of one of the respondents "the time for the workshop was too tight to have a solid impact on the capacity – as a women's advocacy group member I was very illiterate on R1325 and still need more education, what then those people in the community who have never heard anything about it, or even those hiding behind culture" - Adama Kamara. Suggestions included:

1. Participants should be informed well in time, to give them ample time to organize themselves in a way that they wouldn't feel overloaded.
2. The participatory programs/processes at the workshops needed more time to learn the various techniques, i.e. developing themes and script writing because they needed to apply these later on in their organizational work.

Include other languages to avoid exclusion. The specific suggestions concerning Themne older speakers complaining that the language was for young people and rather diluted, a mix to cater for both the young and older Themne speakers would suffice. In addition, casts from other languages should be ethnic from that language.

2.3.3. The program needs proper discussion forum

Although some organizations such as *Thorough Life* and *Talking Drums* took it upon themselves to engender dialogue, a discussion forum was not part of IWTC program in Sierra Leone. Partners suggested the opening up of communicative spaces whereby:

- Partner organization would come in to address doubts, get feedback and provide more information on the Resolution.
- The women also suggested the use of public address systems and platforms such as market places as avenues to engage the public, obtain/record their views where possible and air them on radio which should get more people tuned in.
- Another suggestion was that community radios need to be motivated to air the dramas as part of their programming instead of material to be paid for.

Accreditation of all organizations at the end of the dramas.

2.3.4. Tackling financial and sustainability issues

On a more specific note, in order to tackle the thorny issues of funding and curbing the dependency

syndrome that was evident in both Sierra Leone and Uganda projects, here are a few suggestions:

- *Training in fundraising skills:* Being able to raise own funds would empower women to take control of the programs during and after IWTC has left the scene and help in sustaining their other advocacy work as a long term solution to continuity. Self help or self reliance is one of the crucial aspects of effective empowerment as it enables ownership, control, confidence and efficiency in program prioritization and execution.
- *Collaborate with partners* – Collaborating with other funding partners (i.e. NGOs, local government) has an added advantage of “shooting many birds with few arrows”. This is because several organizations or institutions/government ministries have budgets to deal to **similar** programs. In addition to duplicating several services, they often encourage “greed” which money can be put to better use say by co-sponsoring a program. I believe this is a negotiation a local partner could successfully undertake.
- *Budgetary provisions for continuity* – Once again, the partner organizations can be offered financial assistance (i.e. on quarterly, annually basis, etc) or linked to IWTC identified funders to help them sustain their programs. This is an important point in pursuing the next point:

2.3.5. Steps or strategies for moving awareness to action

- *Provide for budget* – All the partner organizations expressed challenges in dealing with outcomes of the radio programs i.e. how to help women beyond raising awareness on R1325. For instance, in Sierra Leone, while the respondent from Makeni pointed out the alarming rate and cases of rape and domestic violence i.e. 15 cases in the month of February 2009 alone, a more urgent call for action came from Freetown (by Martha Chigozie of “Thorough Life”) requesting immediate financial assistance for the eight rape victims that week who were in hospital while the culprits were nowhere to be found. Often a time, also as was the case in Uganda, the partner women’s organization had their hands tied because they couldn’t help the “financially poor” victims with medical expenses nor with the payment of fees (for forms, and other charges) required in courts, police, hospitals to effect action against perpetrators of the crimes. Empowering these partners with fundraising skills; identifying funders or providing funds for action may arguably come a long way in moving awareness to action.
- *Bring R1820 on board* – bringing R1820 on board as a legal tool to boost R1325 in terms of enhancing action and drawing relevant “action” based institutions such as the police, courts and so on to join the fight is vital.
- *Involve and engage the “Actors and movers”* - Directly involving a) *law enforcers* such as the

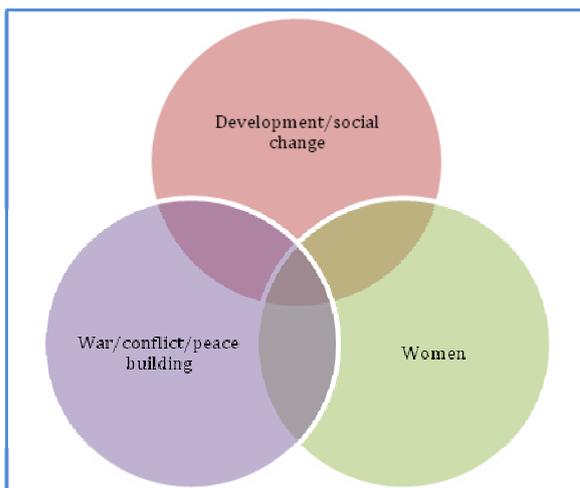
police and court officials in the programs with the aim of fostering action promises to bring about social change and action. For instance, hosting the police chief or magistrate, media personnel and so on to explain the repercussions and what sort of punishments culprits say, of rape will receive may go along ay in stopping would-be perpetrators. In terms of nationalizing the agenda, officials from the *b) relevant ministries* may also come on radio to warn on violation of women's rights and corruption in the police, court and hospital systems that impede action. In both countries, *c) other institutions (such as cultural and religious)* were believed to have power to effect social change. These could be employed beyond raising awareness to fostering action and justice for the victims at the community level. Here, *d) the media* practitioners would play a pivotal role as they have to be vigilant in providing the communicative platform for raising awareness on not just R1325 but the repercussions of crimes the resolution addresses – that's why the media (practitioners) have to come to the center stage too.

3. Participatory communication for social change – a theoretical uptake

3.1. Introduction

The IWTC programs in Sierra Leone are embedded in the theoretical principles of participatory communication for social change. Here, Participatory Communication can be seen as a strategy that brings together and addresses the debilitating interrelation between the three areas of interest for this assessment (see chart below) which is: war/conflict, women and development and this is how.

Chart showing pivotal role of PC in addressing an intersection of war, women and development



Today, with conflicts in almost every region, it has become clear that development and security issues are inextricably intertwined. As is the context for this assessment, underdevelopment raises the likelihood of instability; war obliterates development gains and whereas women are sometimes among the perpetrators of conflict, far more often they are among those who suffer the greatest harm. According to a recent UNIFEM report, in today's conflicts, more than 70 per cent of the casualties are civilians-most of them women and children. Women also face specific

and devastating forms of violence related to gender, including rape as a weapon of war and sexual slavery, practices that in turn greatly increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. As women struggle to keep families together and care for the wounded on the margins of fragile war economies, they are the first to be affected by infrastructure breakdown, and may be forced into survival strategies that involve exploitation (UNIFEM, 2009).

Communication is considered a central factor in bringing about empowerment and social change and participatory communication (PC) a vital prerequisite in achieving this goal. This section presents a brief outline of the main principles of PC in relation to feminism. These are discussed in relation to the IWTC programs. The aim is to assess both the scholastic and practical pragmatism of the participatory communication projects.

Participatory communication is the communication aspect of the participatory paradigm which sees participation as a basic human right, the right to think, express oneself, belong to a group, be recognized as a person, appreciated and respected and have some say in crucial decisions affecting one's life. Here, individuals, communities as well as nations must taken up active roles in the development programs and processes (Liao 2009; Jacobson & Servaes 1999).

Given the shortcomings of the top-down development (communication) approach, participatory development arose as an alternative to the traditional **modernization paradigm**. Within this dominant paradigm which started after the WWII in the early 1950s, the belief then was developing countries would follow in the footsteps of the developed countries, going through the same trajectory of development, but at much greater speed. The modernization paradigm embraced a unidirectional, mechanistic and deterministic view of development, where the stages of growth were seen as irreversible and universal. Communication was a vertical, authority-based, top-bottom and expert-driven process. The mass media were considered vehicles for the transference of new ideas and models from developed nations to the Third World and from urban to rural areas (Lerner 1958; Liao 2009).

The dominant paradigm underwent far-reaching interrogation and criticism from the 1970s by scholars and practitioners around the globe – after the failures of several projects to bring about development. The vertical, authority-based, top-bottom, expert-driven processes and the centre-periphery approaches of the dominant paradigm were all brought to question as ideologically imperialistic, out of context, patronizing, disempowering and of perpetrating **dependency** of developing countries on the developed.

This fall out led to a shift to alternative communication thinking: Here is a summary of some of the benchmarks that mainly centre on participation - effective communication projects had to:

- Start from the grassroots
- Engender dialogue and two-way flows of communication

- Encourage small, community ownership, community understandable content
- Recognize local cultures and traditions
- Disaggregate audiences (e.g. women, youth etc) for development communication as these different audiences had different needs and communication requirements
- Promote equity in distribution of information.
- Provide the independence of local communities to tailor development projects to their own objectives.
- Integrate old and new ideas, the traditional and modern systems, the endogenous and exogenous elements to constitute a unique blend suited to the needs of a particular community, but most importantly and centrally promote the
- Active participation of people at the grassroots (Huesca 2003; Jacobson & Servaes 1999; Melkote & Steeves, 2001)

For this analysis, the above benchmarks to participatory communication are classified in five interrelated themes: *Multiplicity, participation, dialogue, power, levels of participation* – These, it is believed, provide appropriate guidelines to assess IWTC's program objectives of fostering : participation, ownership, understanding, relevancy and advocacy/action around R1325. It has to be remembered that PC is relevant for gender studies as its principles serve the interests of marginalized groups (Liao 2009).

3.2. Multiplicity and grassroots foci/media

One of the more generally and fully articulated concepts to emerge from the participatory development communication is that of multiplicity, the other which is related to multiplicity is the recourse to grassroots media focus. The calls for *grassroots media* as a starting point for participatory communication attribute small, local, community owned and managed media to empowerment of the communities of interest. The argument being that in pursuing a grassroots foci, the community will be assured of access to communicative spaces as well as have control over the media agenda which reflects the specific interests and capacities of the communities they serve i.e. use of local language, locally generated content/ realities, etc) (Wanyeki 2000; Dralega, 2008). These aspects have been achieved to a great extent through the IWTC project that used community radio⁴ drama reflecting the realities of the women in relation to R1325 as shown in the strengths of the programs. The IWTC case however, shows that this approach when applied to empowering women at local levels is not unproblematic nor transparent as several constraints such as socio-cultural and political aspects impeded the effectiveness of the programs – also reflected in

⁴ The advantages of radio have been pointed out in the introduction and in the text.

the various constraints and gaps reported earlier. A starting point is to deal with the power dynamics, further discussed below.

The *multiplicity* approach recommends strong, grassroots participation in development efforts but explicitly rejects universal approaches to its application. Instead it emphasizes diversity and pluralism suggesting that a people, nations and regions cultivate their own, responsive approaches to self-determined goals that emerge out of participatory processes. (Liao 2009; Huesca 2003). IWTC projects have a common overall goal of using participatory approaches to raise awareness on R1325 (i.e. radio drama, locally generated stories etc), However, different paths are pursued and developed by the partners in the various countries IWTC have initiated similar programs⁵. This was a positive as participants were able to generate drama reflective of the individual community realities relating to R1325 which enabled not just the ownership, but created relevancy, and also helped empower women to take active roles in the fight for social change. The suggestions from the field that should be promoted /continued by IWTC however suggested that whereas these different approaches were great, they needed to share and learn from different contexts (e.g. suggestions for exchange visits) as a way to improve advocacy and enhance learning.

3.3. Dialogue as transformative and empowering

Dialogue was not part of the IWTC project in Sierra Leone.

One of the fiercest critics of the modernization paradigm was its disregard for two-way flow of communication as most development programs were top-down in nature and communicated by “experts” with limited possibilities for feedback (Huesca 2003). One important aspect of feminist pragmatism of participatory communication is the empowering role dialogue plays in the development process. Haraway (1991) asserts that knowledge claims should be based on people’s lives rather than from the above or from nowhere. Liao (2009) explains that the connectedness, understanding, and empowerment facilitated by dialogue and communication is the starting point and the foundation of a sustainable development (Ibid.).

The transformative role of dialogue

The transformation of a society starts at the individual level. The essence of participatory communication actually comprises transformations at the individual level, followed by transformations at the communal and societal level, and followed by transformations at the political level (Burkey 1993). How does dialogue contribute to personal growth and

empowerment? Liao (2009) argues that in the process of development, dialogue has three functions. *First*, participants in development learn about new knowledge and practices in dialogues. Here, dialogue is the

⁵ An example is Uganda, where IWTC undertook a similar project targeting grassroots women’s organizations, media houses, scriptwriters and drama groups. This researcher has assessed the Uganda project as well on behalf of IWTC.

means for learning, which is, in fact, a reciprocal process. Development agencies learning from the people and the people learn from the development agencies, and people also learn from each other – as was also the case with the IWTC workshops in both countries.

Second, Liao argues that the redefinition and transformation of the self is achieved in dialogues. This process is called conscientization first put forth by Paulo Freire (1970), a process where an individual becomes aware of the self and becomes capable of critically assessing her or his positions relative to the surrounding social and political environment. Conscientization also enables individuals to make decisions that affect their lives and empowers individuals to act upon those decisions. Freire developed the concept of conscientization as part of his literacy pedagogy. Education, for Freire, is not just for the transmission of ideas and skills but also for empowerment. Here, dialogue serves the same role as education, as a vehicle for empowerment to transform individuals from within and enable individuals to come to the self-realization that they can actively participate in the development process, which will profoundly affect their lives. Examples from Sierra Leone involving victims of GBV who sought help/action from partner organizations after the R1325 drama are cases in point – here, the partner organizations either counseled the victims or referred them to the appropriate “action” institutions i.e. police, court or hospitals. But the lack of (financial) capacity and institutional support as explained elsewhere in this article was a big barrier to the effective empowerment.

Third, dialogue is the means for the establishment of connections among individuals and among communities for a larger perspective. The connectedness is the human condition under which transformed individuals go beyond the self and establish social or political relationships with other individuals. The self-awareness and self-realization is further reinforced in this socializing process. Although, it sometimes drew negative responses from the communities, the dialogue provisions in the IWTC programs to a limited level in Sierra Leone, did engage communities in collective negotiation of the R1325 – something that should be maintained and expanded as recommended in this study.

The empowering role of dialogue

Empowerment has been the most discussed central concept in feminism (Shrewsbury, 1997). For many feminist theorists, the main purpose of feminism is for empowerment (Collins, 1991; Deveaux, 1994). Feminism grows out of social and political movements aiming to bring justice into society, and empowerment concerns itself with the transformation of individual and social consciousness, which are prerequisites for political actions (Liao 2009). According to Said (1979), empowerment is to fuel a person with the ability to see unequal power relations, to analyze the situation and to initiate actions to bring changes into society. Empowerment is to say your say. Thus, communication could play a significant role in

the struggle for empowerment and justice and that's why continuity of the IWTC projects on awareness raising – following revisions/recommendations from this report – is of central importance. Here, by focusing on empowerment, we can vision a concept of power not as domination (as discussed below), but as energy, capacity, and potential for self-definition (Shrewsbury, 1997; Collins, 1991).

Role of power

Some advocates of participatory communication either ignore the issue of power or naively call for its general distribution between countries, within countries, between sexes. Power has been theorized as multi-centered (Tehrani 1999). As is relevant for this assessment, this view acknowledges the role of institutions and structures but emphasizes the role of human agency in reproducing and transforming them (Tehrani 1999). Within the general framework of power, participatory communication is seen by some as being a potential source of social transformation (Liao 2009; Riano 1994). By virtue of differences – ethnic, gender, sexual etc – that multiple social actors bring to social change projects, PC reveals how power functions to subordinate and in this case abuse women. Here, as mentioned above, participation can function to cultivate “generative power” where individuals and groups develop the capacity for advocacy and action – which can also be harnessed to reshape and transform conditions of subordination (Nair & White 1987) as shown from the advocacy and action programs in Sierra Leone i.e. empowerment of women local leaders to stand for local council election by WPJP can be used as an example.

On the other hand, the IWTC programs have also revealed a less optimistic⁶ role of the power of participation as either insufficient or problematic in and of itself to alter power relations in society – to bring action and justice to the victims. This particularly refers to the patriarchal hindrances combined with economic hardships manifested in the feminization of poverty and powerlessness of women to seek retribution and the corruption by responsible actors (i.e. police, court) among others. Here, participation by the IWTC partner organizations was necessary but not sufficient in engaging and altering power relations. As further explained in recommendations, PC that is not guided towards a priori structural goal, such as building progressive institutions or deconstructing dominating discourses by involving/and demanding accountability of “actors” /institutions (police, courts, hospitals, ministries, governments) at local, national and regional levels runs the risk of dissolving into a self-indulgent exercise. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between PC and dominant power structures is neither transparent nor unproblematic and needs to be reexamined by IWTC for their future programs⁷.

⁶ Particularly refer to inability to generate action.

⁷ Refer to recommendations above.

3.4. Levels of participation

A number of researchers have worked to identify differential levels in participation i.e. active identification of development issues and goals and full authority in project governance from planning, implementation and evaluation (Estrada 1998, Huesca 2003). These stages are usually guided by either contextual qualities of participants themselves or by organizational constraints of supporting development organizations who most frequently implement participation on limited level, such as using focus groups in the initial phase of an information campaign because of organizational goals and limitations on time and resources (Huesca 2003). The various levels are normally conceptualized in a complex interaction with contextual and structural constraints. In Sierra Leone, while engendering local participation, IWTC cultivated a more directive role for themselves – something Thapalia (1996) has labeled “transformational leadership” – aimed at constructing a shared vision and commitment to awareness raising and action on R1325. This obviously generated some positives but despite the participatory approaches, there was still a certain lack of ownership of the project especially after IWTC had left the scene. Issues of dependency syndrome - relating to the lack of financial stamina that can allow fuller ownership and continuity have been taken up in recommendations.

4. Conclusion

In short then, theoretically speaking, in pursuing participatory approaches to their projects in Sierra Leone, IWTC has to a large extent, managed to foster ownership, awareness/understanding of R1325, relevancy, advocacy and some action that benefited some of the women's advocacy groups involved. These strengths were however, limited mainly because of issues related to power (economic, political, structural and human agency related) – indicating the need to rethink and integrate solutions that addressed the issue of power, and engender dialogue in order to move the IWTC program forward.

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Appendix 1: Respondents

SIERRA LEONE			
Name	Organization	District	Role in IWTC program
Shella Dallas-Katzman	IWTC consultant	-	Consultant/facilitator
Adama Kamara	Network Movement for Justice and Development	Freetown	Women's NGO rep.
Gladys Brima	Women's Partnership for Justice and Peace	Freetown	Women's NGO rep.
Nancy Sesay	Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum	Freetown	Women's NGO rep.
Abass Kamara	Community Action for Human Security	Makeni	NGO rep.
Martha Chigozie	Thorough Empowerment & Development for Women & Girls in Sierra Leone	Freetown	Women's NGO rep on workshop

Appendix 2: List of radio programs/languages

Sierra Leonean productions

Series Title: *Women Talk Peace*

Languages: *Krio, Mende & Themne*

Episodes:

Woman Wahala (Women's Troubles)

Kula Go Skul (Kula Goes to School)

Side-by-Side

Appendix 3: Maps of Sierra Leone with IWTC's partner women's organizations and radio Production coverage – Source IWTC.

