

**NPTEL**  
**NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE**

**Course Name**  
**Strategic Communication for**  
**Sustainable Development**

**by**  
**Prof. Aradhna Malik**  
**Vinod Gupta School of Management**  
**IIT Kharagpur**

**Lecture 03: Role of Communication in**  
**Sustainable Development**

Welcome back to the class titled strategic communication for sustainable development.

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My name is Aradhna Malik and I will be helping you with this course and we have had two classes till now, we have had two sessions the first session focused on the introductory concepts and the second session focused on the participatory models for sustainable development. And now today in this particular session we will talk about how communication relates to

development and how it relates to specifically to sustainable development. So that is what we will talk about in this lecture okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:58)



Communication for sustainable development.

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**How is communication related to sustainability?**

- Communication forms the medium or bridge between availability of resources and utilization of those resources by the stakeholders (or translation of those resources into benefits for stakeholders)



How is communication related to sustainability. Now we were talking about resources, we were talking about what the community has, we were talking about how the community shapes itself, we were talking about how the community realizes what it wants. Now from that translation, from that understanding the community shares whatever it has with the people who can and wants to help the community become more comfortable for the people living in that community and that is what development is.

So we take this and we say okay, how, you know the communication is the process that forms the bridge between this awareness and implementation of that awareness. I understand what the community has, now when I talk to the community communication is the medium through which these ideas are translated from a sense of awareness about the community to the function to how whatever is there can be used by the community.

Okay or translation of those resources into benefits for the stakeholders. We use resources to make our life more comfortable to enhance the quality of life we have and that is what communication does.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:26)



**Dialogue facilitates development through...**  
(Rodloytuk, 2007)

- **Conscientization**: "The process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action."  
(Freire.org)
- **Shared knowledge**: is created when "... insiders and outsiders of the community meet in an informal and interpersonal communicative context to achieve desirable development in the local area through 'knowledge generation, knowledge acquisition, and knowledge sharing'." (White, 1994, in Rodloytuk, 2007)
- **Empowerment**: "Psychic energy required for human development and change." (White, 1994, in Rodloytuk, 2007)
- **Liberation**: occurs when "... individuals engage in dialogue with an aim to create a 'solid sense of self, an active concern for one's self in relation to others' so as to achieve 'meaningful human relationships.'"  
(White, 1994, in Rodloytuk, 2007)
- **Self reliance**: "involves people putting forward their view in an attempt to identify the needs of their community ... their voices translated into 'community ... agendas'." (White, 1994, in Rodloytuk, 2007)

Dialogue facilitates development through conscientization, conscientization is the process of developing a critical awareness of one social reality true reflection and action and this is from a paper by Rodloytuk took who discusses the Buddhist philosophy of sustainable development and communication and it is a very nice paper I will give you a reference the entire reference, so you can look it up if you are able to do that. And it is an amazingly written paper that that helps us understand how communication plays a role in sustainable development.

The first thing that is talked about is how it alerts our consciousness, how our consciousness plays a role, or how dialogue, how dialogue helps, you know the, how dialogue helps the awareness come about in our understanding of our social reality. So when we talk to others when we discuss things with others the awareness about what we are talking about comes in and that process is facilitated through dialogue. You can you can go back and forth in your own mind about certain ideas and you will still not be able to to come to that rich a conclusion till you discuss those ideas with others.

We have brainstorming sessions, we come we have discussions in class something that somebody says stimulates something else in our minds. So we reflect through in and through

dialogue and the action, and dialogue facilitates this, you know talking to others helps us bounce our ideas off of others and that helps us come to a more enhanced awareness of what it is that we are dealing with in the community.

The second benefit of dialogue, you know sharing of ideas between two people is shared knowledge, creation of shared knowledge which is created when insiders and outsiders of the community meet in an informal and interpersonal communicative context to achieve desirable development in the local area through knowledge generation, knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing. Many people who want to make a difference to the community have never visited these communities, many people who want to help communities have never really had a chance to sit down and understand what the community is all about.

And I am a big proponent of immersion in the community there is a lot of subliminal knowledge that we gain by just interacting with the community without any agenda without any prior knowledge. So you go in and you just keep your eyes and ears open and listen, and absorb the sights, and sounds, and smells of the community. And then let it all sink in from an outsider's perspective and then share your interpretation of whatever it is that you have understood about the community with the people in the community and an amazingly new kind of shared knowledge is created.

So as insiders we understand something about a community and many times a lot of things that we tend to ignore as insiders are picked up by people who come from the outside okay. So I will give you a very small example it is irrelevant, but I will still share it with you and that is just about how community is sort of, you know mingle and create shared knowledge now I came to IIT Kharagpur in 2008 and I had never visited Bengal before this the rural area in Bengal and our campus is beautiful.

So I came here and I started discussing things in a way I used to enjoy long walks and I started talking to my colleagues and one day I remarked and I said, you know the birds here are so beautiful in the morning when you go out for a walk you hear these very nice sounds all kinds of chirping and all kinds of colored colors you can see in the birds. And people who had been living

here for many years some several decades had not noticed this because it had become so much a part of their social milieu.

And I said I found this very nice looking flower and they said really where and I said here and they said, we see it every day but it has never struck us how beautiful this is. Now I had come here for the first time I had never seen such a lush green walkable campus before this. And people who had lived here had taken this for granted and they said oh! it is dirty and I mean, you know better it is fine it is part of our daily routine there are lots of trees and lots of plants.

But from the insider's perspective what was being taken for granted was something brand new to me because I had, you know I had seen all kinds of, you know colleges for me were concrete jungles. So this kind of greenery and heavy emphasis on nature and maintaining the greenery was new to me. And so I am just sharing this with you, so just to give you an idea of how we perceive the same thing differently. So you come in, you see things and you share this, and then we start realizing, we start becoming more and more alert to things around us.

Similarly when we talk to somebody we say okay we have seen that, you know so-and-so person or I mean the social fabric we gain a new understanding of the social fabric as outsiders. And then we share our ideas with the community and a new type of knowledge is created and that can only happen through dialogue I may be thinking something, somebody else may be thinking something, but till we share those ideas we cannot come to a mutual understanding about what it is that we are talking about.

The third thing here is empowerment, dialogue facilitates empowerment, empowerment is the psychic energy required for human development. And change I feel that I am in control of my environment, I feel that my environment, I can change my environment, I can make a contribution to my environment, and that is empowerment. So when I talk about empowerment it is what I feel how much control I feel I am in, you know of my environment of what I am off where I fit in, of where I belong.

And so that comes through dialogue when we talk about people we realize how we fit in, I may have a perception about how I fit in and then I talked to my peers, and then I realize maybe you know I am I am able to make so much for difference to my community that I did not think myself capable of or that I did not think that I was allowed to make. And that is the, that is something that we can only learn, you know through in and or that is something that we are, we become aware of in and through dialogue.

Then this Rodloytuk also talks about liberation that is a, that comes about as a result of dialogue. And so when we talk about making a change in the environment we also talked about engaging in dialogue with an aim to create a solid sense of self and active concern for oneself in relation to others. So as to achieve meaningful human relationships one is empowerment I am able to do this, two is my own unique self I talk to people and I discover how I am unique how what all I can do.

And then we feel that, you know the freedom that comes with talking to people we realize what our capacities are the limits or the lack of limits that exists when we talk to people, and we say we feel hesitant in trying out new things, but when we talk to people we realize that when we get together as a community there is so much that we can achieve together. So the freedom this brings is immense and the last thing that is discussed in this paper is self-reliance which is something that we talked about earlier also.

And that is involvement of people putting forward their views in an attempt to identify the needs of the community and have their voices translated into community agendas. So we are talking about, you know the community realizing what it can do and when people talk to each other they realize that many of them have similar goals for the community. So we identify the needs of the community and we also realize that we are not alone in our attempt to do something for the community.

So that is self-reliance as a team we can achieve so much and within the community itself we have so much of power, so many resources, so much of ability to do things that many times the outsider just becomes a facilitator and that is really what is required. The community needs to be

empowered and all this happens only through dialogue. So that is how communication is related to sustainable development we spark off, we stimulate this discussion about what the community can do we stimulate this discussion about what the community is all about. And in and through this discussion, in and through this going back and forth of ideas we discover how much we have and how much we can do, and instead of sitting and cribbing and saying I do not have this, and I do not have that in my community, so bad and so this and so that.

We realize the kind of resources we have, especially when an outsider comes. The outside is maybe the only goal the outsider has to understand what the community is all about and because the outsider is not living the life of the community the outsider sees the community from a very different perspective. So a balanced view of the resources and limitations comes to the fore as far as the outsider is concerned. And when the outsider engages in a dialogue with the insiders, that is when this difference and opinions is revealed.

And that is when the process of empowerment and self-reliance, and liberation, and creation of shared knowledge, and consent sighs conscientization occurs it is a difficult word and I am also learning how to pronounce it. So maybe you can practice it in the class, but it is an amazing paper and I would share the details of the paper with you when if you can find it I think it could make for a very good read and understanding.



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## Sustainability communication

- Includes communication about environment, risk and science, i.e. resources, contingencies and technology that can be used to deal with the contingencies to preserve resources and make them last as long as possible. (Fiacher et al, 2016)
- Communication for, about and of sustainability:
  - "Communication *for* sustainability (CfS): Has the main objective in facilitating societal transformation towards the normative goals of sustainable development"
  - "Communication *about* sustainability (CaS): focuses on sharing concepts & frames in the context of sustainable development."
  - "Communication *of* sustainability (CoS): transferring information from a sender to a receiver in order to be certain motivation across"

(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011; Newig, 2011; Newig et al., 2013, ...)

Okay sustainability communication, this includes communication about the environment, risk, and science that is the resources, contingencies, and technology that can be used to deal with the contingencies to preserve resources and make them last as long as possible. Again we have to be realistic, nothing can go on forever there is a paper very nice paper called is sustainability really sustainable.

So I will share that with you maybe you can have a discussion in your class about that amazingly written paper, you know on what is it that we are talking about how long do we want this balance to continue and nothing can last forever. But anyway, now when we talk about sustainability communication there is another view that discusses the ways in which communication and sustainability have been talked about in the literature. And that is the three perspectives of how communication relates to sustainability or how communication and sustainability have been studied together.

So the three ways are one body of literature has studied or talks about communication for sustainability. So one aspect is talking about sustainability coming to an understanding a shared understanding of what it is that sustainability means. So it has the main objective of facilitating

societal transformation towards the normative goals of sustainable development that is communication for sustainability, communication about sustainability focuses on sharing concepts and frames in the context of sustainable development.

So it talks about how the different contexts are discussed as far as sustainable development is concerned and communication of sustainability refers to the transference of information from a sender to a receiver in order to bring a certain motivation across.

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**Communication about sustainability**  
(Fischer et al., 2016)

- “Refers to processes in which information, interpretations, & opinions regarding sustainability issues are *exchanged & debated*.”
- Function: “Deliberation; production of intersubjective/ shared concepts/ frames”
- Assessment of effectiveness:
  - “Amount of attention the issue receives from the mass media”  
(Bonfadelli, 2010; Newtg, 2011, in Fischer et al., 2016)
  - “Who has access to the discourse and [who] influences the framing process.” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, in Fischer et al., 2016)
  - “The extent to which the discourse in one subsystem (e.g. science) is compatible with discourses in other subsystem (e.g. the political system), & how likely it is to transfer important information from one subsystem to another so that, eventually, action for sustainable development can be taken.” (Egner, 2007, in Fischer et al., 2016)



Let us discuss these things in detail, communication about sustainability refers to a process in which information, interpretations, and opinions regarding sustainability issues are exchanged and debated. We talk about sustainability, we talk about, we discuss what sustainability means to us in different spheres, we talk about how we define sustainability, how we should define sustainability and why?

And the function of this type of communication is deliberation production of inter subjective or shared concepts and frames. So understanding what sustainability is and defining sustainability and understanding how different areas or how different, how sustainability is understood in

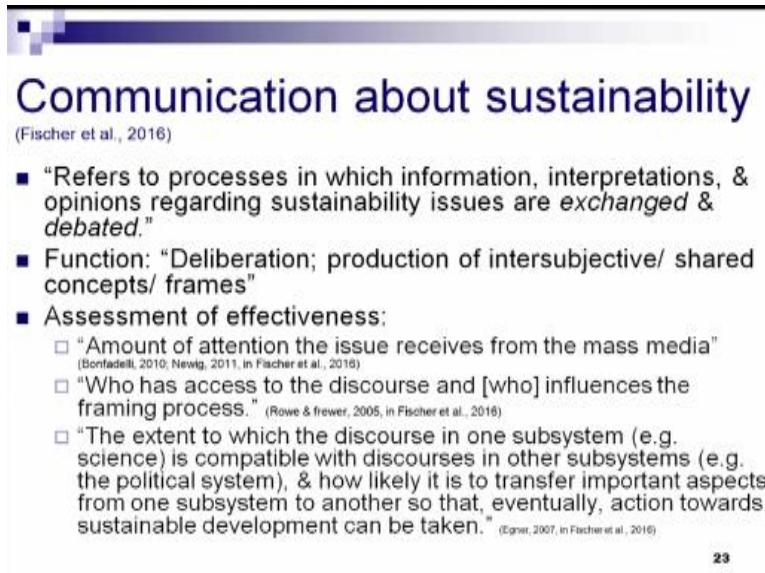
different contexts and from different frames of reference and the effectiveness of this type of communication is assessed by the amount of attention, the issue receives from the media.

And how, you know when we talk about sustainability who listens to us, who decides to act on it, who decides to do something about it that is the, that is how the, the amount of it that is how the asset, the effectiveness of this type of communication is assessed. The second method of assessing effectiveness is who has access to the discourse and who influences the framing process, who decides how sustainability should be defined, who listens to these discussions, who understand how these discussions take place, who gets to contribute in this discussion, whose voice is heard, whose voice is not heard, whose definition eventually gets accepted as the most acceptable definition.

Then the other method in which the effectiveness is assessed is the extent to which the discourse in one subsystem is compatible with discourses in other subsystems. And how likely it is to transfer an important aspects from one subsystem to another, so that eventually action towards sustainable development can be taken. For example, the whole discussion about sustainability and sustainable development has been taking place with regards to the environment.

We have been talking about how sustainability or sustainable development in the context of environmental development. But when we talk about the effectiveness of sustainable development we are essentially discussing.

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## Communication about sustainability

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23

How the environmental issues are related to the economic issues and how maybe science can contribute and how these social scientists are talking about it, and how the concerns raised by this discourse in environmental sciences are accepted or dealt with by the social scientists. What is the impact on the people living in those environments, so we talked about planting trees to people really understand the needs to plant trees, why do they want to plant these, what will they do with planting trees extra.

And how do they, you know how do they react to what is being told to them and I will share an example of how this discourse has influenced the way things are done in a state called Himachal Pradesh and I have seen this on the roadside that anytime a tree is going to be cut and again I do not know if this is an impact or this is an effect of the discussions about sustainability, but there is definitely a heightened concern about cutting trees.

Anytime a tree is going to be cut in many places I have seen that A Pandit a priest comes and decides which day the tree is going to be cut and then they tie this holy thread a Molly around the tree, and then they pray to the tree for the forgiveness for cutting it and then the trees cut. So if you are on a road, on a state highway on any road in Himachal and you see a thread tied

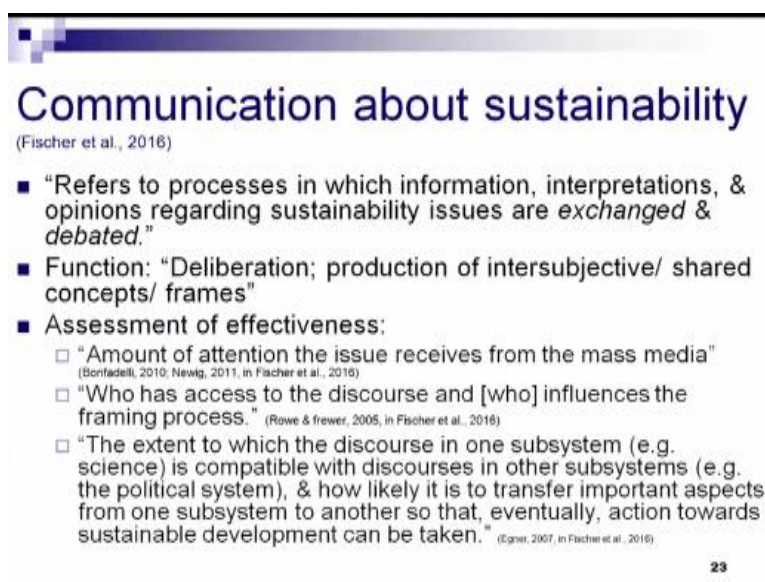
around it please understand that it is a marker in many places, not a place where of course you have these little threads tight on branches.

But if it is tied around the lower part of the trunk it means that the tree is going to be cut and the people who are going to cut it are asking the tree for forgiveness. So, you know the community has accepted it now, I do not know whether the discourse on sustainability influenced this practice or whether this practice was part of the discourse on environmental sustainability.

Again, you know the historians and the low people working in that region would be able to tell you more about it. So community that the community and the environment and the different people working talking about sustainable development efforts need to work in tandem with each other and the effectiveness of communication about sustainability is assessed by how the ideas of one aspect of sustainability or how the discussion about sustainability in one science or one field translates into another.

So a scientist will have something else to say and the social scientist will perceive it in a different way and implement it, apply it, understand it in a different way.

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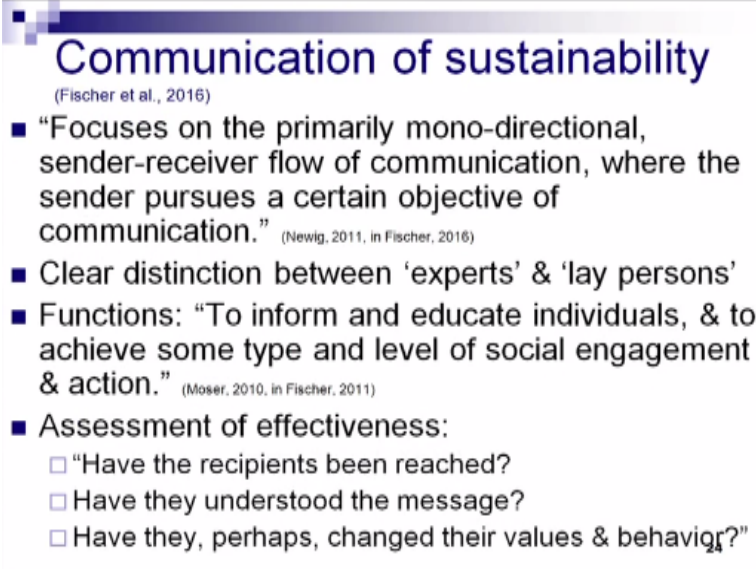
**Communication about sustainability**  
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23

And that is how the effectiveness is assessed.

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**Communication of sustainability**  
(Fischer et al., 2016)

- “Focuses on the primarily mono-directional, sender-receiver flow of communication, where the sender pursues a certain objective of communication.” (Newig, 2011, in Fischer, 2016)
- Clear distinction between ‘experts’ & ‘lay persons’
- Functions: “To inform and educate individuals, & to achieve some type and level of social engagement & action.” (Moser, 2010, in Fischer, 2011)
- Assessment of effectiveness:
  - “Have the recipients been reached?”
  - Have they understood the message?
  - Have they, perhaps, changed their values & behavior?”

The second type of discussion on sustainability focuses on the primarily mono-directional sender receiver flow of communication. Where the sender pursues a certain objective of communication, and here this is mostly about the experts and non-expert. So we talk about sustainability, we talk about the way sustainability efforts need to be implemented and the functions here are or the function of this type of discourse or this type of communication are to inform and educate individuals and to achieve some type and level of social engagement in action.

So one is talking about sustainability coming to a shared understanding, the second is there is this clear distinction between experts and laypersons we are talking about community, we are talking about global warming, we are talking about environmental sustainability, we are talking about sustainability of the social fabric, we will tell you how to live your lives so and we will do it through different ways it could even be participative.

But still there is a distinction between the experts and the lay persons who engage with the community depending on the needs of the community and that is the communication of sustainability, we let the community know that something is required, we generate the need, we identify their needs then we tell them that here is where we fit in, here is where our level of expertise fits in.

The effectiveness of this type of communication is assessed by finding out whether the recipients have been reached, whether the people have actually understood the message, whether they have heard the message.

So if we transmit something over mass media we put something on television, we say we need to plant trees, we need to minimize the wastage of water, we need to minimize the use of electricity as far as possible, we need to look for alternative forms of energy, who is listening to us? Are the people who are actually going to implement these ideas really listening to us? Are they understanding the message? Have they perhaps change to their values and beliefs so when we talk about using renewable sources of energy.

You know many times we talk about solar energy, solar energy is not renewable it is just an assumingly unlimited source of energy, or assumingly under or it is a heavily underutilized source of energy. But it is not renewable, the Sun has a life, however many millions or billions of years. So, you know we say okay let us harness solar energy are people really understanding it, how many people have understood it? How many people are willing to install solar panels on their rooftops?

In order to use solar energy for heating water in their houses for generating electricity how many people are willing to understand that this can be used for different things and how do we enhance the effectiveness of that. For example, to improve or to increase the, or to show people how solar energy could be harnessed into heating water, you know I do not know if this was done, but one thing that could be done would be to just put a pot of water outside and say that if you put it out in the Sun it gets heated.

So that is what these panels do they just take the heat energy and then they heat the water that is there in the tank and that is then sent to the house. So, you know I mean just showing people how this takes place that even if you put a pot of water out in the Sun for sometime the water does get heated, you put your food out the food gets heated. So, you know solar cookers and also you say if you put this added device it gets heated faster the energy is concentrated.

So there are some kind of scaffolding with what people know, and then when people start accepting this then you sort of move on to a different type of technology. So, you know that is a way of reaching out to people by talking by discussing things like an expert who is still connected to the community that they are talking about, okay. The third aspect is communication for sustainability, this really focuses on knowledge generation, social learning, collaborative redeveloping solutions for sustainability problems etc, so the function of this type of communication is to facilitate social transformation towards the normative goals of social development.

And you know this is about sending out messages over a period of time, sending out messages in such a way that the community not only listens to us, the community starts internalizing what is being given to it. So the first was communication about sustainability, we discuss what sustainability means, then we talk about communication of sustainability I am the expert and you are the layperson and if you believe me then you will stand to benefit from whatever it is that I am telling you and then we talk about communication for sustainability.

We talk about empowerment, we talk about generation of new knowledge, creation of knowledge, and then stimulation within the community to generate new kinds of knowledge collaboratively developing solutions coming up with new ideas from whatever resources they have, and then moving onto doing things on their own and that is where sustainability really starts okay. So how do we move from communicating about sustainability to communicating for sustainability is what we will be discussing in this whole series of lectures.



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## Culture and sustainable development

(Packalen, 2010)

- Culture acts as "... a medium that can give shape to the communication and action that is necessary so that sustainable development can be achieved on ecological, economic and social words,



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## Principles of sustainability communication

(Bernhart, 2009)

- Accountability of policies, decisions, actions, products & performance
- Accuracy of information
- Completeness of information
- Comparability of performance
- Context for a claim
- Materiality (significance) of issues for stakeholders
- Reliability of information
- Responsiveness to stakeholders
- Stakeholder inclusiveness
- Transparency of information



Okay and that is where we will stop today and in the next session we will discuss some approaches of sustainable communication. So thank you very much for listening.