Communicative sustainability in a nutshell

The concept of *communicative sustainability* applies to (i) the set of communicative resources required for, or conducive to, sustainability in development, (ii) access to, and control over these resources by the primary actors, (iii) the communicative management of goals and contents of development in accordance with (i) and (ii).

Although originally developed with a strong eye on the local language and its lacking recognition (Bearth 2000a/b), the scope of communicative sustainability is not limited to the narrow concept of "local" nor to giving reasons for the rehabilitation of the local language; rather it should be seen as a set of claims, principles and criteria for bringing two complementary principles into balance: (i) the principle which calls for broad recourse to a bridge medium, conveniently provided by the former colonial language or an African *lingua franca*, as an indispensable means of managing linguistic fragmentation typical of most African countries at an inter-community level; (ii) the principle that calls for the local language as the default medium in all essentials of local conceptualization and implementation of development.

Communicative sustainability was defined in the first place as "auto-propagation of an exogenous innovative message in the target community, independently of external stimuli". Communicative sustainability, in other words, results from the substitution of an endogenous source to the original exogenous source of an innovative message.

In a more explicitly participatory mood, communicative sustainability can alternatively be defined as the set of conditions under which sustainable knowledge can be constructed collaboratively between external sources and local actors.

Put negatively, communicative dependency – the lack of control over communicative resources required for successfully negotiating and achieving locally desirable goals – is the one single factor standing most xx in the way of sustainable development.

Communicative sustainability and the Millenium Development Goals

Given the inclusive scope of the MDG, reducing communicative dependency and augmenting communicative empowerment, appears to be a priority of its own, which needs to be accounted and catered for just as much as the currently listed MDGs, in none of which it is already included.[1] What justifies its recognition as a goal in its own right is its strategic place as a "meta-resource" on whose optimization depends the optimal use of all other resources essential for attaining the MDG. The concept of communicative sustainability, as we might choose to call this precondition, denotes first of all, at a somewhat abstract level, the set of communicative resources required for, or conducive to, sustainability in development, and at the same time the accessibility to, and, last but not least, control over these resources by the primary actors.

➔ Critical remarks on communicative sustainability

➔ Communicative sustainability indicators

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[1] The PANOS consortium (www.panos.org.uk) sees communication needs and strategies as being at the heart of sustainable development in general and poverty reduction in particular: "Reaching the MDG in 2015 will require huge investments of political will and financial resources by governments in both the developed and the developing world; but it will also require a belated recognition that communication is central to all aspects of sustainable development." (Warnock et al. 2007:6).