# Eyes See; Ears Hear

*Donald Snowden,* Memorial University, 1984

**Editors' Note**

Donald Snowden wrote this paper just prior to his death in 1984. It is one of the very few existing publications of his writing. Sadly, while many have heard about Snowden's work, very few have had the chance to read his words. He spent most of his time involved in fieldwork in Canada and around the world, and had very little time to write in the midst of practice. Donald Snowden is perhaps one of the most important early pioneers in the field of communication for development. In 1967, he helped to catalyze the use of a communication for development approach known as the "Fogo Process." The Fogo Process is a people-centred community development approach which, via simple media tools, assists communities and individuals in "coming to grips" with their problems, opportunities and visions. The Fogo Process provided a model of communication for development practice that was far ahead of its time. Indeed, some communication for development practitioners recognize that the field owes a worldwide debt to the Fogo Process and for the person who is largely responsible for promoting this participatory development communication methodology.

The Fogo Process began in 1967 on Fogo Island, a small island outport fishing community off the Eastern coast of Newfoundland. At that time Donald Snowden was director of the Extension Department at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. He led a process whereby community members were able to articulate their problems, ideas and vision on films that were later screened to community members at facilitated community discussion forums. Through the films, the people of Fogo Island began to see that each village on the Island was experiencing similar problems and became aware of the need for community organization. The films were also used to bring distant politicians face-to-face (or face to screen) with the voices and visions of people they seldom heard. Government policies and actions were changed, the people of Fogo began to organize, and the history of the Island changed forever:

"Today few people on Fogo speak often about the filming, yet many believe their lives were changed enormously by it. This can never be accurately measured. But it is certain that the fishermen formed an island-wide producer's cooperative which handled and processed large catches, enabling them to keep the profits on their island. Unemployment of able bodied men disappeared, and government directed their efforts to helping people stay... Films did not do these things: people did them. There is little doubt, however, that film created an awareness and self confidence that was needed for people advocated development to occur." -- Don Snowden, 1983

With Snowden's vision and support, together with the talents of film and video producers from Canada's National Film Board (NFB), the Fogo Process was incorporated within the NFB's innovative "Challenge for Change" program and "The War on Poverty Program in Canada." By the mid-1970's Snowden and his colleagues were being asked to experiment with the Fogo Process in various parts of North America (especially in the Arctic and Alaska), Africa and Asia. In 1983 Snowden was asked by the Canadian International Development Agency to explore the possibility of using small format video and the Fogo Process approach to bring together the physical engineering and social interests concerned with small-scale water control structures for improved agriculture in Bangladesh. It was while working on this project that Snowden died suddenly in Hyderabad, India on April 4, 1984. He was in India to attend the first meeting of the National Council for Development Communications, an organization started by Dr. V.K. Dubey which had grown from Dr. Dubey's work with Snowden on a previous project in India.

Like many busy communication for development fieldworkers, Snowden focused on doing, not publishing. Unfortunately, this has meant that many communication for development practitioners are unaware of one of the strongest roots of participatory communication for development methods. The paper, "Eyes See; Ears Hear," is Snowden's last published work, and was designed to accompany a documentary video depicting the participatory video process as it was used in India.

As you read his paper, "Eyes See; Ears Hear," substitute the word "video" with the names of telecommunication technologies such as telephones or the Internet, and you will see how Snowden's approach to participatory communication for development processes is equally appropriate for these technologies. Snowden challenges us to look at a communication technology and see how it can be used creatively and flexibly to support empowerment processes. He stresses the importance of the communication *processes over product*. He transcends the overwhelming tendency to use communication tools to generate the expert-driven documentaries and "social marketing" programs that still dominate practice in the field of communication for development. Snowden's twist on *process over product* is equally appropriate for helping us to transcend conservative, product and technology driven ICT applications and view these technologies from the perspective of peoples' participation and empowerment.

Snowden also highlights the importance of fieldworkers who work hard to gain knowledge of the community in which they work, "of its joys and its problems, its groupings, perceptions, beliefs and all the things that make it the way it is." How many proponents of telecommunication technologies take the time to gain an intimate knowledge of the people and communities with whom they "interface" in deploying their tools? How many proponents of telecommunication technologies take the time to explore, with the people who will use these tools, the infinite number of creative and potentially empowering applications that can be imagined through participatory appraisals of knowledge and communication systems?

After Snowden's premature death, his family created an endowment and established the Don Snowden Centre for Development Communication at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. For many years the Centre was operated by another participatory video pioneer, Tony Williamson, who succeeded in introducing the Fogo Process to countless community development workers around the world. Williamson retired from Memorial University in 1996, and the Snowden Centre was relocated to the Department of Rural Extension Studies at the University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada where it was renamed the "Don Snowden Program for Development Communication."

The purpose of the Don Snowden Program for Development Communication is to promote, through training, research, and advisory activities, communication for community development and the mobilization of human resources in developing regions of Canada and in developing countries. The publication of this book is an example of the kind of activities that the Snowden Program supports. The Snowden Program provides support to a number of other initiatives, including:

- assistance to students of communication for development working in developing regions of Canada and developing countries;

- participatory video activities;

- participatory approaches to enabling rural stakeholders to take better advantage of rural and remote telecommunication services and telecentres;

- community media projects, and;

- the Internet as it applies to rural and developing regions of Canada and developing countries.

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*Copies of the Snowden video, "Eyes See; Ears Hear" are available for sale via that office.*

## Introduction

This paper is an introduction to some techniques in improved communications which have been used successfully in a number of countries. The paper describes these techniques and the technology of portable videotape recording that provides the vehicle for them.

The paper is written as a companion to the documentary film *Eyes See; Ears Hear* which is available in English and French and has been placed in libraries in a number of countries.

The film, *Eyes See; Ears Hear* illustrates and describes the way in which portable videotape equipment was used to improve communications in an important, applied research project in India which assisted in improving economic conditions and local control, helped improve village health, and brought about greater cohesion among village groups which had been sharply divided. That project was carried out by community workers from the National Dairy Research Institute in Haryana State in India, who were trained by development support communication specialists from Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. The techniques used in that project are highly portable, have been used successfully elsewhere, and can be applied to much community work in many parts of the world.

It is hoped this paper will help in making decisions about effective use of video in informal learning, especially among those who cannot read and write.

### Video Technology in the Third World

There is much controversy around the use of videotape recording technology in community work. One reason is that video is often incorrectly used by people who see its enormous potential for community work but do not have access to the kind of experience and knowledge that will help them to make the right decisions about obtaining video equipment for field work or about using correctly the video equipment they have already.

Many countries have suffered in their first contacts with video as a tool in learning for the following reasons, among others:

1. Those seeking to introduce the technology are not aware of what is required to make it and keep it an effective tool for learning, nor do they know where to go to seek sound advice.

2. The teachers and trainers are sometimes outsiders with lack of knowledge of local conditions and customs that will affect production/distribution/maintenance. When their projects fail, they often blame the technology, not their own deficiencies.

3. International agencies are not as well equipped as they should be to give sound advice.

4. Foreign governments are often well-intentioned in supplying video equipment but their donations are often ill-conceived and made without any real understanding of what is required to make the technology and effective tool in community work, nor do they know enough about its strengths and limitations.

5. Equipment manufacturers' technical training is from the perspective of the salesman. They do not usually offer truly critical assessments of their products,

nor are they aware of field conditions under which video equipment is often used in community work.

Videotape recording equipment is very portable, making it easy to transport and to use in villages and barrios. It is closest to movies in terms of media advantages in community work. It is light, easier to learn to handle, becoming less costly and has one very important advantage over film: it does not need to be sent away for processing in a film laboratory but can be played back immediately, in much the same way as audio-tapes, on a tape recorder. With video, however, there is a moving image as well as sound.

**The Way Video is Used by Development Workers and Techniques for Introducing it into Village Societies**

In the hands of a skilful community worker, portable videotape recording (VTR) equipment is a tool which can greatly accelerate the process of self-help and learning. As a catalyst for community action, video can assist in changing the human condition as well as describing it. Community workers can use video in a number of ways. One way is to use it within a village to show individuals or groups what they already know. Used this way, video becomes a mirror. It is through such videotapes the community worker can help individuals or groups analyse what they are saying about their own hopes and problems. Video assists village people to look objectively and more clearly at their own statements.

*Horizontal Learning and Peer Teaching*

Another thing community workers can do is to take videotapes they have made with one village group and show them to the same kind of group in another village. Video made with the assistance of the community worker and shown from village to village amongst people of the same background becomes a new form of learning. This is known as horizontal learning and is becoming increasingly acknowledged worldwide as an essential component of education, usually (but not exclusively) among adults. Village people can use video to teach themselves, from within their own village, or between their village and other villages, and they are doing this increasingly. Such teaching is clearly illustrated in the film *Eyes See; Ears Hear*.

*Vertical Communication*

Sometimes the community worker and the people use video to speak to people of authority, to people who are regarded as having power over common village people. In like manner, the community worker uses videotape with such people to talk back to the common people of the village. In this way, new communication links are sometimes established and groups and individuals who normally have not been able to talk to each other are able to do so and to learn from each other.

## An Example

Video was used this way in Taprana, a small village in India. Rickshaw drivers who had never owned the vehicles they used to earn their living told their story to their community worker on videotape. They pointed out why they believed they were good risks for loans. The community worker then showed the tape to the bank manager in the city some miles away. On video, the rickshaw drivers had spoken of things they believed banks did wrong when dealing with village people. The bank manager answered on videotape that the rickshaw drivers made sense, and told him things he hadn't known before. He then invited them to the bank to discuss getting loans so that they could own their own rickshaws. The videotape with the manager was played back in the village to the rickshaw drivers. They dealt with the bank and got their loans.

To village people who can neither read nor write, videotape is almost like a new from of reading and writing. It can provide information in a form that village people can understand, and it can assist them to talk with people with whom they do not normally communicate in a way that both can understand and respond to without threat or fear.

Not only does video used in this manner by village people and community workers speak in a language that people can understand, but it can also be used to show how people do things, making it possible for others to follow examples they see on videotape. And example would be the use of videotape to illustrate a successful technique in fishing, or a piece of technology adapted to village use.

## The Importance of the Community Worker

Video is only a tool, and it is only as good as the skills of the community worker who uses it with communities. There are some techniques which will help the community worker use video effectively.

It is best for the community worker to get to know well the people in a village before introducing video. The worker must have knowledge of the village, of its joys and its problems, its groupings, perceptions, beliefs and all the things that make it the way it is.

In most villages people have never seen video and it requires careful introduction into community life if it is to be effective as a tool in learning and teaching. If it is successfully introduced it will come in time to be regarded as something of and for the community; if not carefully introduced video will always be a stranger. A good way to introduce video to communities is simply to set it up in a public area, an open space or a location that people can easily reach in the course of their daily activities, and demonstrate it and discuss it with all who are interested.

Usually the community worker will have a small video production crew of two persons at most, who work as part of his team, one looking after the sound, the

other using the camera. During the introduction of the equipment to the community, people should be encouraged to look through the camera and to see themselves on the screen. Another successful way to introduce video as a community-controlled tool for learning is to have the community worker and his small production crew videotape non-controversial community scenes which are later played back at open community meetings.

Even though video will be unknown to the community, it is a technology that ordinary people can use and control, and by having the time to become familiar with it in a public setting, they may be encouraged to learn from it rather than to fear ir or be mystified by it. Its successful use involves both the screening of videotapes and discussion based on what the tapes have presented. Without the use of a community worker to guide discussion after a videotape has been screened, the technology is nowhere near as useful. In this manner, the development worker and the village people gradually develop a trust for the tool and for each other as they progress in their learning.

Another helpful technique for the community worker is to show the audience the editing process of video technology, to show people that a tape can be erased, or that the content of the tape can be arranged if the people wish to change it to reflect more accurately what they were trying to say.

In order for video to remain an effective tool assisting in community action or learning, people must always be able to maintain trust in the technology and in the people who are using it. The community worker is well advised to give village people every opportunity to be involved in discussing the production of videotapes, in their use and in their distribution. As a good community worker heor she will know that this will take time, as well as much thought and planning with the people.

**Methods of Distribution of Videotapes**

More than any other medium involving moving images and sound, video lends itself to effective group discussion. Indeed, without using group discussion around the screening of video materials in community work, much of the effectiveness of the technology will be lost.

It is important when screening video in the community to bear in mind two important factors:

> 1. **Location**. The showing of videotapes should occur in a place which is acceptable to the community for meetings. In some communities certain groups gather in certain places by custom. These are the places that normally will be most acceptable; but the decision on where screenings are to take place is a matter for the community to make. In some communities where there have been deep divisions, community workers have found it expedient to show

the same videotapes and hold discussions in several areas of the community, at least for a while after the technology is first introduced. One thing is certain – children usually crowd in at screenings with adults, and there are not often empty seating spaces.

2. **Time**. Videotapes for community use are made for specific purposes. It is important that those for whom the tapes are made should be able to see and to discuss them with each other and with the community worker. The time at which this is most convenient varies from place to place. Such decisions should be left to the appropriate viewers and the community worker should accept the community's wishes in this regard.

## Some Observations About Visual Comprehension and Video

The techniques described here can orient the community worker's use of video with village people are primarily for audiences that are illiterate and uneducated. Reading instructions or books are of no help and radio often is perceived as a disembodied voice giving long speeches that convey little understanding. When such people see themselves and their peers on video, saying or doing familiar things (perhaps applying methods or organization), the visual comprehension for the viewers is so real that in the memory of the individuals, long after the event, the medium of the video may be forgotten. People may recall that they have actually met with those they saw and listened to only on video. Such reality sharpens the experience, so that the specific content of the video message is remembered for a long time after. This visual experience, especially in relation to receiving information from one's peers, or sending out information to one's peers elsewhere, can inspire belief and confidence in individuals and in the total community. It is exciting to learn that one's own experience and knowledge is important to others and can be an example to others. It is just as exciting to learn that others to whom one can relate have solved problems similar to your own in ways that you might not have thought of.

## Some Reflections on Video as a Communications Tool

The ability to view immediately one's own self speaking on videotape assists individuals to see themselves as others see them. This self-image conveys the impression immediately that one's own knowledge is important and that it can be effectively communicated. These video techniques create a new way of learning, which not only build confidence, but show people that they can say and do things that they thought were not possible before. For those who cannot read or write, these video techniques make available information that people can understand. They also create new communication links. People can talk with other people in different villages, with other people in different social or economic classes, with other kinds of experts, or with bosses. Video in the hands of a skilled community worker can assist people to talk to other people with whom they may have never

before had any communication or access. It can remove the inherent threat in communicating with persons of authority. It can assist in the planning of action and in the resolution of conflict, potential or actual.

The very presence of a community worker with this technology shows or provides a sense of caring and involvement which enhances the willingness of village people to become involved in new ways of learning and doing. The community worker and the video process bring people together for common cause, create new information channels and inspire a belief and confidence in self-help.

There are times, however when video as a tool is inappropriate to a particular situation. For example, the field-worker may be called upon to arbitrate between difficult interpersonal relations within an organizational framework or project, in which using video could actually interfere with sensitive needs which require immediate action. A community worker must be attuned to such situations and know when to make the decision to use or not to use video as a communication tool.

**The Technology**

Video production and utilization equipment that is most appropriate for development workers and educators is not the same as that used for broadcast purposes. It is less expensive and the technical quality of the image produced may not be as high as broadcast equipment; however, community use of video does not require as high technical standards. It is the message, more than its packaging, that is important in community work.

It is important to recognize that there is a wide range of non-broadcast video equipment on the market. This is a highly competitive field, with the technology changing very rapidly and manufacturers constantly developing new models, so great care must be taken to select the most suitable equipment for the purposes for which it is to be used.

It is also important to make decisions that are as "long term" as possible. Unfortunately, the video industry looks on three years as "long term".

**Types of Learning for which Video can be an Effective Tool**

1. *Horizontal learning or peer learning* -- a form of learning in which country residents use their experience and knowledge to teach one another, or member of one community use their experience and knowledge to teach other communities. And example of the use of video in this form of learning would involve the production and screening of a videotape made by farmers in one village to assist farmers in another village solve a problem concerning marketing. This form of learning is informal and in direct response to a community's perceived needs.

2. ***Vertical learning*** – usually associated with formal learning involving a teacher and students. In community work video is often used for this form of learning to give technical training, or provide information from external expertise. The videotapes are made with specialists in a variety of fields. An example of the use of video in this type of community learning would be the screening of a series of videotapes in the community on the subject of nutrition made by an expert in nutrition from a university or the ministry of health.

3. ***Exchange learning*** – Exchange learning involves the interchange of information, ideas, techniques and knowledge through interactive as opposed to one-way communication. In this form of learning teachers become learner/teachers and those who are traditionally regarded as learners become teachers as well. This process enables the exchange of views, opinions, information and knowledge with a specific objective in mind, such as improving understanding, creating group consensus, and pointing ways to effective actions. An example of exchange learning through the use of videotape is illustrated in the film *Eyes See; Ears Hear* when village rickshaw pullers describe how they used video to speak with a distant bank manager, who replied to them on video.