

The Spirit Lives On: Communication Seminars as a Surprisingly Hardy, Valuable, and Promising Heritage of NPAC

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Abstract

After many decades, dwindling numbers of communicators, extension personnel, and development professionals recall the National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC) of the 1950s and early 1960s. But around the world many professionals, scholars, and organizations can recognize the spirit and legacy of NPAC, which has had substantial impact well beyond its original national mission. NPAC became the springboard for a long-running series of communication seminars that built the capacity of foreign students, studying in the United States, to return home better able to communicate as change agents in fostering development. Seminars of NPAC also point to key ingredients for addressing urgent issues facing our nation and world today. This study addresses the origins, features, transitions, durability, and impacts of those communication seminars across nearly 60 years. The authors used historical analysis to reveal a surprising trail of service that leads to the present day and beyond. It provides new insights about how the NPAC communication training program has exerted more than 15 kinds of impact on agricultural development, on organizations at all levels throughout the world – and on individuals touched by it. The analysis highlights insightful, unpublished backstories about the communication training heritage of NPAC. It also identifies key elements of effective communication training programs and identifies opportunities for further research and practice. It could help readers identify professional development innovations the Journal of Applied Communications will advance and report during its second century.

Key Words

National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC), Professional Development, Communication Training, Extension Communication, Development Communication

Literature Review

Perhaps the most ambitious project in the history of what is now the Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Life and Human Sciences (ACE) ended more than a half century ago. It was the National Project in Agricultural Communications (NPAC), funded by the Kellogg Foundation and participating member institutions of the American Association of Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities. It got under way in 1953 and ended in 1960, then was extended briefly until 1962 when the NPAC office at Michigan State University closed. Staff members moved to new stages of their careers. However, the spirit, legacy, and value of NPAC did not end.

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What follows is the report of a nearly-60-year analysis, beginning with what was known as the communication training program of NPAC. Training was the largest single program area in a \$1 million-plus project that also included (a) collection, evaluation, and dissemination of research, (b) services, and (c) creative programming.

Background of the Communication Training Program of NPAC

The charter purpose of NPAC was to “assist administrators and information workers in our land-grant institutions and the United States Department of Agriculture in using present and potential communications more effectively and efficiently in extending to the entire public the services and facilities of their institutions” (National Project, 1960, p. 14). Thus, communication training and professional development were woven into the core mission of NPAC. When the new project was approved in early 1953 the person selected to be Executive Director was Stanley Andrews who had recently resigned as administrator of the U.S. Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA). Andrews began his new job at Michigan State on September 1, 1953, and served as Executive Director of NPAC until February 29, 1960 (National Project, 1960, p. 89).

Michigan State offered the Associate Director position to Francis C. Byrnes who would serve in it from October 1, 1953 to February 29, 1960 (National Project, 1960, p. 90). As Associate Director, he was responsible for coordinating information, training, and research services for staff members in U.S. land-grant universities involved in agricultural research, extension, education, and communication. More than one-third of the NPAC budget was allocated for training. (National Project, 1960, p. 13). As coordinator for that initiative he led development of the NPAC communication training program, integrating social science knowledge into in-service training of U.S. extension and community development professionals.

Byrnes, since 1947, had been working with Ohio State University as agricultural editor of the Cooperative Extension Service and Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station. His experiences fit well with the needs of NPAC, having integrated the communication programs of the College of Agriculture and Extension Service at Columbus with those of the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station at Wooster. He had helped develop the concept for a consumer-oriented television program, “City-Farm Extra,” and helped mobilize matching grant support for it from 10 agricultural organizations. He had gained international experience placing young farmers from European countries on Ohio farms to learn U. S. agricultural methods (K. Byrnes, 2014, p. 1).

NPAC staff created a series of training programs and materials to upgrade their communication skills. Project staff and collaborating university professors traveled around the country conducting seminars to “train the trainers.” Participating extension specialists and agents then returned home, adapted the materials for local needs and used them to train others (National Project, 1960, p. 29-40; K. Byrnes, 2014, p. 3).

These communication training sessions began in 1956, met with immediate acceptance, and continued actively throughout the nation during NPAC’s remaining years. Several features characterized the training program. (1) It involved a broad base of organizational stakeholders that helped ensure administrative support and interdisciplinary teams that involved academics, extension specialists, and field staff. (2) It featured a “train the trainer” concept. (3) It emphasized a behavioral approach to communication, teaching communication skills within the context of new social and psychological concepts about how people behave. (4) It incorporated new research and insights about the diffusion and adoption of agricultural innovations. (5) It de-emphasized lectures and used inductive teaching methods, bringing participants actively into a “learning by doing” process through individual or group exercises, games, simulation, and discussion. (6) It drew upon packaged training materials adapted to field situations in agriculture and home economics. (7) It included agricultural applications of new information technologies, including the television medium that emerged during the 1950s (National Project, 1960).



Figure 1. Francis Byrnes, John Morrow, and Stanley Andrews (Michigan State College – Nov.-Dec. 1953) (Associate Director, Audio-Visual Director, and Executive Director, respectively)

NPAC leaders placed special emphasis on using a behavioral approach to communication in support of development. In an oral history interview on October 31, 1970, former NPAC Director Stanley Andrews reflected on efforts to incorporate it and reasons for doing so:

At Michigan State (University) we began to get into this communication problem in depth. We looked at communications in terms of how people behave. We stumbled onto something that if we could have had it when we started we might have done a better job in Point IV (the U.S. Government's foreign assistance program before the establishment of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1961). It looked like we were going to get AID to try out the behavioral communications idea. It went clear up in the Eisenhower administration, to the last man, and he said, "Well, damn it, this looks like something awful good, but you know we've got so many things I'll just have to put it off for a while." And the fellow that was carrying it through the bureaucracy was sent to Africa and the whole thing collapsed (Andrews, 1970).

Andrews explained that giving professionals from abroad a debriefing before they return home led them to ask what this means in their countries and how they would relate this to their problems. He observed that it gives an entirely different concept of human behavior, finding common denominators rather than exaggerating differences in human beings.

Pilot Conference for International Communication Training

The international dimension appeared during 1958 as NPAC began to organize pre-departure communication seminars for foreign students studying in the United States (K. Byrnes, 2014, p. 5-8).

Under contract with the U.S. International Cooperation Administration (ICA), NPAC conducted a pilot communication training program to be held at MSU for about 50 foreign trainees. This connection is understandable, given NPAC Director Andrews' former affiliation with the Technical Cooperation Agency, later named ICA and in 1961 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Randall Harrison reported that ICA asked if:

NPAC might be able to help with a problem it [ICA] had. ICA was sponsoring thousands of foreign participants who came to the United States for various kinds of technical training. These participants then returned home. And, while competent in their new skills, they did not seem able to effectively communicate their new knowledge to others. In short, they were not very good change agents. Perhaps, suggested ICA, if these participants were given a workshop on communication and change, just before going home, they might be more successful (K.

Byrnes, 2014, p. 5).

A pilot workshop, based on the NPAC training model, was called the International Communications Conference. It was held in East Lansing, Michigan, on June 22-28, 1958, with 39 participants from nine countries. The purpose was to prepare the participants to re-enter their work situations and help them plan ways to communicate what they learned. The trial effort proved successful. Minutes of the August 20, 1958 meeting of the State Board of Agriculture show that ICA granted \$73,000 to MSU to be used under the direction of Dr. David Berlo to deliver 14 week-long workshops (40-hours each) from July 1, 1958, through June 30, 1959. These workshops were to serve a maximum of 850 ICA-funded developing country participants studying at various universities throughout the United States (Minutes, 1958).



Figure 2. David K. Berlo (Left) & Francis C. Byrnes (Right) - ICA-funded International Communications Conference (the Pilot Communication Training Program)

One condition of the contract was that if ICA wished to continue the pre-departure seminar program a university would be ready to contract for a continuance. NPAC leaders, with endorsement of the communication unit on campus, decided that Michigan State would serve that purpose.

NPAC arranged, in its contract for the pilot seminar, for research funds so that faculty might gain insight on the problems returning participants face and for “back home” evaluation of the seminar by a faculty member [six] months after the pilot. Berlo travelled around the world on this evaluation, finding almost without exception not only favorable comments about the seminar experience but also evidence of changed job behaviors and endorsing comments of supervisors and ICA missions. A few weeks later, with a contract from ICA, Michigan State was in the communication seminar business (K. Byrnes, 2014, p. 6).

In October 1959, an agreement was reached between NPAC and MSU for Michigan State to take over NPAC for an initial three-year period. NPAC entered a new phase as a unit in the College of Communication Arts on March 1, 1960. Reflecting on the fate of NPAC after moving into Communication Arts, Erwin P. Bettinghaus observed that the unit did not do much with NPAC after 1960 (personal communication, February 20, 2013). Absent any new funding after the Kellogg Foundation grant ended, NPAC closed officially in March, 1962 (Klare, 1963, p. v).

The Study

Three research questions guided this analysis of communication training initiatives that emerged from the communication training program of NPAC:

1. In what ways, if any, did the communication training program extend beyond the NPAC project?
2. What levels and kinds of impact did it exert?
3. What lessons and potentials does it offer for future research and practice?

Findings in relation to these questions are organized within four sections: The Michigan State communication seminars, the communication seminars as a private enterprise, International Agricultural Research Centers as new platforms, and impacts of the NPAC communication training program.

Methods

This analysis involved a combination of organizational structures and programming activities. Methodology used here employed the perspective that structural history and historical narrative can complement each other. Emphasis on analyzing organizational or social structures may become static while traditional narrative (featuring events and “telling the story”) may pass over important aspects of the past. Highlighting the relation between historical structure and the older tradition of history as narrative may create a useful synthesis (Burke, 2001; Dougherty & Nawrotzki, 2013; & McDowell, 2002).

On the structural side, this analysis involved a sequence of four models (1) a multi-institutional structure hosting NPAC under foundation financing, (2) a university-based structure featuring public-financed international communication seminars, (3) a private enterprise providing funded communication seminars, and (4) a network of international agricultural research centers providing communication training. The narrative side featured reports of varied activities for improving the competence of those who communicate within and about agriculture.

Libraries, archived and personal collections, and online search systems were used to identify source materials. Those materials represented official documents and other primary sources; books, scholarly articles and other secondary sources; and recollections of participants in the form of correspondence and oral histories. They were evaluated on the basis of informed and competent sources, relevance, authenticity, and verifiability. Materials were excluded if they dealt with communication training programs in general or lacked reference to NPAC and the communication training efforts which emerged from it. No date limits were placed on searching.

The Agricultural Communications Documentation Center and several related collections in the University of Illinois Library, along with the HathiTrust Digital Library, were found to be comprehensive sources of information. Other sources found productive included: PubAg (National Agricultural Library, U. S. Department of Agriculture), JSTOR (Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences), Web of Science, Google Scholar, Google Books, and the Dogpile metasearch system. Search terms used in the online searches included “National Project in Agricultural Communications;” “Communication Training Program;” “communication seminars;” “Michigan State;” and “Management Training and Development Institute.” Authors analyzed selected documents on the basis of their credibility and relevance to the three research questions.

Results

The Michigan State Communication Seminars

Ironically, the ICA-funded communication training program, which grew out of the NPAC-conducted pilot communication training program in 1958, blossomed at Michigan State as a major activity of the Department of General Communication Arts (later shortened to the

Department of Communication). ICA's successor organization, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), continued to provide funding to conduct the communication seminars.

A major component of the seminars was the exposure that participants received to the research that rural sociologists George Beal and Joe Bohlen conducted on adoption and diffusion of agricultural innovations and on developing a model of community-based social action. NPAC staff developed various publications, training materials, and training courses incorporating concepts from the information diffusion and social action research literature.



Figure 3. George Beal and Joe Bohlen presenting their social action model in an NPAC communication training program (Laramie, Wyoming, October 1956)

In turn, some of these materials became part of the curricula of the international communication seminars that MSU's Department of Communication conducted under contract with ICA, and later USAID, for foreign participants studying in the United States.

From the early 1960s through 1978, various department staff directed, organized, and took part in more than 550 communication workshops/seminars that reached 30,000 students from 100 countries pursuing academic programs in agriculture and other fields at U.S. universities (K. Byrnes, 2014, p. 9). These seminars provided communication training that enhanced application of knowledge and skills the participants were learning in their technical fields. They featured group discussion, team teaching to diffuse authority in the classroom and promote group activity, participant presentations each day, early and continuing emphasis on participants' expectations and needs, teaching methodologies that did not overwhelm the program, use of the experience of prior participants in shaping programs, and focus on the participants' re-entry into their home country settings.



Figure 4. Francis Byrnes training in communication workshop in Jamaica (March 1960).

The Communication Seminars as a Private Enterprise

By the late 1970s, either USAID had lost interest in funding the communication seminars and/or MSU's Communication Department had decided not to renew its contract with USAID. Robert Morris was serving as the seminar program director, a position he held from May 1974 through December 1978. He had gained experience in training evaluation from 1972 to 1974 as a Social Science Research Council Grantee conducting research and training design at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Colombia, where Byrnes was head of communication and training. Morris evaluated CIAT's first five years of short courses, following up with 300 former CIAT research and training participants from 16 countries. Morris later recalled the offer he received to manage the communication workshops at MSU:

I had been informed when I took the job that it might not last more than a year or so given noises from USAID. However, I figured that if the program got good ratings it would be continued. It did, from all I could discern, but after four years, we were informed that it was coming to an end. ... I stayed on another year at MSU completing my doctorate (Higher Education Administration and Curriculum, 1984). Being assured that MSU was not interested in pursuing the Communication Workshops on a non-contract basis, I decided to take a shot at offering a program on a similar, but non-contract basis with open enrollment to all foreign graduate students regardless of their sponsorship, and redesigned the program to give more emphasis to management and leadership (Byrnes, 2014, p. 12).

The experiences Morris gained as communication seminar director allowed him to adapt it and continue to make many of its features available for another 29 years. He moved to Washington, D. C., in 1978 and established Management Communication Associates (MCA), later changing its name to the Management Training and Development Institute (MTDI). At that time Susanne Morris (also an MSU PhD) joined him in running the organization. MTDI programs operated from 1978-2007, building on the design of the original MSU Communication Seminars and providing hundreds of five- and ten-day workshops in management communication; project management and evaluation; training of trainers; and management of training. Recently, Bob and Susanne Morris recalled that the training had further ripple effects. An Indonesian husband and wife who attended an MTDI workshop were so impressed with the approach and methodology that they returned home and founded their own company, using that system (R. Morris and S. Morris, personal communication, February 25, 2016).

MTDI also offered custom topics and experiences on special topics and as components for participants on professional travel to the United States. In summary, Morris reported:

More than 10,000 participants from 123 countries attended the MTDI programs. Participants were sponsored by various U.S. agencies, United Nations and other international organizations, NGOs, private firms and home governments, e.g., Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Philippines, Bolivia, Kuwait, and others. Programs have also been conducted directly, or with interpreters, in Spanish, Arabic, Korean, Russian, Polish, Mongolian and French. Programs were also occasionally held abroad, usually at the invitation of former MTDI participants (K. Byrnes, 2014, p. 13).



Figure 5. MTDI communication workshop for senior educators from Ghana and Malaysia, studying in the United States. MTDI trainer Don Cushman in back left. “We learned later that they continued to exchange information and consultancies with each other after they returned home” (Robert Morris, personal communication, January 18, 2014).

Over time, MTDI expanded its curriculum to two-week courses on multiple topics covering leadership, listening, critical thinking, decision making, conflict resolution, and team building. But the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had a negative impact on MTDI’s ability to sustain high enrollment levels of foreign students in its training programs.

With the decline in USAID sponsorship of international students to the US, during 2002–2006 Morris explored the potential to add MTDI functions to operations of several other organizations. He then moved into semi-retirement and more advisory roles, including to the International Leadership Center of IBI International which can now provide these services if international student sponsorship is provided.

International Agricultural Research Centers as New Platforms

While the MTDI program ended and occasional efforts to develop a new NPAC-type project stalled (Kern, 2008), philosophies embodied in the original NPAC communication training program and the communication seminars of Michigan State University and MTDI continued within a new organizational platform. It was the network of International Agricultural Research Centers (IARCs). Indeed, some communicators (e.g., Francis Byrnes, Robert Kern, Robert Morris, Delbert Myren, and Raymond Woodis) who were influenced by NPAC later worked on the communication staff of one or more of the IARCs. Key elements in the NPAC heritage have been adopted and applied in IARC training programs.



Figure 6. K. Byrnes working third Fertilizer Marketing Training Program for the Asian Region (Cikampek, Indonesia, 1982)

Impacts of the NPAC Communication Training Program

Economic and social impacts of the communication seminars that grew from the communication training program which NPAC introduced more than a half century ago are impossible to capture in full. No formal evaluation of impact was conducted for the NPAC project (National Project, 1960). Participant evaluations of the Michigan State and MTDI communication seminars were generally highly complimentary and helped guide adjustments to training teams and content emphasis (Robert Morris, personal communication, June 16, 2015). The current analysis identified evidence that communication training proved valuable in home-country re-entry following studies abroad (Morris & Morris, 1992; Morris, 1993; Morris & Morris, 1994; Harrison, 1996; Training future leaders, 2007). No other impact evaluation is evident regarding the Michigan State and MTDI communication seminars, or the communication training programs of the International Agricultural Research Centers. However, testimonies to NPAC-rooted impact are apparent.

Speeding progress in agricultural development. The U. S. Agency for International Development featured this achievement at the occasion of its 50th Anniversary in 2011. It explained in the publication, *USAID's Legacy in Agricultural Development*:

While a lot of investments were made in developing the Green Revolution technologies..., the speed with which they were adopted and diffused depended on how effectively these technologies were communicated – providing information to change farmers' knowledge, leading to changes in attitudes and acceptance and adoption of new practices. Key to this is the relevance of the improved technology to the farmer's situation and the competence and credibility of the "change agent" to introduce a new technology. ... as adoption and diffusion [of innovations in agricultural technology] also depend on the availability and quality of extension services, USAID took lessons from the experience in the U.S. of the National Project on Agricultural Communications (NPAC), 1953-60. Its largest activity was communications training and the "train the trainer" approach was at the forefront, based on four communications training units for basic, oral, written and visual skills, each incorporating the latest technological advances and training by doing. This approach elevated the role of communications and got different disciplines to work together for effective messaging (2013, p. 48-49).

Spotlighting communication, mobilizing resources, and boosting knowledge. As the NPAC project ended, staff members emphasized several areas of achievement: (1) NPAC increased awareness throughout the federal-state system of the importance and role of communication. (2) It mobilized resources and people to attack communication problems of the day. (3) It sparked the collection, dissemination, and application of available and emerging knowledge about communication (National Project, 1960, p. 27-28). Since then, others have emphasized that NPAC also raised the status of information staffs, broadened the understanding and sharpened the skills of communicators, demonstrated the benefits of crossing interdisciplinary lines, added synergies through groups, individuals, and resources focused on shared interests and problems; sparked graduate study ambitions and research agendas; and extended communication training throughout the world (Miller, 1995; F. Byrnes, 1995; Miller, 2004; McKay, 2005; Miller & Taylor, 2006).

Building academic programs in agricultural communications. The research and training achievements of NPAC "have greatly strengthened development of agricultural communications in the academic community. They also reveal the value of close ties between (a) the courses, degree programs, research agendas and other academic programming and (b) the day-to-day activities, skills, creativity, and insights of those who practice as professionals within the discipline" (Cartmell & Evans, 2013, p. 65-66)

Connecting science with human communication. NPAC workshops provided what Robert Kern described as "the great leap forward" in connecting the communication practices in states and federal offices with a growing body of research and understanding about human interaction and

behavior. They fostered an interest in communication research, which popped up in many places “like bits of yeast in bread dough” (Kern, 2013, p. 15-16).

Influencing and developing careers. The NPAC communication training program also has had career-shaping impact. It “opened a new world to the editors of the time: new ways of thinking about and approaching communication, new ways of thinking about learning and teaching” (Miller, 1995, p. 7).

Authors of this analysis have personal experiences that may serve as useful case examples. After participation in or exposure to NPAC activities, they went on to careers in applied communication that drew on concepts and materials that supported their own academic and development-related work.

One co-author’s involvement in the program began when his father worked with NPAC in the 1950s and early 1960s. He often helped his father around the home kitchen table to collate seminar training materials into packets for participants. Later, at Michigan State University, while studying for his M.A. in Communication from 1967-1968, he helped with the communication seminars as a junior staff member, gaining exposure to the seminar content and training approaches.

More than a decade later, working from 1980-1984 as a sociologist in the Outreach Division of the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) in Alabama, he became heavily involved in communication-related training, helping to design, manage, teach in, and evaluate IFDC training programs. During those years, he participated in or led IFDC fertilizer marketing programs in Thailand, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Bangladesh; an IFDC fertilizer use training program in Kenya; and an International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) seed enterprise and marketing training program in Colombia.

Those experiences provided a valuable foundation when he began working in 1987 as a consultant to MTDI in the Management Communication for Development (MCD) Seminars. Over several years, he worked in nine MCD Seminars, six in English and three in Spanish, held in various cities around the United States. The experience raised his level of confidence as a trainer and provided experience in translating training materials in English into Spanish and doing training in Spanish, an area in which he had an initial baptism when he travelled to Colombia in 1984 to conduct the Green Revolution Game and a *Comunicación Eficaz* (Effective Communication) course in Spanish as part of the CIAT seed training program.

That experience built confidence to create a Spanish version of the MCD course and deliver it in Spanish to a group of Latin American census officials. Then, as a consultant or as part of a full-time job under various employment arrangements with USAID, he developed and delivered training courses in Spanish and English on Organizational Management for Sustainability (OMS) for NGOs in numerous Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The other co-author became aware of NPAC and the communication training program when he joined the University of Illinois faculty in 1962 to lead a new academic program in agricultural communications. He was marginally acquainted with communication theory and related research of the day. After undergraduate study in agricultural journalism, he gained nearly six years of professional experience in counseling, public information, and agricultural broadcasting and advertising. His masters study emphasized marketing and acquainted him with some research in areas such as social psychology and diffusion/adoption of innovations.

That background, while helpful to a neophyte faculty member, left gaping academic holes that NPAC and the communication training program helped fill. While the NPAC program had ended, NPAC training materials were available. They became a valued resource for his early teaching, opened his eyes to communication research, sparked his interest in doctoral study, and have continued to inform his academic work.

The communication training program of NPAC was clearly founded upon something enduringly valuable. As the project neared an end, leaders identified 12 lessons learned from NPAC, most dealing with structure and operations (National Project, 1960, p. 82-84). This analysis has traced the impact of the program through three succeeding structures and initiatives. A half century later, analysis suggests that perhaps five features represent core lessons for success, longevity, and impact in communication training. (1) A broad base of organizational stakeholders and diverse teaching partners contributed substantially. (2) Communication training programs operated successfully within varied structural and financial arrangements, including public/private partnerships. (3) Emphasis on a behavioral approach to communication provided dynamic enrichment, putting skills within a context for sound human communication. Behavioral theories and insights have changed dramatically since the 1950s (including diffusion/adoption theory), but communication training has changed with them. (4) The inductive approach to teaching and emphasis on “learning by doing” were progressive at the time and have worn well across the decades. (5) Similarly, an emphasis on testing and using new information technologies added a valuable dimension that continues to serve.

The current analysis also illustrates how communication training is vital across organizations, settings, and eras. Jonathan Colton recently called for “learning space” in agricultural development: “Knowledge about what does and does not work in scaling up needs to be harnessed through monitoring, evaluation, knowledge sharing, and training. This ensures that programs, as they grow, are adjusted based on the lessons learned” (2015, p. 59).

Today, societies face threatening issues such as population growth, environmental degradation, agricultural sustainability, rural poverty, food security and malnutrition, and social inequity – all of which relate to the interests of ACE and the *Journal of Applied Communications*. The challenges are domestic and international in scope. Perhaps the most relevant area where the legacy of the NPAC communication training program and the succeeding initiatives apply today is the ongoing challenge to donors, national governments, and the private sector (for profit and nonprofit) to reduce poverty in rural areas of the developing world. These are areas where agriculture continues to be the livelihood source and most immediately available licit opportunity for millions of small-scale farmers to raise their incomes. Effective communication is vital in providing a sustainable mix of appropriate productivity-enhancing agricultural technologies. It also enriches a range of institutional support services to grow vibrant agricultural value chains linking small-scale farmers to local, regional, and international markets. The challenges include food security, environmental sustainability, and social wellbeing, both in the developing world and in the United States.

The food price hikes of 2008 that so dramatically triggered food security-related turmoil throughout the developing world spurred the more developed countries to launch varied assistance efforts. These were targeted on addressing the food security challenge of how to most effectively reduce rural-based poverty, increase agricultural productivity, and address constraints to improving childhood nutritional deficiencies. In this regard, the United States launched its “Feed the Future” initiative. At base, the challenges that food security initiatives such as Feed the Future are continuing to face are in many ways those that earlier social action and adoption/diffusion research addressed. In turn, those initiatives informed the design of the communication training program of NPAC and succeeding initiatives described here. Central to the communication training program was a recognition of the importance of understanding the communication process and using this understanding (knowledge) to inform and shape more effective “applied communication” initiatives that serve human development at various levels farm/household, community, market, and governmental (local to international). This challenge continues today in many fields, but clearly and especially in the field of devising agricultural communication initiatives that are more effective in reducing rural-based poverty and improving food security. Communication training in the spirit of the NPAC program and these three following initiatives will be at the heart of success, globally.

Research Questions

Following are some research questions that may serve future professional development in the ACE-oriented arenas of agriculture, natural resources, and life and human sciences:

1. What communication training efforts, if any, are in operation now involving major features of the NPAC communication training program? Under what structural and financial arrangements are they conducted, by whom, among what learners, by what means, and with what results? In what ways do they vary by nation or culture?
2. Among the core features of the original NPAC communication training program and the successors of it, which have endured? Which have disappeared? Which are revised?
3. How do basic principles taught in the NPAC communication training program (e.g., communication process, principles of learning, social change and action, group process, diffusion/adoption, visualization, leadership) compare and contrast with those today?
4. What unmet needs and new opportunities exist today for communication training in support of professional development for educational communicators, extension personnel, scientists, administrators, or others in public agencies, the land-grant system, and other organizations? What new or emerging educational technologies and approaches can help serve those needs?
5. How can we measure more fully the economic and social impact of communication, including the training aspects of it?

Such research directions may help the *Journal of Applied Communications* continue and expand a remarkably durable, valuable, and global tradition in the professional development aspects of its own mission.

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