

# **A complexity-based framework for evaluating social change initiatives in the development context**

June Lennie & Jo Tacchi  
RMIT University, Melbourne

Paper presented to the Australasian Evaluation  
Society conference, Adelaide, 29 August 2012

# Outline of presentation

Brief introduction to communication for development (C4D)

Origins of the framework

Overview of C4D

Challenges and issues

# Outline of presentation

Overview of the framework

General principles

The seven framework components

Take home messages

# Brief introduction to C4D

Use of communication in participatory processes for social change

Can involve different forms and combinations of media, community dialogue

Focuses on issues such as poverty reduction, reducing discrimination, and disease prevention

# Some origins of the framework

## Development of Ethnographic Action Research



# Some origins of the framework

Assessing Communication for  
Social Change project



# Some origins of the framework

Development of an inter-agency UN Resource Pack  
for researching, monitoring and evaluating C4D



# Communication for development



Participation in discussions

Planning for the future

Sharing knowledge & skills

Gaining awareness

Resolving conflict

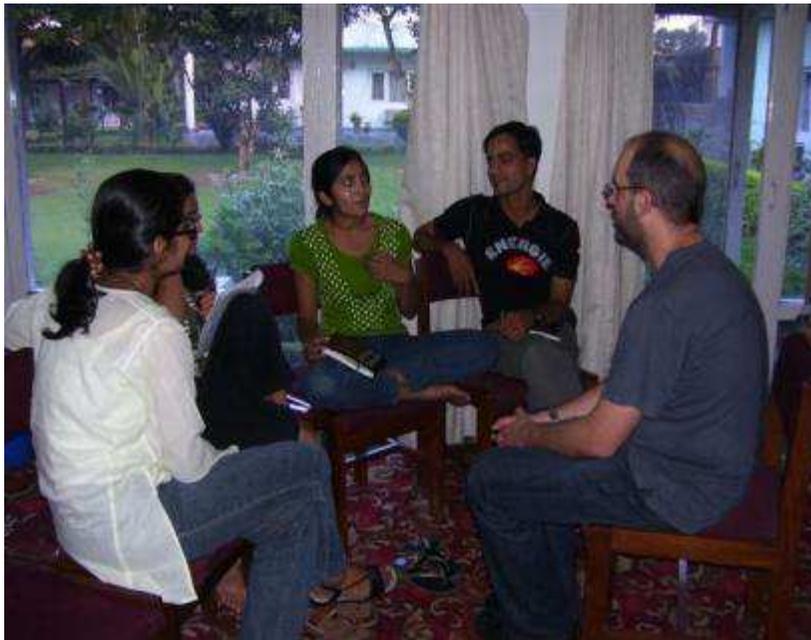
Working towards consensus

# Communication for development

Changing harmful social norms

Sustainable development

Capacity building



# Communication for development



Uses all forms and combinations of communication & media:

- community radio, TV
- participatory theatre
- ICT initiatives
- community dialogue

# Challenges and issues



Contextual, institutional & organisational challenges

Lack of evaluation capacity

Lack of time and resources

Lack of understanding of C4D

Attitudes and policies towards alternative approaches

# Challenges and issues

Use of dominant evaluation approaches

Demonstrating impact of C4D

Unrealistic demands, timeframes & targets

Political nature of participation



# Overview of the framework

- Based on **new and emerging trends, concepts and practices** from a range of fields
- Encourages **new ways of thinking**
- **Social change** seen as non-linear, emergent, dynamic, unpredictable
- Fits with **holistic approaches to development**
- Contributes to aim of **sustainable social change**



# Overview of the framework

Draws on a range of **evaluation approaches**, including systems and complexity-based, participatory and feminist approaches

Advocates using **creative and innovative approaches** and **theory of change approaches**



# General principles

## Evaluation focuses on:

- understanding wider systems and context
- complexity of social change
- *progress* towards social change and *contribution* of C4D

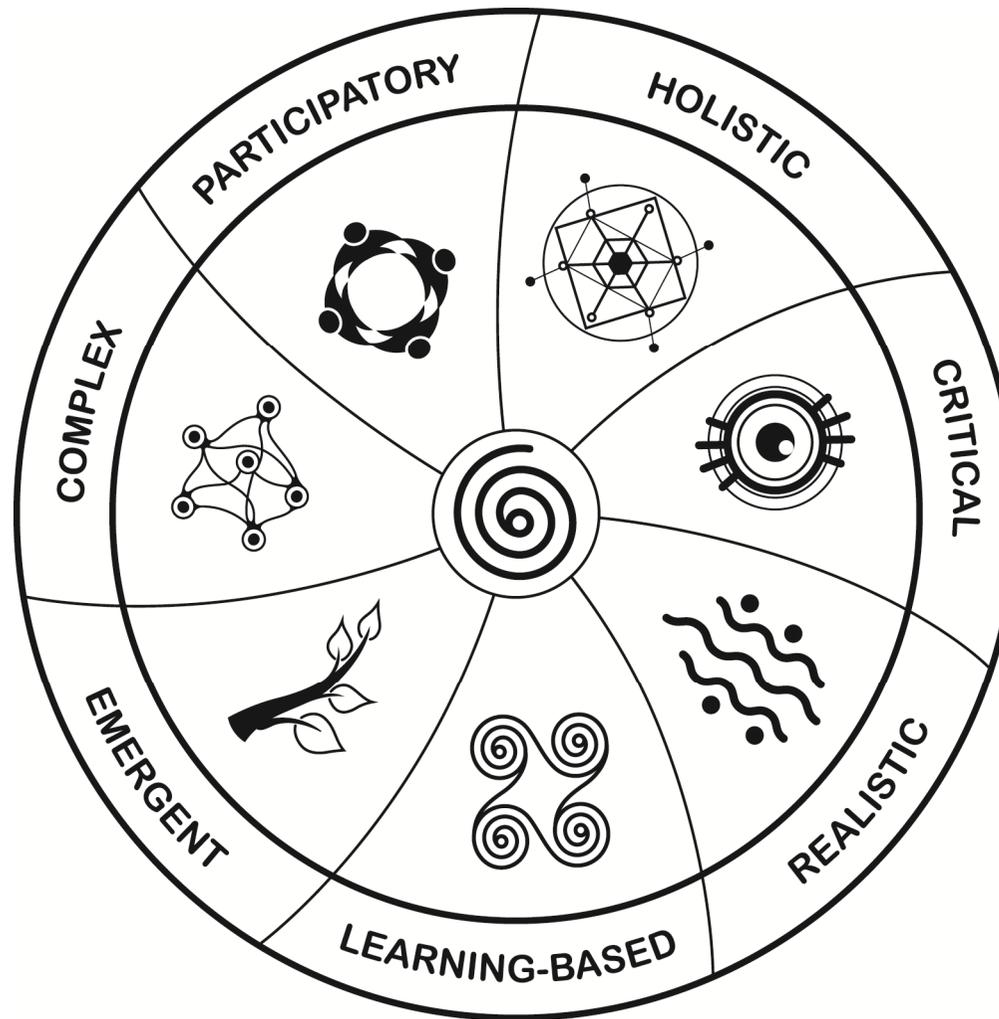


# General principles: Evaluation approach and design

- Participatory, inclusive, flexible
- Long-term engagement in all evaluation stages
- Focus on gender & other differences, unequal power & voice
- Fully integrated into organisations & whole program cycle
- Learns from 'failures'



# Seven inter-related framework components



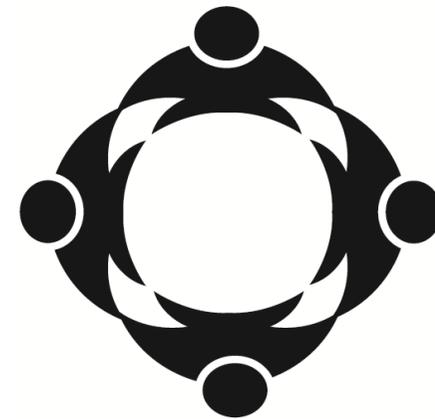
# Component 1: Participatory

Mutual trust, partnerships,  
dialogue, mutual learning

Inclusive processes

Continuous development and  
improvement

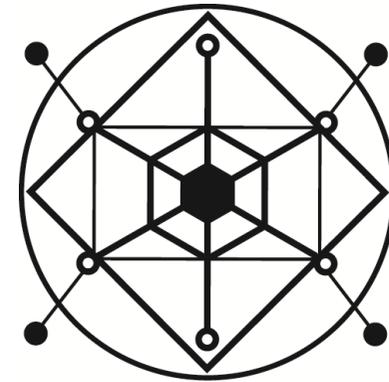
Long-term view of benefits



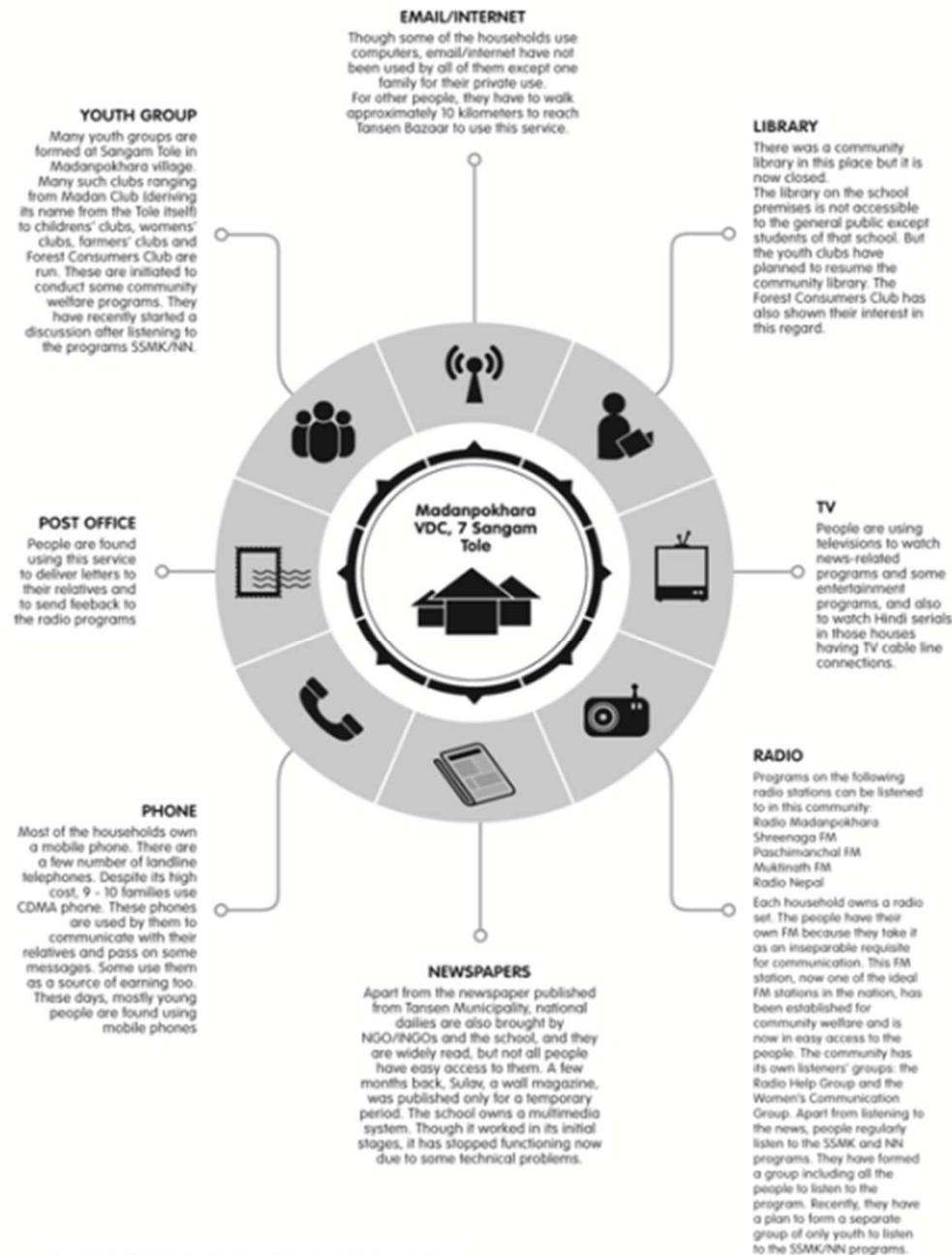
## Component 2: Holistic

Understanding social, cultural,  
economic and other systems and  
contexts

Analysis of inter-relationships and  
networks



# Communicative ecology map of village in Nepal

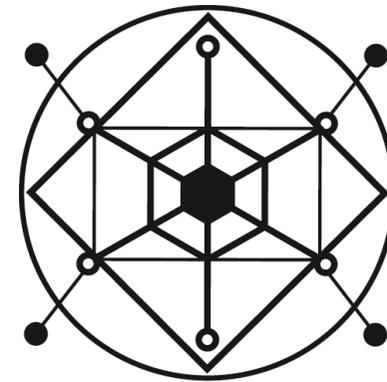


**COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY OF MADANPOKHARA VDC,  
Palpa District, Nepal**

## Component 2: Holistic

Monitoring the communication environment

Holistic, learning-oriented approach to evaluation capacity development



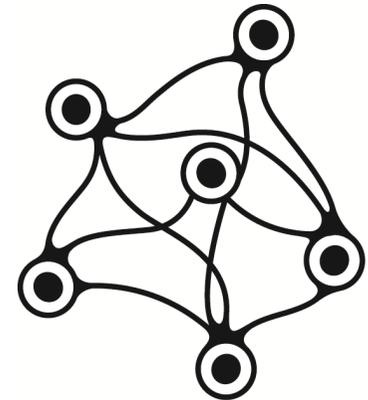
## Component 3: Complex

Social systems: non-linear, unpredictable, emergent

Context: conflict, multiple perspectives & agendas

Outcomes unknowable in advance

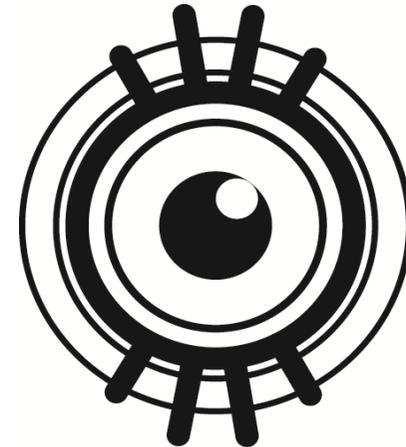
Requires flexible, creative, mixed methods approach; analysis of social norms & contextual factors



# Component 4: Critical

Focus on:

- Gender, ethnicity and other differences; unequal power and voice
- Challenges and contradictions in process of social change

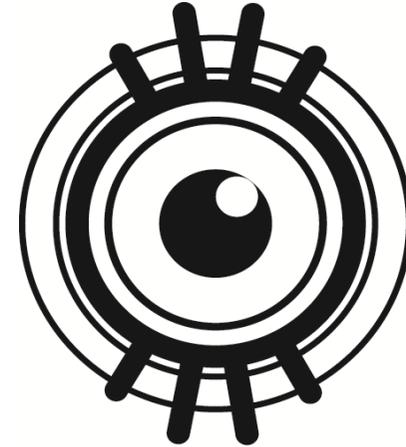


# Component 4: Critical

Awareness of strengths and limitations of different evaluation approaches and methods

Open to negative findings

Includes regular critical reflection and meta-evaluation



# Component 5: Emergent

Social change and C4D outcomes as emergent

Aim – to better understanding process of social change

Alert to critical incidents, tipping points

Use of processes such as self-organisation, continuous feedback loops

Able to capture unexpected outcomes



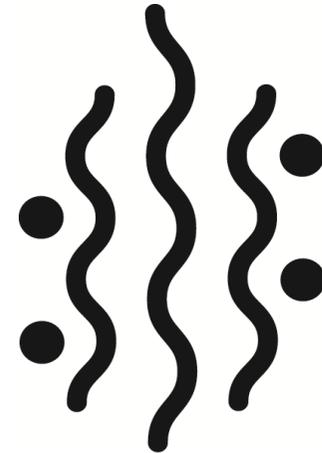
## Component 6: Realistic

Focus on how systems *actually* behave

Need a more realistic, long-term view of C4D impacts and evaluation process

Evaluation needs to be practical, responsive, rigorous, and grounded in local realities

Requires openness, freedom, flexibility and realism in planning evaluations



## Component 7: Learning-based

Action learning and participatory action research processes

Fosters continuous learning, evaluative thinking, better communication and trust

Evaluation integrated into organisations and program cycle

Develops a wide range of evaluation capacities and learning organisations



# Implementing the framework

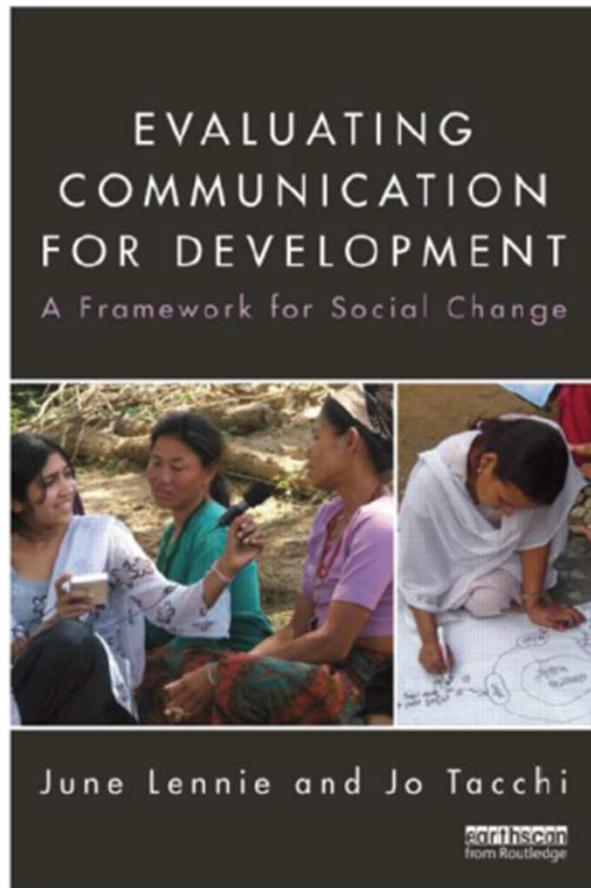
- Can be adapted to the evaluation of different forms of C4D
- Principles and key components can guide implementation and critical assessment of evaluation approaches and methods
- Requires a receptive context and culture & support of leaders



# Take home messages

- Need a new paradigm of research and evaluation
- Framework is more effective in the long-term and less costly when its benefits are considered
- Highlights contributions of C4D to development and change
- Continuous involvement in initiatives and their evaluation leads to better meeting needs and goals
- This is important to sustainable social change

## Further reading



Lennie, J. and Tacchi, J. (in press December 2012) *Evaluating Communication for Development: A Framework for Social Change*, London: Routledge

# Questions? Comments?

We welcome your feedback on this framework

Our aim is to encourage critical reflection and debate about how well this approach works

Thank you!

For more information contact

June Lennie at

[j.lennie@bigpond.net.au](mailto:j.lennie@bigpond.net.au)