13
COMMUNICATION MEDIA, SYSTEMS AND STRATEGY

S GANGULY

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after going through Unit 13 on Communication Media, Systems and Strategy you would be able to

❖ Understand the prevailing nature of communication media

❖ Describe communication systems that enable transfer of information from one source to another

❖ Discuss the why, what and how of communication strategies for adult learning communities

13.1 Introduction

In Unit 12 you read about the means, forms and methods of communication. You also learnt that communication is an important strategy in the teaching-learning process of adult learners. Communication does not only entail using good language and speaking clearly but also reaching to the receiver or making the receiver understand what you want to communicate. In order to go deeper in the realm of communication, Unit 13 is going to deal with communications

media, systems and strategy. What are all these? Media has an important role to play in effective communication and with the IT revolution it has now been of inevitable use and vitality. In adult learning from building up environment or motivating people for literacy to sensitizing people about population explosion, girl child education, health awareness, etc. visual media have played a significant role. Communication system refers to dissemination of information. Communication is part of networking. Communication strategy in adult learning is significant to achieve effective transfer of information so that adult learners achieve the purpose of coming to the adult learning setup. Unit 13 is going to explain these issues at length.

13.2 Communication Media

Some of the earlier methods used for communication have been visual and audio in the form of gestures, sound and pictures/drawings. Technology today has transformed these sounds and gestures to produce speech, videos, films, posters and theatre. The evolution of different means has opened up a vast potential for communication. With a plethora of tools and methods to use, the communicator may find it difficult to choose an appropriate one. How is this choice to be made? Answer to this question depends on our understanding of the impact of information technology on our everyday life. Let us discuss this issue in the next section of the unit.

13.2.1 Impact of information technology

In recent years there has been an information technology (IT) revolution. While paper-based manual systems for processing information and communicating are still very much evident, computer-based technology is increasingly undertaking most office functions and procedures. The implications of IT on communication methods cannot be ignored. However, technology will always require people, and in communication it is the input of the human agency that will ensure effective communication (or otherwise). See Figure 13.1 to
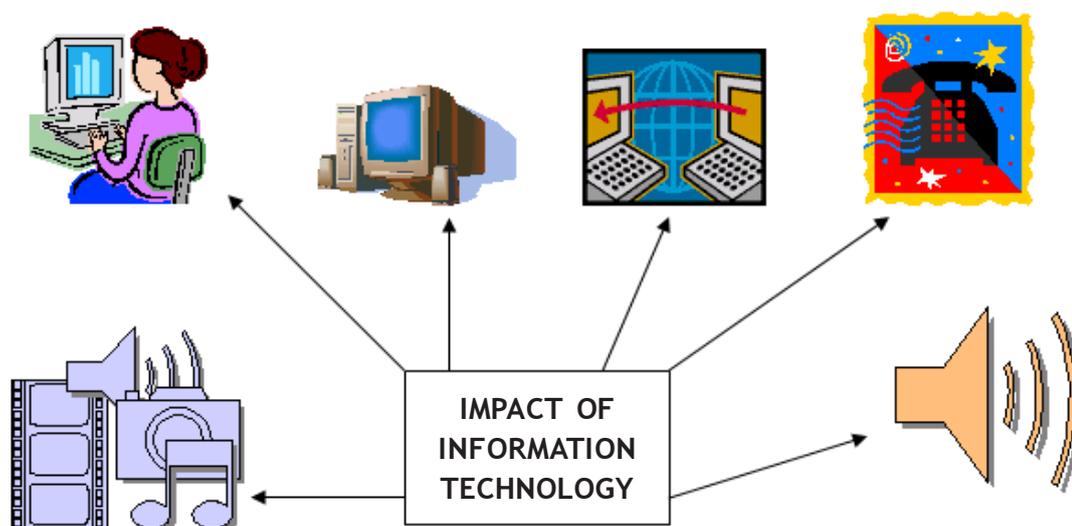

Figure 13.1 Impact of Information Technology

understand better the impact of information technology.

The fundamental skills of structure, tone and composition will always be of vital importance in ensuring effective communication. As originators of printed communications, people have control over these factors. However, while technological developments are making their role more interesting and challenging, the basic presentation techniques conventions should not be allowed to suffer. High standards must be set and maintained in order to ensure that your communications are not only appropriately worded and logically structured, but are also consistently and attractively presented.

13.2.2 Visual Communication

Visuals are used effectively to strengthen communication. Visuals help people remember what they hear. The trick is in relating what you hear to a picture. For a majority of people it is easier to remember pictures than to remember just words. People like to put into pictures what they are hearing. You can say that visuals play the following key roles in our life.

i) Relevance

Visuals can give accurate representation of ideas: visuals help to define facts and information easily and precisely. They can identify and describe in concrete terms giving meaning to words. However, it is important to remember that to give accurate information the visuals must also be accurate. So if it is necessary, take the help of skilled artists or use photographs.

ii) Visuals save time

Imagine that as a communicator you are talking about some common diseases. You want to give a description about the digestive system in humans. Suppose you have to use only words to describe what happens to the food, if we consider only the time factor, the time taken will certainly be much more than if you had a visual of the digestive system.

iii) Visuals help memory

As we have already described earlier, visuals help people to remember and recall much better. Most adults, we find, will be able to recall things they had seen in their youth, than a talk heard just a day or two before.

vi) Visuals can stimulate the imagination

Pictures can often be used as a starting point for discussions and debates. Visuals are not only a quick way of acquiring facts but also of using them. Details presented in a picture can make people think and react.

v) Visuals provide a shared experience

We have seen that when the communicator and the audience share a common experience, communication becomes much easier. Visuals get two people thinking on similar lines about the same subject. It cuts down the possibility of there being ambiguity about the subject under discussion.

13.2.3 Examples of Visual Media

It is relevant to learn about various examples of visual media in more detail because you as a professional adult educator would have many occasions to use them at different forums.

The following seven categories of visual media have their own purposes, advantages and disadvantages and it is a good idea to be aware of strengths and weaknesses of each category. Hopefully the following discussion would

make explicit these aspects of each of the examples of visual media discussed in this unit.

a) Pictures
b) Puppets
c) Dramas, street plays and roles plays
d) Audio Cassettes
e) Videos
f) Broadcast media
g) Teleconferencing

a) Pictures

Pictures are the common factor in video, posters, charts, flip charts, slides and so on. For any of these tools to be understood we have to understand the basic principle of the tool that is the picture. The pictures that we select must be appropriate to the purpose of the communication, the viewer (audience) and the subject (content) of the communication. See Box 13.1 for a discussion on the purpose of using pictures.

Box 13.1: Purpose

Pictures can be used for the purposes of stimulating imagination, teaching skills, presenting facts, organizing knowledge or changing attitudes. Any one or multiples of these are the purposes of the training of adult educators as well. While selecting a picture with a purpose in mind, there are three questions that a picture can help to answer.

What do I see?

What do I understand

What do I feel?

Depending on whether we are focusing on facts and information, discussion and debate or skills, the choice of the pictures will be made. It then becomes necessary that at each stage of our input we must decide the outcome of our communication. For example, if I am to talk about the importance of kitchen gardening, and want the women to learn the skills for developing a kitchen garden, I need to give them information on the vegetables to be grown in a kitchen garden, and make them see how nutritious food is necessary for healthy living. For each one of these statements there is a purpose and one can use a corresponding picture.

Besides understanding the purpose of using pictures to communicate ideas, it is necessary to keep in mind the profile of the audience or the viewer and you would obviously select the pictures appropriate to the theme of the message you want to communicate (see Box 13.2 on both who and what of communicating through pictures). Some pictures can communicate more than what words can convey. In this sense, adult educator have a very good tool by way of pictures to communicate unusual messages. Hope that you will make use of this tool in your professional work.

> **Box 13.2: The Viewer and Subject of Communication through Pictures**
>
> **A) Audience**
>
> ❖ When communicating the idea, we must consider the background, education and experience of the audience. We need to know the media that they are familiar with. Knowing what our audience would understand and their emotional as well as intellectual levels will help us develop the right kind of pictures.
>
> ❖ The experience of a communicator may be much wider than that of the poor rural women and men. So try to discover to what extent they understand pictures. Conduct a few simple experiments, if need be.
>
> ❖ Understanding a picture is a skill that may have to be learned and many rural people may find it difficult to relate to black and white pictures and to three-dimensional objects to real life that they see everyday. When you look at a photograph, you have the help of experience behind you; thus you are able to decipher the perspectives in a photograph or a picture. You can understand the overlaps, highlights and shadows, but illiterate women may have a different perspective.
>
> ❖ In the experience of a poor rural woman, the converging railway lines may look like the end of a track and she may think that a train going along this track will certainly meet with an accident.
>
> ❖ **B) Theme**
>
> The theme or the content of the message will affect the choice of the picture material. If we are talking about fodder development in wasteland areas, we cannot show a picture with fodder being developed in an area which has sources of irrigation. In showing the usefulness of vaccination for BCG, it will be more helpful to show vaccination in progress rather than a victim of tuberculosis.

Using any means of communication has its advantages and disadvantages and it is important that we fully appreciate this dimension before deciding to use a particular tool of communication (see Box 13.3 for a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of using pictures).

> **Box 13.3: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Flat Pictures**
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> ❖ The advantages of using flat pictures are that they are easily available and easy to use. They are low-cost and can be stored and reused. Pictures can arouse interest and imagination. They provide a common experience for the audience to stimulate imagination and start a discussion.
>
> ❖ Disadvantages of using flat pictures are that all details may not be discernible to the viewer in a single picture and some ideas are too big for a single picture. For example, a single picture cannot convey the idea of necessity of good health.
>
> ❖ Pictures are static in that they show the action in a split second of time even if the activity extends over a period of time.

Slide sets/film strips are also examples of pictures only. Table 13.1 shows both pros and cons of slide sets or film strips.

Flip charts are yet another example of communication through pictures. Table 13.2 explains pros and cons of this means of communication.

Printed materials can also be treated as a kind of pictures and as such they present the pros and cons as given in Table 13.3.

b) Puppets
One of the best used forms of rural communication in India has been the

Table 13.1 Visual Communication- Pros and Cons of Using Slide Sets or Film Strips

Pros	Cons
Slide-sets are quite simple to produce because equipment for production and projection is low-cost and easily available. You can get very good color/visual quality. Filmstrips made of robust material are small and easy to transport. Slide-sets are excellent training medium for all subjects except those few for which showing movement is an absolute essential.	Production requires laboratory process Cannot be used in day light without a special rear-projection screen Lacks the appeal of video (which relates to TV in most minds) Turning slides into filmstrips requires laboratory process which is not always available in developing countries

Summary: Slide sets/film strips have proved an invaluable training aid in rural and agricultural development but they are tending to lose out to video, despite the higher cost of the latter.

Table 13.2 Visual Communication - Pros and Cons of Using Flip Charts

Pros	Cons
Cheap and simple to produce and use Good for training a nd extension support	Not as realistic as projected aids Care required for preparing drawings that are understandable to the audience Lack the attraction of audio-visual materials May be thought of as 'second-rate' by people with experience of electronic media

Summary: Flip charts are very useful to help extension workers/technicians in their work with rural people. Drawings notoriously difficult to understand for people with low visual literacy, so careful design and pre-testing needed.

Table 13.3 Visual Communication - Pros and Cons of Using Printed Materials

Pros	Cons
Relatively cheap, simple and easy to produce Can be taken home, consulted, and kept as a permanent reminder Particularly valuable for extension workers, technicians, and community leaders	Of limited use among illiterates but bear in mind "family literacy" as opposed to literacy of individual farmers

Summary: Well designed, carefully written for their intended audience printed materials can provide a vitally important and cheap source of reference for extension workers, and for literates among the rural population.

puppet. For ages this method of communication has held centre stage. Puppetry has evolved as an art form and in many regions of India it is a way of livelihood for many artisans. Rajasthan is particularly famous for its puppets. See Box 13.4 on Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Puppets.

Box 13.4: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Puppets

Advantages

Puppets make the audience responsive, as they get emotionally involved with them.

Audience can easily identify with the puppet-characters in the story and can get involved in their situations.

Puppets are not usually resented even when they depict sensitive subjects.

From a practical point of view, puppets are easier to operate, parts may be read, there are minimum rehearsals, unusual characters can be presented easily and there are few production problems, like stage setting, actor coordination, rehearsals, etc.

Puppets and suitable stories can be devised for all ages and for a wide variety of subjects. Puppets are also useful for exaggerated presentations. All types of scenes can be depicted using puppets. Animal puppets are particularly useful.

Disadvantages

Since they are small, puppets can sometimes cause problems in usage. In Rajasthan though, the art has been perfected so well that large life-size puppets are also made and managed properly.

Audience seating has to be managed carefully so that everyone can have a clear view and sound carries to the last person in the audience.

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c) Dramas, Role-Plays and Street Plays

Drama is used in many countries, not just for entertainment but as a media for giving social messages. In India the street play or the nukkad natak is a common form of drama that is used for transmitting social messages.

The use of drama is an educative experience for both the performers as well as the audience. Many social activists have also used the formal theatre regularly. Drama takes many forms. Besides the role-play and street play, one also comes across the pantomime plays that do not use language but only facial expressions and body gestures. Dance is also one form of drama. The classical dances in Odissi, Kathakali, Rabindra natya, etc. have been used effectively in communication social messages.

To help us simplify the different forms of drama we can club it in the following categories.

1. The formal drama with written scripts, rehearsals, actors, etc.

2. Impromptu dramatization where the situation and story are suggested and people make up actions and use their own words.

3. Informal theatre with a flexible script, interactions with the audiences and absence of costumes or props.

In different regions of India, adult educators have made efforts to use folk media to impart social messages. See Box 13.5 on the next page on pros and cons of using folk media.

d) Audio cassettes

Almost everywhere in the world, audio cassettes and nowadays compressed discs (CDs) have been used by adult

Table 13.4 Tools of Communication – Pros and Cons of Using Audio Cassettes

Pros	Cons
Easy and cheap to produce programs Cassette players quite widely available Easy to localize information Good for feedback because farmers can record their questions/ reactions Can be used well in conjunction with rural radio	Audio only and so suffers some of the weaknesses of radio, though repeated listening may help to overcome it

Summary: Very good low-cost medium. Potential has not been sufficiently recognized. Especially useful when used in conjunction with extension and rural radio.

Box 13.5 Folk Media (Theatre, Puppetry, Story telling etc.)

Pros	Cons
Does not require capital investment Does not depend on technology that is liable to break down Intrinsically adapted to local cultural scene. May be highly credible and persuasive where folk media has a strong tradition	Requires skilled crafting of development messages into the fabric or the folk media May lack prestige vis-à-vis more modern media in some societies May be difficult to organize, and calls for close working relationship between development workers and folk media artists

Summary: Creative use of folk media in cultures where it is popular and well entrenched can be a subtle and effective way of introducing development ideas and messages. Care required to ensure that the mix of entertainment and development is appropriate, so it is possible to further the latter without damaging the former.

educators as very effective tools of communication. Let us look in Table 13.4 at pros and cons of this useful means of communicating ideas.

e) Videos

Videos have been largely used as a mass media and dissemination tool. Many projects today have a separate unit for production of videos that can help in development work. The role of video in development communication has been to educate, helping to spread messages prepared by professional producers. It is necessary to have a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the videography (see Box 13.6).

f) Broadcast Media – Television and Radio

In India, a high percentage of people have access to radio and slightly less percentage have access to television. Both these media are powerful channels of communication and have been used under many circumstances to spread developmental messages (see Box 13.7 on pros and cons of Television and Radio Broadcasting).

Both TV and radio programs can be used by a trainer in developmental work. In using the television, the communicator needs to know the content and timing of the program and how the program can be used. As we have said earlier, the TV can be used with other media,

Box 13.6: Pros and Cons of the Videography

Pros	Cons
Highly persuasive	Multiplicity of standards/formats
Constantly improving technology is making if ever cheaper and more reliable	Requires talent, skill, and experience to produce good programmes for development
Electronic image/sound recording gives immediate playback and production flexibility	Requires rather sophisticated repair and maintenance facilities
Allows more than one language to be recorded as commentary on a single tape.Can be shown in daylight using battery-powered equipment	Dependent on the use to which it is to be put, may call for quite large capital investment
	Colour/visual quality mediocre in some standards

Summary: Video has become the media in the minds of many. Indeed it is highly effective but calls for a careful strategy and skilled producers.

Box 13.7: Pros and Cons of Television and Radio Broadcasting

Television

Pros	Cons
Prestigious and persuasive	Trends to be monopolized by powerful interests because of its prestige
	Not available in all rural areas
	Expensive production/reception
	Program production for agriculture can be difficult
	Difficult to localize information for agriculture unless there are local TV stations still are in developing countries

Summary: Summary: Although potentially powerful, television is not easy for agricultural and rural development in most developing countries.

Radio

Pros	Cons
Wide coverage and availability in rural areas	Weak as a medium for training and education since it is only audio
Cheap production/reception	
Relatively simple programme production	
Local radio stations facilitate localized information	

Summary: Radio has been an excellent medium for motivation and for drawing attention to new ideas and techniques but weak for providing detailed knowledge and training.

like posters or charts and other printed material. A communicator can also use a lecture or discussion mode coupled with TV viewing.

g) Teleconferencing
Teleconferencing is an interactive mode of communication, where high quality multi-media links and satellites are used

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to establish links between the trainer and trainee.

Advantages

Teleconferencing is good option to provide uniform training to all the field functionaries.

Through Teleconferencing a good strategy can make all the project partners feel linked and involved directly. This is an important medium to provide a quick and uniform training to all field functionaries and it minimizes distortion and time lag in messages.

Disadvantages

It is a highly technical medium and requires basic electronic media facilities like telephone, fax, etc., that are not easily available in rural areas. A trainer-trainee live interaction is absent because of the distances separating both.

When there are too many calls to attend, trainers may miss out some queries or may not be able to answer them satisfactorily.

The above description of various examples of visual media leads us to the quest for learning in detail about communication systems and strategy most suitable for adult educators and adult learners. Our next two sections will be devoted to these two themes.

Activity 13.2

i. Explain how audience and theme are of concern while deciding the visual presentation through pictures.

ii. Discuss any three pros and cons of using slide sets/film stripes.

iii. Do you hold that printed materials are always effective to use? Give at least three reasons for your belief.

iv. In adult education programs, dramas and nukkad nataks are popular means of conveying a message. Have you ever tried it out? What are your observations?

v. How do you think the resources of folk media can be used in rural India for disseminating effective adult learning?

vi. Do you agree with the view that radio is more reachable than any other form of media? Give reasons for your agreement.

13.3 Communication Systems

A system for communicating is generally called communication system that is often a facility comprising the structures set up for disseminating information. In other words, you could also describe a communication system as a facility to provide information transfer between persons and equipment.

13.3.1 Communicating as a Part of Networks

The system may be a collection of individual communication networks, transmission systems and relay stations and terminal equipment for interconnecting and interoperating so as to make an integrated whole. The individual components of such a system possess a common purpose and employ common procedures and operate as a unified organizational structure. Often, nowadays a communication system is recognized as a telephone, radio, television, data transmission, or other system in which information-bearing signals originate at one place and are

reproduced at a distant point. We are here going to talk about communication systems in a more general and broad sense of the term.

13.3.2 Various Forms of Communication

Organization charts make it easier to see how communication can take place vertically (between levels), horizontally (between sections) and diagonally (between different levels and sections). It is important to keep all communication routes as open and as effective as possible. Let us briefly discuss the various communication systems in the following paragraphs.

Downward communication

This is by far the most frequent form of communication within an organization, where higher levels communicate with staff below them. In this category are communications like memos, notices, in-house newsletters, company handbook, procedure manuals.

Upward communication

The upward communication flow is equally important as the downward flow. Communications are directed upwards to managers, supervisors or directors by using memos, reports, meetings, informal discussions.

Horizontal communication

This occurs between people of the same status – sales staff, departmental heads, directors, supervisors. As well as memos and reports, horizontal communication could include committee meetings, seminars and conferences.

Diagonal communication

Tasks frequently arise which involve more than one department and there is often no obvious line of authority. Diagonal communication often relies largely on cooperation, goodwill and respect between the parties concerned.

Unofficial communication

When the correct lines of communication are not used, the grapevine often results. This term describes an unofficial communication system, which is constantly changing. The grapevine is a vehicle for distortions of the truth; it is basically a kind of rumor and gossip. An active grapevine can cause much damage to an organization by spreading incomplete, false or exaggerated information. It results in low morale, cynicism, fear and an unsettled workforce. Although the grapevine may never be completely eradicated, one should take steps to reduce its influence by considering carefully ways in which information is communicated, particularly in times of uncertainty within the organization. The confidence of an organization's employees is vitally important, and adequate and accurate information should always be made available to the people concerned at the earliest possible opportunity, through the correct channels.

Let us now discuss the aspect of evolving a communication strategy suitable for development work carried out by adult educators.

Activity 13.3

i. Describe the communication systems used in your family.

ii. What is downward communication?

iii. Give reasons for the belief that unofficial communications cause much damage to an organization.

13.4 Communication Strategy

In the overall communication strategy, we need to address five major questions which will help us define the communication strategy for our community.

❖ What is the message that we are communicating?

❖ Who is the target audience for our message?

❖ What behaviors should we promote among the target audience?

❖ What message concepts will promote perceived benefits of the new behavior?

❖ What channels of communication will reach our targets audiences as often and as affordably as possible?

13.4.1 Why, How and What of Communicating

Why do we need to communicate?
This need was felt because of a variety of factors. As a useful exercise, perhaps you could write some of the reasons why working with the poor rural women is necessary or is a need based activity that arises from your assessment of the situation and your understanding of the goals of adult learning.

How do we assess and prioritize the needs?
First, we have to assess what the women want to know and then prioritize what should be communicated first. For example, women may want to know how to cultivate fodder in wastelands, they may want to know how to improve the breed of their cattle and they may want to know how a motion picture is made.

Now each of the needs is a topic for communication.

Deciding on what to communicate
After having understood the needs of the women, we now need to pick and choose what we have to communicate. There is a plethora of information available on any given subject, but as communicators we assess the level of understanding of the women and then decide what they will understand. Communication should always be targeted at the middle level so that it is not too simple, neither too technical. Suppose we are communicating about growing vegetables and kitchen gardening to a group of women belonging to the farming community. Then we presume that they will know the basics of growing vegetables. What we need to focus on in this case may be composting, varieties that can be grown, improving production or introducing new methods in horticulture.

13.4.2 Selection of Tools and Methods

We have spoken at length about this in the previous section. Based on the input to be given we can select the appropriate tools and methods for delivering the communication package. There are already many tools available to us through the Project. Many of the materials developed like posters, flip charts, handbooks, video-films can help us. In addition we can use programs on radio and television where such facilities are available.

13.4.3 Process of Communication

Once the needs are understood, the content of communication decided and the tools and methods selected, we can work on the process of communication. This simply means who will communicate what – using what tools – to whom – when - and – with what effect. When we answer these questions for each of our communications we are in addition focusing on two things.

i) What is the time that we are setting for our communication – when?

ii) What is the outcome that we expect from our communication – with what effect?

Deciding on the time to communicate is important. Suppose we organize an exposure visit for a community involved in farming and it is harvesting time, then people may join us but not participate fully.

13.4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

What is the outcome that we expect from the communication? What is the objective of our communication in creating awareness? Is it only giving information? Is it providing skills? Does it aim to change behaviors? Depending on these objectives, we need to look for the impact of the communication

and also measure the impact.

For example, if we have taken the women out for an exposure visit to the Public Health Center (PHC), what is the outcome that we are looking for?

❖ That women will be aware of the facilities in a PHC?

❖ That women will know the route to the PHC and in case of need, be able to guide other people in the village to the PHC?

❖ That women will be aware of the vaccination schedules for children?

❖ That they would effectively ask for compulsory vaccinations of all children in their village (skill building for advocacy)?

13.4.5 Restructuring the Message

In a long-term communication process, monitoring and evaluation helps us in restructuring messages that we give. This means that when we find gaps that exist in our communication – in terms of content, tools, delivery, place and time – we must make adjustments before going in for another round of communication. Communication is a process of constant learning and innovation. We must understand that evaluating the communication cannot be done in isolation.

Activity 13.4

Discuss in 250 words the how, why and what of communication at your adult learning setup in terms of prioritizing the needs of adult community.

13.5 Apply What You Have Learnt

As an adult educator you need to form a strategy for selecting an appropriate set of communication systems. For this purpose see Box 13.8 on forming a strategy.

Box 13.8 Forming a Strategy

Evaluate

Implement

Pre-test (optional)

Formulate communication material

Plan coordinated timing of activities

Identify communication channels and messages

Identify barriers and opportunities

Determine information needs

Prioritized needs of audience

Understand the audience

Purpose of communication

You may like to carry out a short project to evolve a strategy of establishing effective tools of communication for development work in the community of your choice. Keep in mind the above steps to form a strategy. Good luck!