ENACTING AN ALTERNATIVE VISION OF COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL

CHANGE IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

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AMI SENGUPTA

has been approved for

the School of Communication Studies

and the Scripps College of Communication by

_____

Arvind Singhal

Professor, School of Communication Studies

_____

Gregory J. Shepherd

Dean, Scripps College of Communication

Abstract

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<u>ENACTING AN ALTERNATIVE VISION OF COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL

CHANGE IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON</u> (278 pp.)

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In spite of advances in all spheres of human life, majority of the world continues

to suffer from hunger, poverty, and disease on a daily basis. Facilitating social change to

create a more equitable society, though possible, continues to be an uphill struggle. I

began this study seeking to understand how issues of health, gender and human rights can

be communicated more efficaciously. Further, I sought to enhance our understanding of

how poor, isolated, and marginalized community members perceive, experience, and

participate in social change efforts.

In so doing, I present a case study of Minga Perú, a non-profit community-based,

communication for social change organization that promotes social justice, gender

equality and human rights in the Peruvian Amazon. Central to Minga's efforts is the

entertainment-education based radio program *Bienvenida Salud*, which is complemented

by a network of over 56 peer facilitators. Minga also trains women in income generation

skills such as handicraft production and fish and poultry farming.

This interpretive study draws upon both feminist and participatory research

paradigms. The findings are based on six weeks of fieldwork in Perú, divided between

Lima and the Loreto Region. The research design utilizes ethnographic methods

including interviews, focus group discussions, audience letters, and participatory sketches

and skits, involving a total of 124 participants and 160 hours of observation. I co-

construct my analysis with the narratives of the Minga team, including its co-founders, program implementers and peer facilitators, and men, women, and adolescents from riverine communities. The findings resulted in 14 themes clustered around three research questions.

Through my findings, I put forth that enabling social change necessitates an alternative approach that privileges community perspectives. Further, social change initiatives benefit from being contextualized and cognizant of the lived realities of the people they are working with. Finally, transformation of hegemonic gender norms occurs through a holistic understanding of gender as including men and social structures. Renegotiating established power hierarchies leads to resistance and conflict as men and women begin to gain agency and contest the normative order. Ultimately, the research strengthens the reflexive and interconnected relationship between theory-praxis.

Approved: _____

Arvind Singhal

Professor, School of Communication Studies

To my parents, Madhu and Ashish Sengupta, with love

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Chapter One: Introduction

The greatest tragedy of our time is that one sixth of humanity [roughly one billion

who account for the poorest of the poor] is not even on the development ladder. A

large number of the extreme poor are caught in a poverty trap, unable on their

own to escape from extreme material deprivation. They are trapped by disease,

physical isolation, climate stress, environmental degradation, and by extreme

poverty itself. Even though life-saving solutions exist to increase their chances for

survival – whether in the form of new farming techniques, or essential medicines,

or bed nets that can limit the transmission of malaria – these families and their

governments simply lack the financial means to make these crucial investments.

The world's poor know about the development ladder: they are tantalized by

images of affluence from halfway around the world. But they are not able to get a

first foothold on the ladder, and so cannot even begin to climb out of poverty.

Jeffery Sachs, 2005, p. 20

As we progress further into the twenty first century the world continues to be

dichotomized into developed and developing nations, first and third world countries, and

northern and southern hemispheres. However we wish to name these disparate segments

of the globe, the world in essence is fragmented into "haves," those living in

industrialized, affluent and primarily western nations and the "have nots," those living in

developing, poverty ridden, non-western nations (Chambers, 1983; Escobar, 1995;

Mohanty, 2003; Sachs, 2005; UNDP, 2004). Two thirds of the world remains

underdeveloped economically, enslaved by poverty and the maladies that accompany it –

malnutrition, ill-health, poor living conditions and lack of opportunities (Esteva, 1999;

Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 2005). As Muhammad Yunus (2003), the 2006 Nobel Laureate

and founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh (a bank for the poorest of the poor),

eloquently emphasized, extreme poverty leads to the misery and indignation of human

beings and "does not belong to civilized human society" (p. 248). Further, poverty is not

solved by charity but by poor people themselves if they are given opportunities equal and

befitting all human beings (Yunus). Chambers (1983) succinctly put it:

> Whatever the estimates of numbers – and endless scholastic argument is possible
>
> about definitions, statistics and the scale and degree of deprivation – there are so
>
> many people who are so poor, the prospects of future misery are so appalling and
>
> present efforts to eliminate that misery are so inadequate. (p. 2)

Poverty affects communities as a whole based on their remoteness and lack of resources;

however, within communities families and individuals are differentially affected by

poverty. There is a gender dimension to poverty and underdevelopment, leading to

distributional inequities within poor households in terms of food distribution, income

allocation and access to resources (Kabeer, 1994). Women remain the majority of the

poor; the most disadvantaged within families, and have the least access to resources while

being the most vulnerable to exploitation, domestic abuse, displacement and other forms

of discrimination (Chamber, 1983; Kabeer, 1994; Mohanty, 2003; Sen & Grown, 1987;

Yunus, 2003).

This dissertation explores how Minga Perú, a community based organization in

the Peruvian Amazon, responds to the poverty, isolation and social injustices faced by

community members who are economically, socially, and geographically marginalized. I

explore the vision, the beliefs, and the programmatic intiatives of an organization

committed to social change. In addition, I seek to enhance our understanding of how and why poor, isolated, and marginalized community members perceive, experience, and participate in social change efforts.

Ultimately my research seeks to strengthen the reflexive and interconnected relationship between theory and praxis by highlighting how Minga's practices are informed by theory and can in turn inform future practice. Although the Minga team and I are cautious about promoting Minga as a model to replicate in other global settings, we believe that important lessons can be gleaned from Minga's approach to communication for social change.

<center>Objective of the Study</center>

The research attempted to document Minga's approach to communication for social change, particularly how the organization integrates issues of gender and participation within their various initiatives. Minga promotes a people-centered local approach which stands in sharp contrast to the top-down, external, and expert driven model of development or social change. I co-construct my understanding of the region and the organization along with the voices of Minga co-founders, program implementers, *promotoras* or peer facilitators, and men, women, and adolescents who live in the riverine communities of the Peruvian Amazon. This study illustrates how alternative visions of development and communication for social change can be enacted and embodied.

 Specifically the study explicates (1) Minga Perú's approach to communication for social change and its distinguishing communicative practices, including how and why community members participate in and perceive the social change process facilitated by Minga; (2) how participants experience and perceive the social, material and physical

context of the riverine communities in which they live, highlighting how contexts intersect with and influence communication practices; and, (3) how gender is positioned within Minga Perú's framework and how gender norms and roles are affected by Minga's social change initiatives.

In so doing, the study sought to understand the key elements that facilitate sustainable and meaningful change, how social issues such as health and gender equity can be communicated more effectively to communities, and how communities can both envision and re-envision healthier futures. In doing so I use methodological triangulation to gain a holistic understanding of the multiple and complex processes that play out in social change efforts (Morgan, 1998; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995).

This interpretive study drew upon both feminist and participatory research paradigms. The findings are based on six weeks of fieldwork in Perú, where I divided my time between the Minga offices in Lima and Iquitos and two riverine communities. The research drew upon a range of ethnographic methods including interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and qualitative content analysis of audience letters. Additionally, I included two participatory tools – sketching and skits – into my repertoire of research methods. The study drew upon a broad and interdisciplinary theory base, comprising communication for development and social change theories as well as postcolonial feminist frameworks.

Description of the Project

Established in 1998, Minga Perú is a non-profit community-based,

communication for social change organization that addresses issues of social justice,

human rights, reproductive health and gender equity (Minga Perú, n.d). Founded by

Ashoka fellow[1] and social communicator, Eliana Elías and her husband Luis González,

Minga aims to provide culturally and regionally appropriate communication and training

to community members to enable them to realize their basic human rights and attain a

higher quality of living (Digital Pulse, 2003; Inter-American Development, 2004).

Figure 1.1. Minga founder Eliana Elias enthusiastically describing Minga's work.

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[1] Ashoka is a global non-profit organization that furthers international development goals by investing in social entrepreneurs around the world. Ashoka Fellows are extraordinary individuals who are leading social entrepreneurs, recognized for their commitment and innovative approaches to social change. Over the past 23 years, Ashoka has nominated over 1,500 Fellows from 53 countries (Ashoka, 2005).

Minga works primarily with women but extends their work to include their families. Their work is situated in the Loreto province in the Perúvian Amazonia, which comprises rainforest and riverine areas. The population of Loreto province is spread over 146,000 square miles and has about one million inhabitants. The region comprises rainforests and riverine communities which are traversed by the River Amazon and its tributaries which serve as the region's primary mode of transportation (Farrington, 2003; Minga Perú, n.d.). The inhabitants of this region are mostly riverine Amazonian peasants of mixed ethnic descent, referred to as *ribereños* or river people (Santos-Granero & Barclay, 2000). This area is ravaged by unemployment, malnourishment, low food security, and poor health exacerbated by very limited access to health facilities (Minga, n.d.). Barring the main towns, the region has very limited access to power supply or telephone connections.

Though the Loreto province comprises almost a third of Perú's total area, the population accounts for less than five percent of the country's total population. Iquitos is the main city in the area and is home to almost half the population of Loreto (see Map 1). Over 500 communities spanning over 65 linguistic groups and representing over 13 main ethnic groups reside in the Loreto province (Farrington, 2003). Given the vastness of the area and its scattered settlements, radio serves as an effective means of communication between the riverine communities (McKinley & Jensen, 2003).

Figure 1.2. Map of Loreto Region showing the river network and main towns.

Source: Minga Perú, n.d.

According the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Perú is categorized as a "medium developed nation," distinguishing the country's level of human development from other highly developed and least developed nations. The life expectancy at birth is almost 70 years, the literacy rate is 85 percent and the per capita GDP is US $ 5,010[2] (UNDP, 2004). However, the indicators for Loreto are well below national figures in all respects. The health indicators in Loreto reflect higher infant mortality and fertility rates than in urban areas of Perú. Life expectancy in Loreto is

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[2] To put this into context, developed countries such as Norway or the United States have a life expectancy of 79 -77 years and the per capita GDP for the U.S. is US$ 35,750.

shorter than the national averages (Sypher, McKinley, Ventsam, & Elías, 2002).

Regional reproductive health figures suggest that an indigenous woman in Loreto is

likely to become sexually active by age 12, and bear 10 children in her lifetime (three

times the national average) and to have a life expectancy below 50 years which is 22

years less then the national average. In addition these women are very likely to lose at

least one child, suffer from sexually transmitted infections and domestic violence

(Farrington, 2003). Women begin having children early, and among the females between

the ages of 15-19, 24 percent have had at least one child and 40 percent have had more

than one child (Minga, n.d.).

 In the early 1990s, when Elías began working as a social communicator in the

Amazonia on a health, sanitation and cholera prevention project, she realized the dearth

of messages that were culturally appropriate and understandable to local communities

(personal communication, July, 4, 2005). Realizing that most health material was

produced by officials in Lima and used language and terminology inaccessible to

indigenous communities, Elías saw the imperative to provide communication that was

appropriate to the target groups in order to achieve the desired impact (Farrington, 2003;

personal communication, July, 4, 2005).

 Minga works primarily with the *Cocama* indigenous group living in the riverine

communities in the El Tigré and Marañon basin. However, the radio program *Bienvenida

Salud* includes a diverse audience spanning across the *Bora, Witoto, Quichua, Urarina,

Shawi, Iquito, Ticuna, Achuar, Aguahun,* and *Wambi* indigenous groups (E. Neira,

personal communication, April 17, 2007). Minga recognizes health as an important

aspect of women's rights and construes health broadly to include but not be limited to

reproductive rights. Minga's primary purpose is to promote a healthy lifestyle by enabling local communities to be well informed through access to health materials and information that they can understand. Their communication strategy includes an entertainment-education (E-E) based radio program, information material in local languages, videos and training manuals, all of which use terms that are easily understood and simplify technical jargon. According to Eliana Elías, Executive Director:

> In many cases, they [Ministry of Health] handed out materials no one could understand, full of technical jargon and with no culturally appropriate context. Producing culturally appropriate material goes beyond using local vocabulary and the right accent; it demands that the people you are trying to reach participate in forming the messages and that their sensitivities, values, attitudes and emotions are integral to them. (Farrington, 2003)

A central aspect of Minga's initiatives is their radio program *Bienvenida Salud* (Welcome to Health) that reaches over 80 percent of the population of Loreto. *Bienvenida Salud* is aired three times a week and each episode is 30 minutes long. By the end of 2006, over 1,100 episodes had been aired. *Bienvenida Salud* has enabled a "mediated space in which population planning and gender-based development discourse can be contested, reworked, and negotiated" (McKinley & Jensen, 2003, p. 182). Women's concerns such as domestic violence and reproductive health, which were typically construed as private concerns, entered the public domain through *Bienvenida Salud* (McKinley & Jensen). The content of the radio program is collaboratively constructed by the audience and portrays local realities in local language and familiar accents. Further, radio listening and ownership in this area tend to be communal thus the radio program encourages

community listening which is accompanied by group discussion and visits to neighbors and friends.

In addition, Minga has a network of 56 *promotoras* (peer facilitators) from 35 riverine communities who provide outreach and leadership on health issues to community members. *Promotoras* provide ground-based support, reinforcing radio messages and training the community on issues they have learned at Minga workshops. They engage in peer education and training and are motivated women and girls from the communities, who have displayed commitment and leadership skills and are nominated by the community themselves. Each *promotora* works closely with about eight to 20 women from their community who are part of Minga's women's network. Presently, this network has more than five hundred active women participants in the Peruvian Amazon. These women and others work with Minga to develop scripts and training materials. Minga's other activities include mobilizing around 40 youth correspondents who work with the adolescents and regularly write letters to Minga, serving as a link between the adolescents in the communities and Minga (Digital Pulse, 2003; L. González, personal communication, July 27, 2005; McKinley & Jensen, 2003; Sypher et al., 2002).

At the Tambo training center, located near the town of Nauta about two hours by boat from Iquitos city, Minga conducts orientation and training programs for women on human rights, health, income generation schemes such as handicrafts, carpentry, fish and poultry farming and natural resource management activities (see Figure 1.3). Special sessions are held for men too. Minga has also trained their *promotoras* to make handicrafts using local art forms and materials and are currently looking for markets to sell the products (personal conversations, Minga Team July 2005). Several *promotora*s I

spoke with took active interest in the workshops where they were taught to crochet or

embroider, returning to their community to teach other women. The women are making

tapestries embroidered with visions from their dreams, purses using local fibers such as

chambira, and jewelry using Amazonian berries, beads and wood.

Figure 1.3. The Minga boat ferries people from Nauta to the Marañon River bank

leading to the Tambo Minga training center.

The term "Minga" refers to collaborative community work in the local dialect,

Quechua. According to Elías, empowering women was closely linked to building

collaborations with the area's indigenous communities. One of the ways in which Minga

privileges collaboration is through valuing local knowledge and collective knowledge

building. For instance the story lines of the radio program are based on letters written by

the community members to the producers. These letters help weave in people's concerns

and needs into *Bienvenida Salud's* storyline and consequently into Minga's

programming. Minga pays boat companies for the delivery of these letters which arrive

by the dozen every month and are written on various indigenous materials such as tree

barks with vegetable and stone dyes in place of ink. According to Elías "asking for letters

is not only a strategy to measure audience effects, it is a way to prepare the scripts of the

program and a way to change the passive consumers of the program into active

producers" (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, p. 17). As of July 2005, when this fieldwork was

conducted, some 6,000 letters had been received. Similarly health messages are designed

incorporating ideas from local community members such as opinion leaders, traditional

healers (shamans) and health workers (Farrington, 2003).

<center>Theoretical Rationale</center>

Since the 1970s, several heavily funded development projects (which have

included communication for social efforts) have been criticized as they failed to improve

the living conditions of their intended beneficiaries. Poverty continues to be on the rise

and the worst off continue to become worse off (Auwal & Singhal, 1992; Chambers,

1983; Escobar, 1995; Melkote & Steeves, 2001). The growing "cemetery of

development," i.e. the failed attempts at bringing about lasting and meaningful social

change are urgent reminders that development needs to be re-envisioned from more

participatory and local standpoints (Gumucio-Dagron, 2003).

Development interventions have historically been modernistic, top-down and

expert driven in their approach, often failing to take into account local cultural and

historical contexts. Over the past two decades, there has been a distinct move toward

"endogenous" models of development (Chambers, 1983; Escobar, 1995; Fraser &

Restrapo-Estrada, 1998; Rist, 1997; Singhal & Sthapitanonda, 1996). Sypher et al.

(2002) aptly state that "locally situated knowledge is an imperative for designing

culturally sensitive, participatory campaigns; it provides the framework for understanding

why and how a social system changes because of media interventions" (p. 193).

Participatory communication is central to contemporary development

communication efforts and is defined as "a dynamic, interactional, and transformative

process of dialogue between people, groups, and institutions that enables people, both

individually and collectively, to realize their full potential and be engaged in their own

welfare" (Singhal, 2001, p. 12). A participatory communication framework recognizes

the potential inherently present in ordinary people and sees them as active agents of

change. It promotes two-way, bottom-up and community driven communication

(Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Singhal, 2001; White, 1999). Minga's approach to

communication and social change embraces local knowledge and sensitivities and views

community members as active agents of social change, not passive recipients, thus

drawing upon several ideals of bottom-up and participatory development (Chambers,

1983, 1997).

By the 1970s it was recognized that mass media was an important but not

sufficient means to development. The social and cultural contexts were accepted as

important factors influencing social change and horizontal flows of communication were

seen as vital (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Singhal & Sthapitanonda, 1996). Effective

communication strategies began to incorporate an integrated approach where information

was a part but not the whole. It was stressed that social change campaigns were not meant

to be stand-alone change agents (Wallack, 1981); they needed to be supplemented with

service delivery, community organizing and interpersonal communication with change

agents and opinion leaders (Singhal, Sharma, Papa, & Witte, 2004; Zimicki et al., 2002).

Empowerment became the overarching purpose of the alternative model of development

communication and scholars urged that mere information delivery and diffusion of

innovations was not enough, development communication had to facilitate the

empowerment process for marginalized communities (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

Within the traditional model of development communication women were not

recognized as communicators, they were viewed as passive recipients in the

communication process. Communication strategies wrongly assumed that marginalized

women did not take part in communication processes just as they assumed that these

women did not take part in public sphere activities (Riano, 1994b). Whenever women

were taken into account they were viewed as "mothers" and caregivers and their

traditional social and economic roles were overlooked (Steeves, 2002).

A gender and grassroots perspective to women and communication revealed that

through community driven communication efforts, women could express themselves

using their own language and symbols, and that they could find meaning and make sense

of their varied lived experiences. This perspective (1) views women as producers of

communication, (2) questions women's access to and control over communication

resources, and (3) understands women as consumers of communication – both

commercial and social (Riano, 1994b).

Communication scholars remind us about the centrality of gender and feminism in

critical organization scholarship, pointing out that gender has often been only partially

explored in our field (Rakow, 1992; Steeves, 2001; Wilkins, 1999). For one gender has

been treated mostly as an independent variable and been viewed from the perspective

of white women in the formal work force, this neglects men as gendered selves and

narrows the focus of such studies to women in the workplace and management (Allen,

2000; Mumby, 1998; Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004; Spitzack, 1998). This study addresses

gender holistically, acknowledging the concurrent forces of masculinity and femininity

along with race, class and place that constitute gender. By studying gender within the

contexts of organizing for social change it strives to broaden the scope of gender as is

studied within the discipline.

Realizing that the add-on approach to including women in development efforts

was in fact worsening the condition of women in developing countries, agencies, scholars

and practitioners moved to the gender and development (GAD) approach which

addressed socialized relationships and structures involving both men and women (Moser,

1989; Sen & Grown, 1987). While the GAD approach promised to be transformative, and

was astute in terms of theory it was slow to be translated into praxis. Several

organizations claim to be adopting this approach but in reality are still addressing only

women under the guise of gender, and have only partially understood the challenges and

meaning of gender mainstreaming (Parpart & Marchand, 1995; Rathgeber, 1990;

Rathgeber & Vainio-Mattila, 2005).

Feminists, gender and development, and communication scholars all implore us to

see women as situated selves with race, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity intersecting with

gender (Harding, 1987; Kabeer, 1994; Rathgeber, 1995; Sen & Grown, 1987; Steeves,

2001). As the proponents of development alternatives with women for a new era

(DAWN), a group of activist, scholars and policy makers who advocated for development

to be viewed from the "vantage point of poor third world women," point out "for many women, problems of nationality, class, and race are inextricably linked to their specific oppression as women." The group affirms that "feminism strives for the broadest and deepest development of society and human beings free of all systems of domination" (Sen & Grown, 1987, p. 19). Further, poor women struggle simultaneously to overcome poverty and gender based oppression (Riano, 1994b).Thus, broadening the scope of feminism to address all forms of social inequities and struggles became important and necessary.

Within the broader landscape of feminist theorizing, frameworks such as postcolonial feminism call for recognizing multiplicity and differences among people in developing countries, valuing local and indigenous forms of knowledge, and privileging contextuality (Harding, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Shome & Hegde, 2002). Developing countries continue to carry colonial legacies that have resulted from their economic exploitation by developed countries (Mohanty, 2003). Unequal economic power, the exploitative nature of international trade, and unequal access to and ownership of resources within and across nations are some ways in which people from developing countries remain colonized (Sen & Grown, 1987). Further the notion of a universal third world woman was debunked, stressing on differences within societies and the intersectionality of oppression (Collins, 2000; Narayan, 1997).

In addition feminist communication studies make a case for alternative constructs such as invitational rhetoric that encouraged self-determination and informed decision making over persuasion, connectedness, integrative thinking and feminist models of negotiation (Buzzanell, 1994; Foss & Griffin, 1995; Putnam & Kolb, 2000). These

feminist visions both disrupted normative/masculine ways of being and knowing while proposing alternative and more egalitarian perspectives. The study thus seeks to illustrate how feminist thinking helps find meaning in alternative communication for social change practices.

<center>Implications of the Research</center>

The Minga Perú initiative is becoming increasingly known for its locally-based, people-centered approach to communication for social change (Digital Pulse, 2003; McKinley & Jensen, 2003; Singhal & Rogers, 2004; Singhal, Njogu, Bouman, & Elías, 2006; Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Sypher et al., 2002). Through my dissertation I conducted systematic research to gain an understanding of how initiatives that espouse alternative organizing and promote local perspectives can bring about sustainable social change among marginalized communities.

Scholars have noted that academic feminism in general and within disciplines has tended to be "hegemonic," representing the voices and concerns of privileged white, western women. This is also the case within the field of feminist communication studies where the study of differently positioned women has been sparse (Aldoory & Toth, 2001). The present research valued and sought to learn from the everyday lived experiences of women from the south. In doing so, the research bridges the gap between academic feminism and grassroots women's movements; furthering non-hegemonic representations of women by recognizing difference and multiplicity.

This research adds to the current literature on grassroots feminist communication and responds to the call for "transgressive scholarship" which involves moving beyond the academy to a "widened community of knowers and knowledge producers." By

presenting voices of community members and through the use of participatory research methodology the study strives to "theorize with" the people we typically "theorize about" (Social Justice Group, 2000, p. 2).

At a broader level, by understanding how and why community members choose to become involved in Minga's activities we can better understand how diverse issues such as gender equality, health, income generation can be integrated within a larger realm of development and how communication is central to this process and links these many parts into a consolidated whole.

Scholars have referred to applied communication scholarship as "practicing theory and theorizing practice" (Wood, 1995, p. 157). The present research is committed to strengthen the reflexive and interconnected relationship between theory and praxis. By applying existing theory to an ongoing initiative the study strengthens and extends theory. Further, Minga serves as an exemplar of theory being practiced.

Critical accounts of failed development abound and highlight what development projects did wrong while suggesting how things could be done better (Chambers, 1983, 1997; Escobar, 1995). Being critical of development or being aware of how development in general has failed is needed for both scholars and practitioners in order to avoid pitfalls of previous efforts and to re-envision and re-design development initiatives. This study however focuses on "what works" and tries to understand "why it worked." Documentation of successful projects provide "reasons for hope" (Krishna, Uphoff, & Easman, 1997). Successful cases "show us that approaches to rural development that respect the inherent capabilities, intelligence and responsibility of rural people and that systematically build on experience have a reasonable chance of making significant

advances in improving these people's lives" (Krishna, Uphoff, & Easman, 1997, p. 2).

These authors remind us that interventions succeed for various reasons but in many cases it depends on people "who saw acutely both the needs and solutions and who persevered as they innovated" (p. 2). While providing instructive lessons for future development praxis, examples of initiatives that have worked also bear witness to the fact that there is rarely one reason for why a certain development project was successful in achieving its goals.

This research embarks on a journey to chart the approach undergirding Minga's social change efforts in the Peruvian Amazon, while acknowledging that such "exemplary" instances suggest a complex, relational and interdependent play of several factors that in unison result in success.

The present chapter provided a brief description of Minga's social change initiatives, outlined the rationale behind the study and culled the key theoretical ideas that guided the research. The next chapter details my theoretical framework and presents the major ideas drawn from the literature review. The chapter concludes with general research questions that guided the study. In Chapter Three, the methods of data collection and data sources are described. In Chapter Four, the research questions are answered, and Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings for scholars and practitioners of communication and social change.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on communication for social change (sometimes also referred to as "development communication" or "communication for development,") beginning with a historical overview of the field and situating the field in the broader discipline of development theory-praxis. I also chart the evolution of communication for development praxis from the dominant paradigm to the current people-centered model within which I situate Minga Perú's work. I highlight how our understanding of development and underdevelopment were discursively created, dichotomizing the world into the developed and developing countries. I pay particular attention to gender and feminist frameworks which have influenced the fields of communication and development. Finally, I draw upon extensive feminist literature as I articulate a feminist communication and development standpoint.

The field of communication for social change emerged and was affected by the paradigm shifts within the larger field of development (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Initial proponents of development and communication during the 1950s and 1960s emphasized the role of information and communication in enabling development. Over time, the focus shifted to involving people and recognizing local cultural realities.Consequently, during the 1970s, it also came to light that women were not equally reached by either development or communication efforts, and that the situation of women had in fact worsened as they were overlooked by both development policies and communication programs (Boserup, 1970; Sen & Grown, 1987; Steeves, 2001; Wilkins, 1999). Thus, both communication and gender became important aspects to consider in the course of development.

Communication for Development: Advances in Theory-Praxis

The Beginnings of International Development

The "development age" was born out of U.S. President Truman's 1949 inaugural address in which he stated "we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" (Esteva, 1999, p. 6). The world was instantly labeled, named and dichotomized into the developed and the developing world. Not only did two-thirds of the world become "underdeveloped," they became a group that was considered inferior, primitive and a threat to the well-being of developed countries. (Escobar, 1995; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Rist, 1997). To quote President Truman (as cited in Escobar, 1995):

> More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skills to relieve the suffering of these people…what we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of fair dealing. (p. 1)

With the technical knowledge and skills that were available in the western or developed nations, President Truman saw it as the United States' onus to bring about "advancement" among the underdeveloped majority of the world (Escobar, 1995). Truman's statements marked the beginnings of the modernization phase of development also known as the dominant paradigm. The primary emphasis within this model of development was on industrialization and economic development; increases in per capita

income and raised standard of living were considered indicators of development

(Escobar, 1995; Rist, 1997).

A decade later in the early 1960s, the United Nations Development Decade

Proposal for Action recognized that the "problem of the underdeveloped countries is not

just growth …. Development is growth plus change. Change, in turn, is social and

cultural as well as economic, and qualitative as well as quantitative….The key concept

must be improved quality of people's life" (Esteva, 1999, p. 13).

More recently, in 1990 the *Human Development Report* published by the United

Nations Development Program (UNDP, 1990) stated:

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle these

choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the

three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire

knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of

living….But human development does not end there. Additional choices, highly

valued by many people, range from political, economic and social freedom to

opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying personal self-respect

and guaranteed human rights…. development must, therefore, be more than just

the expansion of income and wealth. Its focus must be people. (p. 10)

Currently, development is often referred to as social change, or "a process of transformation in the way society is organized, within institutions and in the distribution of power within various social and political institutions" (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis, 2002, p. iii).

In the early phase of development, it was realized that the spread of ideas and innovations for development needed to be communicated to people and involved the challenging task of changing deep-rooted attitudes and behavioral patterns. Communication for development efforts formally began in the sixties and aimed to strategize and produce communication material to support development projects (Schramm & Lerner, 1976). A pioneer and a visionary in the field, Erskine Childers (as cited in Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998) stressed that:

> No innovation, however brilliantly designed and set down in a project plan of operation, becomes development until it has been *communicated* [italics added]. No input or construction of material resources for development can be successful unless and until the innovations- the new techniques and surrounding changed attitudes which people will need to use those resources- have been *communicated* [italics added] to them. (p. 45)

Thus communication for development became an important means to further development goals, legitimizing the field as a distinct area of theory and praxis.

Today the field of communication for development has evolved to become much broader in scope and encompasses communication efforts for supporting broader social change goals. It has been defined by scholars as "a process of strategic intervention toward social change initiated by institutions and communities… [with] the intentional

use of communication technologies and processes to advance socially beneficial goals"
(Wilkins & Mody, 2001, p. 385). Communication for development involves the use of
communication processes in order to enable people to become critically aware about their
situations and their life options, aiding people to make informed choices by gaining
knowledge that they deem necessary to improve their conditions (Fraser & Restrapo-
Estrada, 1998; Freire, 1970).

Though communication for development was initially viewed as supporting
development initiatives through information delivery, it is now recognized as an integral
part of the development process and includes aspects of interaction, organizing, and
ultimately individual and collective empowerment.

Modernization to Dependency

The modernization era (1950s to 1960s) dichotomized the world into developed
and underdeveloped, modern and traditional, advanced and primitive (Escobar, 1995).
Within this worldview, communication was perceived as a one way, top-down flow of
information. People or beneficiaries of development projects were seen as passive
recipients of information, and media as a powerful vehicle of social change (Rogers,
1976). A pro innovation and pro persuasion bias existed in most of the outreach work.
Agricultural extension efforts, a key area of communication for development, focused on
persuading people in developing countries to adopt technological innovations (Rogers,
2003). Four broad communication approaches were used to foster social change: (1) the
communication effects approach, (2) mass media and modernization approach, (3) the
diffusion of innovation approach and (4) the social marketing approach to innovations
(Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Morris, 2003).

By the early 1970s, the next phase of development, known as the dependency paradigm, emerged and consequently influenced development communication theory-praxis. Scholars resisted the "perpetuation of historical inequities" demanding more "human, egalitarian, and responsive communication theories and practices" (Huesca, 2002, p. 501). Proponents of the dependency paradigm saw developed countries as making developing countries overly reliant on aid and prospering at the cost of poorer countries (Frank, 1969). The dependency school first began in Latin America (Rist, 1997). Members of this school, known as the *dependistas,* believed that the developing countries remained poor due to their dependent economic position with respect to Europe and North America and saw the west as accountable for their continued exploitation and underdevelopment (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Power imbalances and the historicity of the process of development were thus brought to center stage.

Communication scholars such as Joseph Ashcroft, originally from Malawi but trained in the west, began to critically question the practice of development communication. For the first-time "bottlenecks," or external constraints to adoption, such as the financial inability to adopt an innovation or inadequate knowledge about the innovation, were recognized as serious impediments in the process of social change (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Latin American scholars further deconstructed the dominant paradigm, pointing out that development communication theory and praxis had thus far been modeled upon western models that were out of sync with the context of developing countries (Huesca, 2002). For instance, the focus of persuasion oriented efforts was on individuals and not on communities or social systems, reflecting a western belief system. This led to a significant shift in how communication for social change was perceived and

called for recognition of the social, political and economic context within which

communities lived.

Communication scholars also became aware of the structural inequities in the

flow of information. Access to information was not equal; social, ethnic and gender

inequities existed, and the poor, women, and other marginalized people were most often

left out of the information loop. Realizing that in many cases adequate and relevant

information was not reaching all the intended beneficiaries, communication scholars

adapted their models to become more sensitive to the cultures and contexts of developing

countries (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; White, Nair, & Ashcroft, 1996). Thus, development

thinking and consequently development communication progressed to the alternative

paradigm which embraced a basic human needs perspective to development.

Alternative Paradigm

As a continuation of what the *dependistas* began, the alternative paradigm too had

its roots in Latin America, gaining popularity in the 1980s and 1990s (Huesca, 2002).

The history of the movement becomes an important variable in understanding the context

within which this study is situated. Within the alternative paradigm, participation was

recognized as a prerequisite for development programs. Rogers (1976) defined

development as a widely participatory process of social and economic development

(including equality and freedom) through gaining control over one's environment. This

approach espoused a pluralistic perspective where "multiple local and individual realities

are recognized, accepted, enhanced and celebrated" (Chambers, 1997, p. 188).

The paradigm recognized people as human beings and not as objects to be

developed, calling for a people-centered bottom-up approach as opposed to the earlier

top-down approach. The alternative framework also moved away from blue-prints to development work and encouraged a localized and context-specific approach (Chambers, 1997). The call for "endogenous" development, which stemmed from societal values and community's perception of their needs, rang loud and clear (Fraser & Restrapo-Estrada, 1998). The focus of development shifted from economic advancement to social change, focusing on bettering peoples' quality of life (Rist, 1997).

The new paradigm drastically impacted how communication for development was viewed as it stood in sharp contrast to previous models of development and communication. It was recognized that mass media was an important but not sufficient means to development. The social and cultural contexts were accepted as important factors influencing social change and horizontal flows of communication were seen as vital (Schramm & Lerner, 1976).

Effective communication strategies began to incorporate an integrated approach where information was a part but not the whole (Singhal et al., 2004). The socio-political context, economic conditions and the multiple flows of communication within the communication process were recognized (Wilkins & Mody, 2001). This vision accepted the complexities involved in the process of social change. Communication was also seen as a constitutive factor in culture and social change, not just a part (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Development communication thus became reconceptualized as *organizing at the community level* involving those who are most often left out of the development process – women, lower castes, ethnic minorities, and the poorest of the poor (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Social collective action through organizing and communication became the new focus.

Consequently development communication scholars put forth the importance of "context evaluation" which encourages the understanding of lifestyles and community needs (Wilkins & Mody, 2001). These scholars stress that "understanding the context of implementation is critical if we are to gain a better understanding of community-responsive communication interventions" (Wilkins & Mody, 2001, p. 391). In similar vein, Sypher, McKinley, Ventsam, and Elías (2002) aptly state that "locally situated knowledge is an imperative for designing culturally sensitive, participatory campaigns; it provides the framework for understanding why and how a social system changes because of media interventions" (p. 193). This shift was concurrent with the shifts in international development, which began increasingly to embrace multiple local voices, community participation, and was accompanied by the emergence of grassroots and community based organizations.

Freire's (1970) philosophy radically transformed the fields of education and communication for social change. He viewed development communication not as message delivery but instead as "emancipatory dialogue" leading to empowerment (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, p. 299). Particularly significant to the field of communication for social change was Freire's vision of talk as being transformative. He saw dialogue as fundamental to humans, and by speaking words which formed the basis of dialogue, people could transform the world (Freire, 1970). Thus, for Freire (1970), "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p. 68). Freire introduced the concept of *conscientization* whereby the poor acquired the knowledge and skills to critically take stock of their lives and take charge of transforming their situations. *Conscientization* resulted from a communicative process that involved dialogue, critical thinking and active learning as

opposed to the traditional banking model where 'welfare recipients' (Freire, 1970, p. 55) were given or deposited knowledge.

Another influential thinker whose ideas greatly informed the alternative approach in communication for social change was Saul Alinsky, a community organizer from the U.S. who published the *Rules for Radicals,* a treatise on realistic and practical organizing for social change in 1971. Alinsky (1971) viewed education not as propaganda but enabling individuals to "make sense of their relationship … to the world they live in, so they can make informed and intelligent judgments" (p. 124).

Alinsky saw the world inherently laden with power, and saw power as the shaping force behind all organizations. For instance when people have common political goals or ideas, they come together and organize into a political party as a means of gaining collective power. Thus, "change comes from power, and power comes from organizing. In order to act, people must get together" (Alinsky, 1971, p. 113). In similar vein, communication scholars noted that organizing led to collective agency, which enabled poor people to question and resist powerful structures and oppressive systems (Rogers & Singhal, 2003).

Further, Alinsky saw communication as being the most essential requisite for organizing, as it was the cohesive force that organized people for social change. People had to understand what was being communicated to them, and for people to engage in meaningful communication, the messages had to be relevant and part of their lived experiences. Rational or ethical information alone did not make for meaningful communication, it must invoke people's self interest and appear personalized not generated at a mass (Alinsky, 1971).

Scholars began to consider empowerment as the process whereby individuals gain control over their lives (Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995; Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, & Papa, 2000; Rogers & Singhal, 2003; Shefner-Rogers, Rao, Rogers, & Wayangankar, 1998). These scholars also saw the process by which individuals become empowered as essentially a communicative and interactional one. Dialogue and exchanges within individual community members or organizational members led to empowerment (Rogers & Singhal, 2003). Change agents, much like Freirian educators, acted as facilitators in the empowerment process as is well illustrated in the role enacted by the *promotoras* in this study.

In both development and communication programs, it was seen that the lack of people's participation was contributing to numerous cases of failed development (Chambers, 1983; Escobar, 1995; White, 1999). As Freire (1970) pointed out:

> Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their personal views or reality, never once taking into account the […] *men-in-a-situation* to whom their projects were ostensibly directed. (p. 75)

Consequently, development and communication practitioners began to see a strong link between communication and participation (Fraser & Restrapo-Estrada, 1998; White, Nair, & Ascroft, 1994). As Singhal (2001) states "there can be no participation without communication. The notion of 'participation,' as a desirable part and parcel of communicative approaches to development, goes back three decades" (p. 12). In fact communication and participation are conceptually the same thing. The root of the Latin word for communication is *communio* which implies participation and sharing (Gumucio-

Dagron, 2001). While there is no singular model for participatory communication, the

central tenet is to involve people in the communication process in order to achieve social

change (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Fraser & Restrapo-Estrada, 1998; Singhal, 2001; White,

2003). Table 2.2 provides an overview of the key elements that distinguish participatory

communication efforts from more traditional approaches.

Table 2.1

Conceptual Shifts in Communication for Development

	Participatory/Bottom-Up	*Non-participatory/top-down*
Rationale	– Based on people's real needs	– Based on donor's felt needs
	– Contextualized and locally adapted programs	– Replication of best practices not contextualized
	– Consciousness raising, understanding root causes, posing local alternatives	– Persuasion aimed at behavior change to prevent symptoms but not sustainable
Nature of communication	– Horizontal – people as active participants in control of communication	– Vertical – people as passive recipients of information
	– Collective community based action	– People targeted as individuals
	– Intervention done with people	– Intervention done for the people
	– Community owned	– Dependent on media access
Role of community	– Community driven process of dialogue and democratic participation	– Community members as targets of media campaigns and communication messages
Desired outcome	– Long-term process of sustainable social change	– Short-term results oriented behavior change

Note. Adapted from Gumucio-Dagron (2001) and Singhal (2001)

In sum, scholars consider participatory communication to be "when communication processes are used to inform people, enable them to contribute their points of view, reach consensus, and carry out an agreed change or development action together" (Fraser & Restrapo-Estrada, 1998, p. 59). Participatory communication has become central to contemporary development communication efforts and is defined as "a dynamic, interactional, and transformative process of dialogue between people, groups, and institutions that enables people, both individually and collectively, to realize their full potential and be engaged in their own welfare" (Singhal, 2001, p. 12). A participatory communication framework recognizes the potential inherently present in ordinary people and sees them as active agents of change. It promotes a two-way, bottom-up and community driven communication (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Singhal, 2001; White, 1999).

Entertainment-Education

Within the field of communication for development, entertainment-education (E-E) emerged as a specific strategy to facilitate social change and has been widely used in developing countries since the 1980s (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). E-E is a notable instance where tenets of the dominant paradigm have been combined with participatory elements (Huesca, 2002). Recent E-E based efforts led scholars to re-think the dualistic divide between top-down and participatory approaches, urging them to view diffusion and participation as a continuum as most projects are difficult to confine at either ends of the continuum (Huesca, 2002; Morris, 2003). In this section, I review some E-E based efforts that reaffirm that E-E strategies can meaningfully incorporate participatory ideals and involve audience members in the development and reception of messages.

Singhal & Rogers (2004) define E-E as the "process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior" (p. 5). E-E has been used in developing countries to communicate messages such as reproductive and maternal health, HIV/AIDS, oral rehydration, sanitation, and domestic violence and more recently to communicate safe sex and breast cancer messages in the United States (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). Interestingly, the roots of E-E go back to Latin America, where the strategy was inspired by the unprecedented popularity of the Peruvian *telenovela* *Simplemente María* aired between 1969-1971. Since then, scores of developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have launched E-E initiatives, and research results indicate that audience members closely identify with the engaging characters and educational storylines at a personal level, often watching or listening to episodes collectively, and then discuss them with friends and family (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Singhal, Obregon, & Rogers, 1994).

E-E based programs are typically funded by international donors and aired on national or regional television and radio networks. Communication for social change scholars have pointed to the fact that E-E messages tend to reach those who have access to mass media, and are the more privileged members of developing communities (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Those without access to mass media are likely to remain unreached by these messages unless specific steps are taken to design E-E programs that reach marginalized communities. However, as this study will detail, Minga Perú draws

upon the E-E framework while reaching out to marginalized community members through regional radio networks and loudspeakers.

One of the reasons behind the success of E-E initiatives is that audience members form close and life-like relationships with mediated characters. The characters or celebrities serve as role models and people treat these figures as real people whom they want to emulate (Brown & Fraser, 2004; Singhal et al., 2004). For instance a regular listener of the E-E radio serial *Taru* in India modeled the behavior of Neha, the protagonist of the program by opening a school for lower caste children stating that "if Neha could do it, so could I" (Singhal et al., p. 367). E-E uses both positive and negative roles models, the short-term models are classified as idols or villains, and the long-term models as Gods or devils (Brown & Fraser). Role models are dynamic and change over time, one group may find a particular character positive while others find the same negative. For instance, Everly Egoavil, who directs the radio program *Bienvenida Salud* and plays the character of Passioñara, was called the "evil" or "damned" Everly by the men for making the women speak up for their rights, while women loved her character and considered her a star.

E-E projects have historically been large scale efforts driven by international development agencies who partner with national or governmental players, largely due to the fact that E-E deals with urgent health concerns which if left unaddressed could be disastrous. Being large-scale and donor driven or top-down programs, most E-E interventions are relegated to being non-participatory. However, as in the case of a population project in Nepal that used an integrated communication approach, combining two E-E based radio serials with improved communication between health workers and

clients and community-based activities at the grassroots level, E-E can facilitate

participation at multiple levels (Storey & Jacobson, 2004).

Similarly, the *Taru* project in North India, was a multi-layered communication for

social change initiative which included the broadcast of a radio serial by the same name,

several village-based folk performances to prime audience members to listen to the radio

program, establishment of *Taru* listening groups, and a participatory theater workshop

and performances conducted by avid listeners of the program. The E-E serial was

designed to spur dialogue among listeners about gender equality, small family size,

reproductive health, caste and communal harmony, and community development, while

the theatre performances and listening groups encouraged community participation

(Singhal, Sharma, Papa, & Witte, 2004).

As a means to increase stakeholder participation, audience members' needs and

feedback have been incorporated in to E-E program planning through extensive formative

research, pre-testing and summative evaluation (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, Storey &

Jacobson, 2004). In the case of Soul City a multi-level E-E initiative in South Africa,

findings from formative research were used to develop scripts and storylines. Further the

storylines were shared with audience members and fine-tuned to make the stories

resonate with audience experiences and expectations. Some of the changes made to the

script included mellowing down the character of the abusive husband as the original story

made him too harsh and people considered him to be an extreme case not someone "like

them." Audiences see their lives or lives of people they know being relived through

storylines involving "normal" people (Usdin, Singhal, Shongwe, Goldstein, & Shabalala,

2004).

Feminist and Postcolonial Frameworks for Development and Social Change

Over time it came to light that women and gender dimensions had been overlooked in both international development efforts as well as in communication for development. A move to recognize gender as socially constructed and culturally situated influenced the rhetoric and reality of development and social change. Concurrent socio-historical shifts in feminism influenced and were influenced by development theory, policy and praxis (Connelly, Li, MacDonald, & Parpart, 2000; Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2007; Kabeer, 1994; Parpart & Marchand, 1995; McIlwaine & Datta, 2003). The initial phase of Women in Development in the 1970s was grounded in the beliefs of equality paralleling the ideals of second wave feminism. Consequently, with a move toward postcolonial feminisms, development policy shifted, at least in rhetoric, to a "gender and development" (GAD) framework during the 1980s and emphasized the absence of universal gender roles across diverse global settings. In this section, I chart these shifts, as I highlight commonalities and synergies between the two fields. As Sen and Grown (1987) eloquently state:

> Feminism is a political movement, and as such expresses the concerns of women
> from different regions and backgrounds. Like all political movements, it can be
> diverse in its issues, immediate goals, and methods adopted. But beneath this
> diversity, feminism has as its unshakeable core a commitment to breaking down
> the structures of gender subordination and a vision for women as full and equal
> participants with men at all levels of societal life. (p. 79)

Although there is no single theoretical framework that represents feminism, one of the fundamental premises that all theories build on is that the social, political, and

economical situation of women remains unequal to that of men (Buzzanell, 1994; Calas & Smirich, 1996; Delmar, 2001; Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999). Feminist activism has several goals; some feminists aim to achieve gender equity and enable women to realize their human rights and all opportunities to develop, while other feminists are committed to creating alternative social structures that espouse feminist values, and some feminists include emancipating all those who are marginalized from the sources that oppress them (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999). According to Harding (1987) the pluralistic vision of feminism(s) stresses that:

> Women come only in different classes, races, and cultures: there is no 'woman' and no 'woman's experience.' Masculine and feminine are always categories within every class, race, and culture in the sense that women's and men's experiences, desire, and interest differ within every class, race, and culture. But so, too, are class, race, and culture always categories within gender. (p. 7)

Recognizing the differences between women became particularly relevant in the context of development, Sen and Grown (1987) point out:

> While gender subordination has universal elements, feminism cannot be based on a rigid concept of universality that negates the wide variation in women's experience. There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concern of different women, and defined by them for themselves. (p. 19)

Most feminists accept that there is no one meaning of feminism, or one "true" way of being a feminist. While some consider an awareness of women's oppression and injustices as being integral to the feminist movement, others consider feminism as

recognizing the systematic domination of women and identifying themselves as a part

of the larger socio-political movement against such oppression and inequity (Delmar,

2001).

As Campbell points out feminist scholarship is not research done by women and

"need not be research solely about women" (Forum, 1988, p. 4). Feminism may be about

women, yet is beyond just women as it recognizes them as a part of complex and

intersecting social systems. One of the fundamental tenets guiding feminist scholarship

is that it recognizes women as individuals; women are equal members of society who

have been systematically oppressed and silenced, ultimately arguing for a more equal

social system (Forum, 1988). Hence feminist scholarship is inherently political and has

an activist agenda (Foss & Foss, 1988).

Mansbridge (1995) articulates that what ties together feminists, feminist

organizations and the feminist movement is a sense of "accountability" to feminist

discourse. Feminists are motivated and inspired by a commitment to the women's

movement. Feminists feel accountable to the movement; this often gives them the

impetus to work and continue the struggle in fear of letting themselves and the movement

down.

Feminist scholarship values qualities and ways of being that are considered

traditionally feminine, such as emotionality, interdependence and process oriented

thinking (Foss & Foss, 1988). "Within the feminist perspective the qualities of women's

experiences are taken into account, taken seriously, and valued" (Foss & Foss, 1988, p.

9). Emotions have been typically kept away from traditional science; however, emotions

are an important part of human life and can contribute to making scholarship more real

(Hochschild, 2003).

Gender as Socially Constructed

Gender is central to an individual's personal and social identity. Though a social

category, it is often mistaken as being a biological category. Feminist anthropologists,

such as Margaret Mead, established that gender was not a universal variable but one that

was shaped by cultural realities. One of the earliest voices contesting biological

determinism, Mead presented the women in North America with the idea that women

everywhere did not follow the same Victorian norms of propriety and behavior. Through

her work in Samoa, Mead highlighted that adolescents and young women could have a

range of gender roles, beyond what was the norm in North America, thus stressing that

gender norms were changeable and situated (Mead, 2001).

Second wave feminists furthered the nature vs. nurture debate and emphasized the

difference between biological sex and socio-cultural gender, distinguishing between

being born male or female from being nurtured into masculine or feminine beings

through normative discourses (Oakley, 1972). By the seventies it was established that

biological sex had no universal influence on social roles and relationships, and that

biology took on cultural and social meanings to form gender (Brettell & Sargent, 2001).

Gender operates overtly at the behavioral level through our daily actions and at a

deeper ideological level through cultural perceptions and social value attached to male

and females (Bonvillain, 2001). Masculinity and femininity alone do not explain the

functioning of gender because they operate simultaneously and are relational and deeply

intersectional. Gender is situated within contexts of race, class, culture and sexuality

(Harding, 1987). As Mumby & Ashcraft (2004) state, "gender is an important discourse of difference that necessarily intersects with others" (p. xi). Further, gender is not a "peripheral, only sometimes significant feature of organizational life, but rather …a defining, constitutive feature of the organizing process," (Mumby, 1998, p. 259). Gender is thus shaped by cultures, and gender roles change immensely across cultures and over time. According to Bonvillain (2001):

> People in every culture maintain and transmit ideas about the roles that men and women perform, the rights they have in relation to each other and the values associated with their activities. Taken together, these ideas comprise culturally shared and accepted models of gender. They are all social constructs, developed and sustained specifically within each culture. (p. 4)

Organizational communication scholars emphasize that gender is an ever-evolving interactive construct that we "do" through organizational discourse. Thus, gender is not just one feature of organizing or development but an integral aspect (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). Gender is framed as an "ongoing social activity" it is not something that individuals inherently possess but instead something that we as social beings "do" and co-create. Mumby and Ascraft (2004) emphasize that gender identity is not static but a "product always in progress," in similar vein, gender is not an universal but "is a situated and provisional accomplishment – the continuous activity of managing conduct in light of dominant expectation for appropriate gender behavior" (p. 9).

Women in Development

Early on in the development process it was noted that women had either been left out from most development efforts and had been "targeted" by communication

campaigns that assumed that women from developing countries only enacted private sphere roles and responsibilities (Riano, 1994b; Steeves, 2001; Wilkins, 1999). In this section, I present how programs evolved from viewing women as "add-ons" to existing programs to addressing deeper structural norms such as gender. I review how gender is currently understood within the context of development, and describe how gender increasingly became a critical concern in development and communication efforts.

Realization of women's increasing marginalization led to the recognition of gender as an important variable in the development discourse. The then ground breaking work of Ester Boserup (1970) addressed the impact of development on third world women, bringing to attention that in spite of women's contribution to agricultural production, agricultural modernization had focused on men, thus masculizing agriculture and adversely affecting women's livelihoods. Boserup's seminal work highlighted two important issues: (1) that development had different impacts on men and women; and, (2) that development efforts had imposed western roles on third world women, viewing them primarily as occupying private and non-productive realms.

Consequently, the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) raised concerns about the "invisibility" and increased marginality of women in the course of development, laying out the path for the "women in development" (WID) phase of development (Chant & Guttman, 2000; Moser, 1989). Development planners thus began to incorporate women as a separate category in development and promoted the WID approach (Kabeer, 1994; Marchand & Parpart, 1995). WID, as a movement, emphasized *equality* and recognized the productive roles of women (Kabeer, 1994).

WID was grounded on the ideals of second wave and liberal feminism. Liberal feminism stressed equality and liberty, and saw a clear demarcation between the public and the private spheres of life. Equality being the central concern of WID, the proponents assumed that taking specific measures (such as advocating for equal opportunity to education, employment and equal voting rights) to integrate women into development work would minimize their disadvantaged position. Moreover, patriarchy was seen as the primary source of women's oppression. This approach did not challenge the existing social system but attempted to take measures to provide equal opportunities to women within the structure (Connelly, Li, MacDonald, & Parpart, 2000; Rathgeber, 1990).

However, the WID approach saw women as an *add-on* to pre-existing development programs and viewed women as an overarching single category, overlooking differences among women (Kabeer, 1994; McIlwaine & Datta, 2003). Women were seen as passive targets and silent "as objects of representations or as recipients of development programs, media messages, advertising, and technology" (Riano, 1994b, p.42). Further, the WID approach failed to question the sources and nature of women's oppression. WID, being rooted in modernization, attempted to fix the exclusion of women through advocacy and technological training (such as income generation skills and introduction of technology that would ease women's workloads) rather than address root causes (Rathgeber, 1990).

In spite of efforts to improve the situation of women through the UN decade for women it became apparent that "with a few exceptions, women's relative access to economic resources, income, and employment has worsened, their burdens of work have increased, and their relative and even absolute health, nutritional, and educational status

has declined" (Sen & Grown, 1987, p. 16). Hence, with the concomitant shifts toward socialist feminism and the alternative paradigm of development policy, there was a shift toward "gender and development" (GAD) during the 1980s.

The Gender and Development Framework

The GAD framework focused on the socialized gender relations between men and women (Parpart & Marchand, 1995; Rathgeber, 1990; Rathgeber & Vainio-Mattila, 2005). Influenced by multiple feminist frameworks, gender and development has know become the current framework for improving the situation of men and women in developing nations. This approach stood for empowerment and gender aware development planning. Socialist feminists recognized both the productive and reproductive roles played by women within capitalist male-dominated structures (Connelly et al., 2000). Further, they questioned the social construction of gender roles ascribed to men and women in different cultures (Rathgeber, 1990) and argued that both class and patriarchy had to be simultaneously challenged (Connelly et al.). Thus, the shift to GAD, differentiated between *biological sex* and *socially constructed gender*, emphasizing the absence of universal or fixed gender roles across diverse global settings (Kabeer, 1994; Rathgeber, 1995). The GAD framework focused not on women per se but instead on the socialized gender relations between men and women, and questioned the prescribed gender roles that men and women enact (Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Moser, 1989; Rathgeber, 1990).

Thus, unlike the WID approach, which tended to work within the existing social structure, a gender perspective went beyond equality and integration, calling for reexamining social structures, hierarchies and gender relations; resulting in the loss of

power among "elites" which could be men or women and is yet to be fully

mainstreamed in development praxis (Rathgeber, 1990, 1995; Rathgeber &Vainio-

Mattila, 2005). A distinct shift in this approach was that it recognized both women and

men as gendered, as opposed to WID's essentialized notion of women being united solely

based on a sense of shared biological sisterhood. The GAD perspective recognized "class

solidarities as well as class distinctions" (Rathgeber, 1990, p. 494). GAD gave particular

attention to women's oppression in the domestic sphere seeing the family and home as

sites where gendered social relations were enacted (Rathgeber, 1990).

Third world feminist writing and grassroots organizing informed the

empowerment aspect of the GAD approach (Connelly et al., 2000; Moser, 1989). The

GAD approach posited that women experience oppression differently based on their

social and historical positioning and thus must "challenge oppressive structures and

situations simultaneously at different levels" in order to empower people (Moser, 1989,

p. 1815). A key aspect of the GAD approach was that it viewed "women as agents of

change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance, and it stresses the

need for women to organize themselves for a more effective political voice" (Rathgeber,

1990, p. 494). This is similar to the idea of solidarity, where people or women of diverse

life situations autonomously come together to fight against oppression (Mohanty, 2003).

GAD emerged at a time when the alternative or participatory paradigm of

development was coming into prominence (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). It was also

influenced by several feminist perspectives that were emerging during that period, such

as global, black, and third world feminisms (Connelly et al., 2000). Thus, a basic tenet of

the GAD approach is that the "situation of women is a function of multiple power

relationships" (Rathgeber, 1995, p. 207) and that gender intersects with class and race, among other factors (Rathgeber, 1990).

Though it is a holistic vision – women, gender and development – the acceptance of the GAD approach in development agencies has been slow. Few agencies have adopted the approach because of the *transformative nature* of GAD's ideology, which challenges power structures and is "likely to be politically sensitive and personally threatening to members of privileged elite groups" (Rathgeber, 1995, p. 219). However, for a long time agencies continued to operate within the WID framework while incorporating certain principals of GAD, more recently agencies have tended to co-opt the rhetoric of GAD without really implementing the ideas in policy or programs (Rathgeber, 1995; Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2007).

Gender and Communication for Development

Gender as a construct has not been adequately addressed in communication and development (Steeves, 2001; Wilkins, 1999). Within the modernization phase, communication almost always originated outside the community and was a result of decisions made by the change agents – government agencies, NGOs or international agencies and relied on mass media (Escobar, 1995; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Riano, 1994a; Singhal & Sthapitanonda, 1996). Thus, the top-down flow of information and technology further exacerbated gender inequality as women were excluded from both the industrial and information revolutions (Steeves, 2002).

Barriers faced by women to access the information were often overlooked (Riano, 1994a). For instance in the case of agricultural extension efforts, extension agents were mostly male and typically visited and trained male farmers, thus leaving out female

farmers from new farming information and skills. Communication scholars began to recognize that mediated messages were not equally accessible and that media most often failed to reach women and other marginalized groups (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Both WID and communication programs viewed women as performing traditional western roles of mothers and caregivers and obscured the other economic and agricultural roles performed by women in developing countries (Steeves, 2002; Wilkins, 1999).

In addition, several women-centered development communication campaigns adopted a persuasion and social marketing approach, where media was considered a powerful force influencing passive ignorant women (Wilkins, 1999, 2000). An analysis of development communication programs from the International Women's Decade through the 90s reveals that women were the primary "target" of development communication campaigns focusing on health, population, and nutrition. They were viewed as targets of persuasion and social marketing and not as participants, and most campaigns viewed women solely in their roles as mothers, and caregivers (Wilkins, 1999). During the initial phase of development, socially beneficial outcomes were promoted to women via the adoption of commercial products (e.g. condoms, baby formula, antibacterial soap) thereby possibly privileging commercial interests as opposed to women's genuine needs (Steeves, 2002; Wilkins, 1999).

While GAD is faced with operational challenges, so is the new role of communication in development. The question of "who" is communicating and with "whom" is becoming more of a concern for communication scholars who stress the use of participatory approaches to achieve sustainable development goals (Escobar, 1995; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Steeves, 2002; Wilkins, 2000). Steeves (2001) points out that

programs aimed at reaching rural women must strive to use alternative forms of media such as indigenous or traditional media (e.g. folk theatre), interpersonal communication through women's groups and social networks and other community based media initiatives (community radio, village loudspeakers etc.) while democratizing the communication process. In addition, communication programs cannot merely focus on women, but they also need to incorporate men, when the decision to change an existing behavior requires co-operation.

Empowerment, a central construct in gender and development praxis (Moser, 1989), is understood as negotiated through interaction and dialogue (Rogers & Singhal, 2003). Communication, thus, becomes both a means to and of empowerment. Further, the GAD framework recognizes women as agents of change and stresses the need for women to organize themselves for collective action (Rathgeber, 1990).

Generalized and monolithic representations of women negatively impacts communication effectiveness. In terms of message content, scholars point out that promoting stereotypical or average representations of women may lead to fulfilling short-term program objectives but fail to challenge overarching gender norms and negatively effect broader programs goals such as those promoting gender equality (Wilkins & Mody, 2001).

Meanwhile, literature suggests that the relationship between women, participation and communication has evolved over time. As pointed out by Riano (1994a, pp. 6-7), four broad frameworks summarize the shifts and key features of women in communication for development (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.2

A Typology of Women, Participation and Communication

Type	*Approach*	*Participation*	*Empowerment*	*Messages*
Development communication	Women as subjects of information.	As a means of bringing about change.	Acquiring new information.	One-way; expert driven messages.
Participatory communication	Women as participants.	As transaction between receivers and source.	Enabling the acquisition of knowledge or gaining control.	Collaborative message design; bottom-up two-way.
Alternative communication	Women as subjects of change.	As control – necessary for social change.	Developing individual and collective capacities to change.	Multi-dimensional flow; horizontal message delivery; active senders and receivers.
Feminist communication	Women as producers of meaning.	As ownership, inclusion, and accountability.	Transformation of social subjects, gaining voice.	Communication as exchange; circularity of messages; horizontal.

These frameworks are not mutually exclusive and have several overlapping elements. The current thinking in gender and communication is best served by the alternative and feminist communication frameworks. Within the alternative communication framework women are encouraged to develop "alternatives to commercial media and to the vertical, one-way dominant communication system" (Riano, 1994a, p. 11). This model promotes solidarity and the creation of local community groups to identify and resist oppression. Since traditional communication frameworks failed to adequately address gender, the feminist communication framework specifically includes gender while drawing upon tenets of the alternative model. Gender is a consideration for both the ends (goals) and means (strategies) in this framework. Personal experience and individual subjectivities are privileged. Participation in feminist communication projects is seen as a way of coming to terms with their life experiences and articulating and speaking about forms of oppression that affect women's lives. Through participation women are transformed to become active subjects of struggle and producers of meaning (Riano, 1994a).

Women have erroneously been seen as either passive recipient of communication or as left out by the communication process. These accounts have failed to take into consideration the fact that in non-western societies women have traditionally been active in the communication process through oral traditions and informal communication practices. Further communication in non-western settings and oral cultures has traditionally been people centered - through informal communication, folk songs and stories (Riano, 1994b).

Having reviewed the history and the evolution of gender in communication and development, in this section I articulate a feminist and postcolonial standpoint which I believe is useful in understanding and furthering alternative models of development.

Feminist Communication Standpoint(s)

Feminist communication studies draws upon various feminist frameworks and ultimately articulates a unique communicative standpoint. A feminist communicology, as put forth by Mumby and Ashcraft (2004) involves "dereifying and critiquing the discursive and material mechanisms that create stable structures and hierarchies of value – men over women, white over black, reason over emotion, and so forth – become sedimented over time" (p. 185). Mumby and Ashcraft join other scholars in directing our attention to the dialectic of the symbolic and material, urging us to recognize that inequities in whatever form are experienced both as material and discursive practices (Cheney, 2000; Clair & Thompson, 1996; Cloud, 1994). Power and difference come into being through communication yet as Cloud (1994) points out, "discourse is not the only thing that 'matters'" (p.141). Therefore, although discourse is shaped by materiality, material realities go beyond the symbolic, bearing real, lived, tangible, and corporeal consequences. This resonates with participatory communication theory, which posits that power and material constraints intersect and is based on "the understanding that social reality is produced between people, in material contexts, and in communication" (Huesca, 2002, p. 503).

Feminist communicology views "human communication as the basic, constitutive activity of organizing. In other words, it is as people engage in communication action that identity, action, and structure – individual and collective – become possible and

meaningful" (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004, p. xxv). Within this integrated and historically

contextualized heuristic framework, gender is viewed as a "complex, ongoing, and

contradictory accomplishment, [that is] situated, embodied communicative praxis" (p.

115) and communication is conceived of as "the dynamic, situated, embodied, and

contested process of creating systems of gender meanings and identities" (p. 116). Thus

within organizations gender and communication mutually shape and are shaped by one

another.

Foss and Foss (1988) aptly define feminist communication scholarship as

focusing on "how gender is constructed through communication and how gender informs

communication. Thus gender is not one of many variables studied by the feminist

scholar; it is the major element studied" (p. 9). Although, the fundamental premises of

feminist theory inform all disciplines, what distinguishes feminist communication

scholarship from feminist scholarship in general is the interest in the synergistic

relationship between gender and communication. The distinctive lens of feminist

communication scholars is that they see gender as shaping and being shaped by

communicative practices (Foss & Foss, 1988; Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004; Rakow, 1992).

Feminist scholarship has powerful potential to inform and transform struggles for

social justice and its ultimate goal is emancipation from oppression (Foss & Foss, 1988;

Mohanty, 2003). Feminist communication scholarship is also uniquely suited to human

development in several ways. The following constructs both inform and play out in

development praxis:

Invitational rhetoric. As presented earlier, communication efforts for

development have been criticized for being overly persuasive and viewing women as

targets. The alternative feminist proposal of invitational rhetoric as put forth by Foss

and Griffin (1995) is grounded on the principles of equality, immanent value and self-

determination. The imposing and powerful traditional rhetor or change agent is replaced

by a rhetor who offers perspectives and encourages an atmosphere of mutual respect and

freedom where others can present their ideas. "In presenting a particular perspective, the

invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tries

to appreciate and validate those perspectives…rhetor and audience alike contribute to the

thinking about an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the

issue" (Foss & Griffin, p. 5). Much like in a Freirian dialogue both the rhetor and the

audience are transformed through the exchange of ideas; however, the aim of the

exchange is to gain understanding and appreciation *not* persuasion. The notion of offering

perspectives rather than solutions is akin to the role of the communicator as facilitator in

the participatory development paradigm and essentially allows individuals to make

informed choices (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; White, 1999).

Within this framework, the goal of the feminist communicator becomes to offer

perspectives aimed at mutual understanding while facilitating an atmosphere where

audience members are free, safe and valued while expressing their points of view. This

requires a spirit of openness where individual experiences and perspectives can be valued

and participants are seen as free and equal human beings (Foss & Griffin, 1995).

Feminist model of negotiation. Negotiation and dialogue are important constructs

in enacting GAD work. The role of spousal communication to promote women's

reproductive health and women's ability to negotiate safe sex with their partners are two

instances where negotiation is a means through which women realize their rights.

Negotiation is a common communicative practice to solve problems, and make joint

decisions in all spheres of life. More effective ways of negotiating, such as the feminist

model of exchange (Putnam & Kolb, 2000) can be crucial to furthering the successes of

GAD work.

Putnam and Kolb (2000) highlight that negotiation is a gendered process

associated with masculine traits such as competition, individuality and reason.

Negotiation is also gendered because men usually are more powerful in the bargaining

process. They propose a feminist model of negotiation that is based on feminist principles

of connectedness and collaboration rather than trade and exchange as in traditional modes

of negotiation. The ultimate goal of such negotiation is transformation - not settlement -

and the process involves empathy, dialogue, emotions and sharing among other qualities.

In place of information exchange this model emphasizes co-construction through

"connecting and creating mutual understanding" (p. 84) which encourage inquiry and

openness.

Feminist vision of organizing. Principles of feminist organizing such as (1)

integrative thinking, (2) cooperative enactment, and (3) connectedness are proposed as an

alternative to traditional organizational themes like competitiveness, linear thinking, and

individualism and can particularly benefit development work. This alternative vision

privileges non-binary thinking and values feminine ideals of commitment, relationship,

interdependence and collaboration (Buzzanell, 1994). Co-operative enactment, which like

solidarity, entails individuals coming together and working toward collective goals.

Integrated thinking is considered to be typical of women not just feminists, and deals

with thinking holistically (for instance thinking of the family before the self). Finally,

connectedness refers to seeing things as linked, to the integration of mind, body, and emotion in making sense of the surrounding world. If development planners and researchers are able to give up binary thinking (such as viewing themselves as experts and the community as ignorant beneficiaries) and view development as co-creation of a more equitable world order, development practices may become more effective (Chambers, 1997).

Towards a Postcolonial and Multicultural Future

Shome and Hegde (2002) propose that the "politics of postcoloniality is centrally imbricated in the politics of communication" (p. 249). Postcolonial studies are particularly relevant for communication studies – for one communication has always been "situated" calling for contextuality. Contexts are not linear and are always "fractal," they overlap with other contexts and are both contained in and contain other contexts (Grossberg, 2002, pp. 368-369).

While postcolonial studies theorized about "the problematics and contexts of de/colonization" its present focus goes well beyond the purview of colonialism. Postcolonial studies are interventionist and emancipatory: that is, it is not merely knowledge but knowledge that informs transformative practices. At its strongest it deals not with just colonialism but "why those conditions are what they are, and how they can be undone and redone" (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 250). According to Gayatri Spivak an influential postcolonial thinker, "postcolonial scholarship provides a theoretical and historical focus to multiculturism," it takes into account "multiplicity" at a deeper level and becomes all the more pertinent in the context of globalization (Hegde & Shome, 2002). Though postcolonial studies initially responded to colonialism, the focus now is

more metropolitan, with forces such as globalization, capitalism and migration paving

ways for new forms of colonization (Hegde & Shome, 2002; Mohanty, 2003).

Grossberg (2002) reminds us that "not only does any communicative context exist

at a particular geohistorical position, it also is located in complex geohistorical relations –

both horizontal and vertical – to other contexts" (p. 369). The postcolonial project goes

well beyond addressing nation states: "it entails geopoliticizing the nation and locating it

in larger (and unequal) histories and geographies of global power and culture" (Shome &

Hegde, 2002, p. 253).

Postcolonial studies urge us to think beyond binaries, by addressing the complex,

fragmented, multiple ways people can be located. People are no longer situated within

binary realms as colonizer and colonized or oppressor and oppressed, but instead exist in

multiple spaces and locations that recognize concurrent oppressions and fragmented

identities. Further, the postcolonial enterprise compels us to recognize how, what we

consider normal, common sense or natural is intrinsically linked to the colonial history of

modernity; particularly notions of what we consider development, identity, public

private, culture, education and knowledge (Grossberg, 2002).

Within the context of international development, the Euro-centric bias is another

form of colonization that is critiqued by postcolonial discourse. The north funds most

development projects and has shaped development standards from western perspectives

(Ferguson, 2000; Harding, 2000). In addition, scholars agree that development has tended

to blindly follow the modernization paradigm and the enlightenment dream (Barker,

2000; Ferguson; Harding). Further, the development agenda evolves in the north and is

enacted by researchers and practitioners based in the north, who represent different

realities and unequal power relations over those they are attempting to "develop" (Ferguson). Thus western scholars, practitioners, development experts and feminists in many ways dominate and colonize the south (Ferguson). Postcolonial feminist theorizing sensitizes scholar-practitioners to become "multicentered … simultaneously self-critical of their own power/knowledge starting points, historically and contextually grounded, and yet unapologetically integrative" (Ferguson, 2000, p. 197). Ferguson calls for "situated ethics" (p. 198) over universal, north-centered ethics. Ferguson's suggestion to re-orient and initiate development practice from the south, starting with the community's needs and participation, is timely and useful in (re)envisioning feminist development practice and bears much in common with similar call for "endogenous" development practices (Singhal & Sthapitanonda, 1996).

Both feminist and development theory-praxis remain in the hands of "experts" most of whom belong to or are trained in the west. Similarly the notion of what counts as knowledge continues to follow western, scientific and rational ideals, undervaluing indigenous knowledge (Chambers, 1997). For feminist theorizing to be truly (de)centered, the site of knowledge production necessitates a shift from ivory towers and academics to include the lived experience and local knowledge of grassroots women, as this study attempts to do (Harding, 2000).

Harding (2000) further elucidates on the value and need for incorporating "local knowledge systems" within the development discourse. She highlights how the enlightenment paradigm that values scientific and universally valid knowledge claims, has shaped and in turn limited the efficacy of development practices. Development was equated with economic growth and this model had several flaws, such as the devaluing

and obscuring of other needs and interests. The Eurocentric framework saw other cultures as "savage" and only validated scientific knowledge thus ignoring local indigenous knowledge that were a part of non-western cultures. Harding values local knowledge systems and points out that cultures have their distinct knowledge bases, grounded on their unique interests and standpoints, and their different discursive resources. Thus there is no singular or universal scientific claim just as all forms of local knowledge are not equally powerful or relevant to all situations. She presents us with a postcolonial standpoint on knowledge, which recognizes knowledge that emerges from those that are not a part of the western, Eurocentric, scientific world. Local knowledge travels, connects to knowledge that belongs to other cultures and is reconstructed to produce a new form of regionally shared knowledge. Harding promotes the idea of "cognitive diversity" as a scientific value in an imperfect knowledge system.

Barker (2000) like Harding (1987, 2000) challenges the western scientific model as well as the essentialist construction of women, in women and development (WID) and colonial accounts, recognizing alternative forms of knowing and going beyond scientific knowledge and Cartesian rationality. She proposes that a "genuine and sympathetic reading of nonmodern ways of being can help us construct radical epistemologies that result in nondominating ways of producing knowledge" (p. 186). Barker asserts that an emancipatory project that wants to be free of reproducing hierarchy and domination, has to involve a feminist position that deconstructs the enlightenment ideal and values local knowledge systems.

Post-colonial and third world feminism are uniquely situated to provide a deeper contextualization of women's issues in developing countries (Narayan, 1997). Hence the

GAD perspective, discussed earlier in this chapter, was influenced by the various shifts

in feminism and consequently has several overlapping concerns, such as accounting for

differences, privileging the local context and avoiding cultural effacement that obscure

women with different identities (Heywood & Drake, 1997; McIlwaine & Datta, 2003;

Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Rathgeber, 1995).

Research Questions

The present review of literature drew upon (1) development theorizing, paying

special attention to the emergence and consequent shifts in the field of communication

for development; (2) multiple feminist frameworks that aid in understanding a feminist

and gender oriented approach to communication for development and in articulating a

postcolonial feminist communication standpoint. Several common threads run between

all these theoretical perspectives: they all mark a distinct shift toward a people-centered,

localized, non-linear and structurally transformative model of social change. Further, this

alternative model is guided by the recognition of difference and multiplicity. They call

for blurring of fixed/normative boundaries within an integrated and holistic vision of the

world. The vast body of literature emphasizes that all people and practices are deeply

situated. In addition, these frameworks reinforce the need to account for local knowledge,

value local experiences and respond to local needs. These theories, being people-

centered, emerge from praxis and praxis lends itself to broaden the existing theory. This

research seeks to highlight the mutually reinforcing nature of theory-praxis while

answering the following broad research questions:

RQ 1: *What communication for social change practices does Minga employ as they engage with community members and what are some of the distinguishing aspects of Minga's approach?*

RQ 2: *How do the participants perceive, experience and co-share the material and physical context they live in and what do their narratives and sketches reveal about the lived realities of the Peruvian Amazon?*

RQ 3: *How do Minga's efforts enable or constrain gender equality and how are gender roles, norms, hierarchies and relationships affected and altered?*

Chapter Three: Methodology

Theoretical and methodological predilections are in many ways interconnected, and both research questions and methodological choices emerge from theoretical inclinations. Furthermore, my personal leanings toward a participatory and feminist stance as a scholar and researcher influenced how the research was conducted. The questions I posed were well served by taking on an interpretive approach and drawing upon multiple ethnographic tools of inquiry. In this chapter, I provide a detailed discussion of how I sought to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 2. I begin with the basic epistemological and ontological assumptions that guided the study then describe the research setting. I end this chapter with a discussion on the data collection and analysis procedures.

The study draws upon feminist and participatory paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). A paradigm is viewed as a framework or a worldview that endorses certain conceptions of the nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). At a basic level, paradigms provide an overall framework for how we view reality and knowledge. Paradigms guide our methodological choices as well as ontological and epistemological proclivities (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The present research was guided by several epistemological assumptions shared by feminist, social constructivist, and participatory paradigms. Epistemologically, the study recognizes and privileges women and other marginalized people as possessing "knowledge," thus legitimizing the lived experiences of women and traditional communities (Harding, 1987). Further the study enabled the participants to be active in the production and meaning making of knowledge that concerns their lives (Chambers, 1983).

Methodologically, this was an interpretive study that drew upon several ethnographic tools of inquiry such as interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, content analysis of audience letters, as well as participatory sketches and skits. The primary purpose of the study was rich description rather than prediction of human actions or behaviors. Being an interpretive study, emphasis was placed on the socio-cultural context in which human behavior occurs while recognizing individuals as active agents in the co-construction of their social realities. Finally, human interaction within the context of social change is best understood as complex, multi-faceted, and requiring reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995).

<div align="center">Research Standpoint(s)</div>

Feminism research agendas are rooted within the emancipatory ideals of the movement and reality is viewed as shaped by social, political, cultural, historical, economic, ethnic, racial, gender and sexuality related factors. Epistemologically, the feminist paradigm adopts a subjectivist and transactional stance, where the researcher and the research participants co-construct knowledge. Knowledge is situated and influenced by the values and positionalities of both the researcher and the research participants. Methodologically, the paradigm calls for dialogue and collaborative knowledge building which are well served by qualitative methods. The researcher is not aloof and objective but a transformative advocate and activist who reflexively engages in the research encounter (Harding, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Oakley, 1981; Olesen, 2000). Ultimately, the purpose of inquiry for feminist scholars is to transform, critique, and emancipate. Feminist research is ultimately not just about women but *for* women and

aims "to provide for women explanations of social phenomenon that they want and need" (Harding, 1987, p. 8).

As Harding (1987) reminds us, traditional social science was grounded in and limited to the experiences of elites, most often white men, thus leading to a partial understanding of social life. As a response to the omission of women's perspectives, feminist research "generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences" (Harding, 1987, p. 7). Thus, feminist research provides a more nuanced understanding of social life and stresses the multiplicity between and among women who exist as members of different classes, races, cultures, and religion. Feminists emphasize that feminist research does not use a unique methodology. Methods used for feminist research could be used for any research and traditionally androcentric methods such as surveys could also be used to understand women centered issues. What distinguishes feminist research from other forms of research is not the methods per se but the guiding assumptions of the research such as the centrality of women's experiences, the primary purpose behind the research (i.e. for women) and the role of the subjective and reflexive researcher (Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser, 2004; Olesen, 2000). Within this framework, I seek to understand and include multiple voices, reflecting the multiple and concurrent forces of exclusion faced by men and women in the Amazonian region.

The *participatory* or the *cooperative paradigm* bears much in common with the feminist worldview. Both paradigms view reality as participative (i.e. collaboratively built by the research participants and the researcher) and encourage critical subjectivity. In addition, experiential and practical knowledge (such as women's experiences or knowledge of the people gained through doing daily acts) is valued. Importantly, both

paradigms privileged voices that are most often silenced and historically marginalized. Methodologically, the participatory paradigm calls for collaborative or action based research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This approach to research is particularly well-suited to research that relates to development and social change. The researcher is viewed as a facilitator where both respondent and researcher learn through an active and engaged research process (Chambers, 1983, 1997). The aim of inquiry is for social transformation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Robert Chambers (1983, 1999), a prominent advocate of participation in development praxis reminds us that participation is both a means (i.e. a way of implementing more sustainable projects by involving people) and an end (i.e. the goal being to unleash the potential of people to take control of their own lives). However, he reminds us that "the reality of participation though has often differed from the rhetoric. Much development that is participatory in name has remained top-down in practice" (Chambers, 1999, p. 8). A researcher within the participatory paradigm thus becomes a researcher-facilitator who must be willing to let go of certain attitudes and knowledge that comes from their position as "experts" or training as "scholars." Further, the participatory research process involves constant learning and unlearning (Chambers, 1999).

The participatory paradigm questions the monopolization of knowledge by the objective elite researcher within the scientific worldview. Scholars espousing cooperative inquiry refer to it as "an emergent worldview, more holistic, pluralistic, and egalitarian, that is essentially participative" (Reason, 1998, p. 262). According to Heron "this worldview sees human beings as co-creating their reality through participation: through

their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action" (cited

in Reason, 1998, p. 262). Much like the feminist and liberationist education movement

that influenced the participatory paradigm, co-operative inquiry calls for "self-reflexive

critical awareness-in-action" (Reason, 1998, p. 262).

This study uses methodological triangulation in order to gain a "more complete,

holistic, and contextual portrayal of unit(s) under study" (Jick, 1979, p. 603).

Triangulation is the combination of methodologies in a study to better understand the

same phenomenon; the term is derived from geometry where multiple viewpoints

allowed for greater accuracy. Triangulation can be done in several ways. At its most

common level triangulation can be done between or across methods resulting in cross

validation, when two or more methods are found to yield congruent comparable data.

Triangulation can also be done with-in methods, where within a single method multiple

techniques are used, as is the case with this study (Jick, 1979). I combine a broad range of

methods for cross validation and to ensure that the community opinions, perceptions and

ideas are represented.

<div align="center">Ethnographic Field Methods</div>

Ethnography is a term used to indicate a research approach that involves high

levels of commitment and immersion or an approach to research which uses several

ethnographic methods as is the case in this study (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998;

Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1988).[3] Historically ethnographies are associated with early

studies in anthropology and sociology where other cultures and tribes were observed first

hand. Though ethnographies now include the study of one's own culture, or indirect

---

[3] Though there is no definitive length of fieldwork or requisite level of cultural immersion required for an ethnography, this study uses ethnographic tools and is not an ethnography in the traditional sense.

observation through texts, cultural artifacts or recordings of interactions, they emerged

as western accounts of non-western cultures and people (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998;

Silverman, 2001). Ethnography can be described as a "story telling institution," where a

researcher goes out to a community, spends time with them, becomes close to them and

returns to document what was "learned in situ" (Van Maanen, 1995).

Ethnography as an approach includes several methods including establishing

rapport, participant observations, maintaining a field diary, interviews with key

informants among others. However as Geertz (1973) stresses, the defining characteristic

of ethnography is not the tools utilized but the overarching commitment to provide "thick

descriptions." Furthermore, such interpretive acts provide the context within which acts

occurred, making them contextually specific, particular and circumstantial (Geertz,

1973). Ethnographic studies, thus, allow the researcher to become intimately involved

with the phenomenon being studied and write a first hand in-depth account of the

researcher's experience with a culture. The main aim of the ethnographer is to follow

what people do and how they do it (Silverman, 2001). Ethnographic research functions as

a boundary spanner between two cultural worlds, that of the researcher and the people

she is studying, thus making it simultaneously an interpretive act and a representation of

culture (Van Maanen, 1988).

Ethnographers have been urged to rethink the purpose of their research and go

beyond knowledge building to include advocacy for the people who they study. Critical

theories such as Marxism and feminism in particular have influenced ethnographies to

include more collaborative research with a less hierarchical and more democratic

research process. Thus, marking a distinct shift toward more applied and collaborative

ethnographies that actively engage in social and political change (Atkinson &

Hammersley, 1998; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Hence I include participatory tools

within my research design.

According to Singhal (2001), participatory research or participatory learning and

action is:

> Community development approach whereby facilitators work with communities
>
> to help them analyze their needs, identify solutions to fill those needs, and
>
> develop and implement a plan of action. Facilitators use a variety of participatory
>
> approaches, tools, and methods to gather information about the community and its
>
> problems, and work closely with community members to help them prioritize the
>
> problems, and their solutions. (p. 37)

When research involves groups that are non-literate and have been historically muted,

they may not be able to articulate their thoughts, feelings and perceptions through

mainstream research tools. Participatory means enable respondents to envision and

articulate in their own way how they view their lives and what changes they seek

(Chambers, 1997).

Participatory methodologies focus on the empowerment of the research

participants, combining the principles of participatory learning and action with notions of

rigor and trustworthiness. Through these methods researchers and practitioners gain a

first hand account of the perceptions and needs of rural people. Many of the research

tools are visual and require simple material such as pen, paper, blackboard and chalk or

can be drawn on the ground with sticks. Therefore, they are easy and accessible to most

rural people. Through these activities people become active participants in the data

collection and analysis process (Chambers, 1997).

Participatory research approaches include several distinct methodologies such as

participatory action research, participatory rural appraisal, cooperative inquiry and action

inquiry. These methods are complementary and overlapping and there is scope for

integration of these methods (Chambers, 1997; Reason, 1998). For the purpose of this

study, I adopt an integrative approach to participatory methodology, combining two tools

– skits and sketches.

<center>Research Setting</center>

Given that the present study is focused on the social change initiatives of Minga

Perú and its work in the Peruvian Amazonia, it is important to describe the research

setting and provide a brief background to the country and the Amazonian region of

Loreto where Minga Perú conducts its programs.

Perú is situated in the western part of South America. The country shares borders

with Ecuador and Columbia on the North, Brazil on the East, Bolivia on the South East

and Chile on the South. The Spanish *Conquistadoras* took over ancient Perú in 1532,

capturing the Inca ruler and beginning centuries of colonial rule (Hemming, 1970).

However, the Loreto region though almost a third of the country's territory remained

isolated and away from the influence of the colonial regime (Santos-Granero & Barclay,

2000). Peruvian independence was declared on July, 28th 1821. The Republic of Perú

inherited the colonial legacy of a highly divided society where power rested mainly

among the wealthy European minority who controlled the poor Indian natives. Even until

today, large numbers of Perú's population remains on the fringes of this highly stratified

society where "internal colonialism privileges the needs of the white and the wealthy over those of peasants, street vendors, maids, soldiers, Amazonian Indians, African-Peruvians, and Quechua and Aymara speakers" among others (Starn, Degregori, & Kirk, 1995, p. 3).

Politically, Perú went through immense violence and internal strife during the 1980s and into the early 1990s. This bloody period in Peruvian history is often referred to as *Manchay tiempo* (the time of fear) or in the Maoist leader Guzman's words "the river of blood" committed to end the old order and bring in a Maoist nation (Starn, Degregori & Kirk, 1995).The truth and reconciliation commission set up to assess the extent of the political violence between the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) rebel group and the State forces, estimates that 69,280 Peruvians were killed during the internal conflict. Of these, majority (almost three fourths) belonged to indigenous groups such as the Quechua, were largely rural dwellers (79 percent) and more than half were peasant populations (See Perú Support Group, 2005 for the full report). President Alberto Fujimori came to office in 1990. His government improved the economy and considerably controlled the guerrilla rebellion, imprisoning many of the senior rebel leaders including Guzman. However, allegations of corruption and a general sense of dissatisfaction stemming from his authoritarian rule led to his ouster. Today, after close to two decades of instability and violence, Perú has reached a relatively calm and peaceful period.

Perú is dived into three distinct geographical regions, the coastal area (*costa*) which traverses along the pacific shoreline is where Lima is situated; the highlands (*sierra*) which is the Andean belt; and the lowlands which includes the riverine areas

referred to as the *selva* (forests). The Andean region is home to the country's vast

Andean population and claims a prominent place in Peruvian history as it was the base of

the famed Inca Empire. In the coastal area lies much of Perú's elite and power base.

Administratively, the country is divided into 25 Departments which are further divided

into numerous Provinces, (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Administrative map of Perú.

Source: The University of Texas at Austin, Perry-Castañeda Library, Map Collection.

As shown in Figure 3.1, the Loreto Region lies in the Northern part of Perú and is part of the Peruvian Amazonia, traversed by the serpentine tributaries of the vast oceanesque River Amazon and dense rainforests. It lies in the lowlands or the lower tropical rainforest area east of the Andes (*selva baja*). Loreto is considered a frontier province as it shares borders with three of Perú's neighboring countries - Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil. The post independence government in the mid 1800 expressed interest and commitment in harnessing the rich agro-economy of this area, though their attention was short lived and more an act to protect their borders from Brazil's expansion, the government did succeed in building the infrastructure and connectivity for future trade. Loreto became an economic center during the rubber boom from 1870 to 1914, and the growing demand for rubber in the developed nations led to an unforeseen increase in Loreto's rubber export. The rubber trade was both extractive and exploitative (Santos-Granero & Barclay, 2000).

Figure 3.2. A riverine community in the Peruvian Amazon.

Historically, the region has been heavily influenced by a number of outside forces intent on controlling and "civilizing" the natives such as the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries, the rubber barons, the *Hacienda* or *fundo* bosses, and now in many ways the centralized Peruvian Government. The region has had river trading ties with the adjacent Brazilian Amazon much before the discovery of rubber or steam navigation. Natives would trade commodities such as salted fish, local oils, and sometimes slaves (initially for domestic work and later for rubber extraction) and the means of transportation was locally crafted canoes oared by the master *Cocama* boatmen (Gow, 1991).

Figure 3.3. A *ribereño* paddles his handmade canoe on the Amazon river.

Iquitos is the capital city in the *Selva* region and is relatively developed. Here one

has access to most services and facilities including the Internet and telephone. It is also a

bustling tourist center as the Amazonian Jungle Lodges are accessible only from Iquitos.

Iquitos is considered as one of the largest cities in the world without access by a road

network – it can be reached only by air or ship. During the rubber trade days, Iquitos

came into prominence because of its port, making it one of the richest cities in Latin

America (Starn, Degregori, & Kirk, 1995). The city stands in stark contrast to the rest of

the region which remains isolated and remote, with limited access to electricity,

telephone lines, higher education and health care. The area has been ravaged by its

exploitative economy and outbreaks of disease such as cholera.

The Peruvian Government and its land reform agencies included the Amazonian

communities for the first time in the 1970s giving them land titles and registering these

communities officially as *comunidad native* (native communities)[4], the term native was

used by the state to replace the terms indigenous or Indians. However, the state did not

recognize and register all communities, hence official estimates of the number of river

communities in this region are lower than the actual number (Gow, 1991).

Native communities are often described within a dualistic framework that views

them as being either civilized/ Christians (*fieles*)/ workers (*mozo* meaning people

working under a patron) or traditional forest people/ savages (*salvajes*)/ pagan

worshippers (*infieles*). However these binaries do not do justice in explaining the

numerous influences that have shaped the native Indian people over the centuries. In their

own terms, they understand this process of acculturation as transforming them from being

real indios (people who had no contact with outsiders i.e. missionaries or white patrons)

to becoming *gentes civilizada* (civilized people). They understand their history as being a

series of temporal progressions beginning with the *tiempo de los ancienos* (the ancient

time of their ancestors prior to contact with white people), *tiempo de caucho* (time of

rubber where the native people became slaves to the rubber bosses and barons), *tiempo de

la hacienda* (time of the hacienda when the end of the rubber era forced the native people

to live as slaves on large landholdings) and the present period is described as *estes*

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[4] The Peruvian Government passed the Law of Native Communities and Agricultural/Pastoral Promotion in the Tropical Forest and Montane Areas on 24 June 1974.

tiempos (these times) where they have liberated themselves from slavery (Gow, 1991).

Gow writes:

> '*Ya somos gente civilizada'* (Now we are civilized people). This is a statement
> constantly made by native people … It seems, to the hearer, to be a statement
> of separation from the past, and of the irrelevance of older generations'
> experience. But, in the speech of native people, it calls up a multiplicity of
> associations which extend out across time and space to locate them within a
> larger spatial and temporal system. (p. 59)

This study, in part, attempted to understand how these Amazonian community members

have been affected by Minga Perú's projects. As the following section will explicate, I

used an array of methodological tools to explore the organization's and the community

members' perspective on social change as is being fostered by Minga.

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedures</div>

Gaining Entrée

My interest in Minga Perú's work began in the Fall of 2004. I was taking the

Communication and Information Diffusion (COMS 710) course with my advisor Arvind

Singhal and he invited Elizabeth Rattine-Flaherty, an Ohio University alum, to class to

talk about her recent visit to Perú, where -- over six weeks -- she had studied some

aspects of Minga Perú. After listening to her presentation my curiosity was piqued and

over the next couple of months I found myself visiting my advisor over several occasions

and repeating my interest to study Minga Perú. This interest in Minga was a pipe dream

of sorts: we didn't know if Minga would be open to such research, I didn't speak Spanish,

and didn't quite know where I was going to get the research funds from. Seeing my

continued interest, Dr. Singhal broached the topic with the Minga team when he visited

Perú over Spring break in 2004. Based on Minga's long standing relationship with Dr.

Singhal and the positive experience they had had with Elizabeth Rattine-Flaherty, Minga

was willing to give me access and provide field support.

We still had other issues to take care of such as travel funds, visas,

immunizations, airfare, and accommodation arrangements to name a few and all these

required a reasonably generous research grant. So, Dr. Singhal and I collaboratively set

about writing multiple research grant proposals and managed to raise enough money to

cover my main expenses. With the major concerns taken care of, I contacted Eliana Elías,

Executive Director of Minga Perú and shared a brief description of my research

objectives. She in turn shared this with Dr. Eloy Neira, who serves as an advisor to

Minga. They were both interested in my proposed research and invited me to Perú to

conduct fieldwork over the summer. Meanwhile, I defended my dissertation proposal and

worked on detailing my research design and interview protocols. I also presented my

research proposal along with the research protocols to the Institutional Review Board at

Ohio University and got their permission to collect data prior to embarking on fieldwork.

Since I had no prior experience in Latin America, it was recommended that I

enroll in a cultural (language) immersion program. After doing some background

research on immersion programs, I registered for an intensive Spanish language and

cultural immersion program at the Utatlan School in Xela (Quetzaltenango), Guatemala.

Xela is a small town about five hours away from the capital city and is well known for

high quality immersion schools. I spent the last two weeks of June, 2005 in Xela where I

studied Spanish with a personal instructor for eight hours daily. In order to get to know

the local culture I lived with a Guatemalan family and since they did not speak any

English I got to practice my newly learned Spanish at home. I studied basic

conversational Spanish as well as grammar and learned vocabulary and phrases that

related to my research area. After classes and over the weekends the school organized

excursions, documentary viewings and lectures to help the participants learn more about

the social, historical, religious and cultural aspects of the region. I gained immensely

from the individual lessons as well as the home stay and was better prepared to venture

into the Peruvian Amazon. By no means was I close to being conversationally fluent in

Spanish; however, I developed an ear for the language, its tone, and some of its

vocabulary.

Engaging in Fieldwork

   My fieldwork was conducted over a period of six weeks in Perú between the

months of July and August, 2005. I spent time in Lima and in the Loreto region where I

divided my time between the main city Iquitos and the training center Tambo. In Loreto,

I also made field visits to two communities, Gallito community (on the River Amazon)

and Santa Cruz community (on the River Marañon). The communities were selected

based on the number of community driven activities initiated by Minga in the particular

community and access and proximity to the central town of Iquitos the Tambo training

center.

   In Lima and Iquitos, I conducted participant observations and in-depth interviews

with the Minga team. In the communities I conducted individual and group interviews as

well as participatory sketching. While in Tambo I met with *promotoras comunitarias*

from six communities and women's network members from two communities on the

river Marañon. Here I conducted in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and

participatory skits with the women. I also spent time in the Andes, where I didn't conduct

formal research but I was able to observe another very distinct part of the country. See

Table 3.1

Table 3.1

Overview of Research Location, Method and Participants

Location	*Method*	*Participants*
Lima	IDI	Minga Team
Iquitos	IDI	Minga Team
Gallito Community	IDI	Listeners
	FGD	Correspondents
		Listeners
	Sketching	Male and female
		Community members
Santa Cruz Community	IDI	*Promotora's* spouse
	FGD	Men's group
Tambo Training Center	IDI	*Promotoras*
	FGD	*Promotoras* group 1
		Promotoras group 2
		Women's group
	Skits	*Promotoras* and women's
		network members

Note. IDI = In-depth Interview, FGD = Focus Group Discussion

In the first week, I spent time in Lima meeting the Minga team and learning about the organization and their vision. During this time I also worked with the team to translate my research protocol and interview guidelines. This was a re-iterative process and the documents went through several rounds of revisions. Initially, I went over the interview protocol with Eliana and then worked closely with a Minga volunteer who translated the protocol into Spanish. The translated version was then given to Eliana who reverse translated the questions to ensure they still carried the same meaning. Consequently, we made changes to the questions. Then the revised question guide was emailed to Everly, the coordinator of the radio program, in the Iquitos office. Everly is from Loreto and I wanted to ensure that the language was locally appropriate and understandable to community members. In the final round of revisions we changed some words, simplifying them or replacing them with the local term.

While in the field, I was accompanied by a bi-lingual interpreter who translated both the individual and group interviews and the participatory exercises. I worked with two interpreters, both of whom had degrees in communication and had previous experience in conducting qualitative research. One was an American who has been living in Iquitos for several years and the other was a Peruvian who has worked and researched with Minga. I briefed the interpreter about the research goals and methods prior to conducting the research. At the end of each day in the field, I would sit with the interpreter and go over the day's work, discussing the outcomes and insights, and we would plan forward for the next day. The interviews and the participatory research were conducted in Spanish and the interpreter simultaneously translated it into English. Both versions were audio taped and the English version transcribed over a period of six months

by me upon return from fieldwork. The data collection resulted in a total of 29, 60

minute tapes and 359 pages of transcripts. The interviews could not be taped digitally as

the research sites did not have electricity.

I specifically drew upon the following ethnographic tools:

Interviews

I conducted open-ended interviews with key informants such as Minga team

members and *promotora*s. A total of 17 interviews were conducted with 12 female and 5

male participants. A "qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the

interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific

topics raised by the respondent" (Babbie, 2001, p. 292). Face-to-face in-depth interviews

were conducted as open-ended unstructured interviewing (in-depth) is considered to

provide more details than other forms of interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 1998). It is

viewed as a means of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being

studied. In-depth interviews served as a flexible tool that allowed for a smooth and

natural interaction with the participants (Babbie).

Issues in interviewing such as establishing rapport, gaining trust and the role of

the interviewer are critical in shaping the outcome of the interview. The respondent-

researcher interaction is shaped by issues such as gender and race (Fontana & Frey,

1998). Interviews are typically grounded on a stimulus-response model. However, I

approached the interviews as conversations building upon the collaborative or friendship

model of interviewing. This model conceives of friendship as being developed through

research, and encourages the researcher to be responsive to the respondent. Interviews

may also be treated as discourse (Mishler, 1986). Alternative approaches to interviewing

such as these promote a two-way dialogue between the researcher and research

participants. Questions are posed by both the researchers and the respondents and thus are

better suited to grasp the complexities of social and behavioral issues (Mishler, 1986;

Oakley, 1981). This approach suited the field setting and fit in with how the participants

treated me as a friend/visitor/guest to them and their country. As I got to know them they

too got to know me and would ask questions about my work, my country and even my

relationship with my spouse.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used as a complimentary data source. The

focus groups provided for a large number of responses in much less time and allowed me

to validate findings and see patterns among participants' responses (Fontana & Frey

1998; Morgan 1997). Seven FGDs were conducted with *promotora*s, listeners' groups,

correspondents and community men and women. A total of 25 females and 12 males

participated in the discussions. The potential shortcoming of focus groups compromising

on depth and detail was overcome by using in-depth interviews along with focus groups

(Morgan, 1997). FGDs helped gather, integrate and embellish responses of individuals

(Fontana & Frey, 1998). The strength of group interviews lie in the fact that they are

relatively "inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents and recall aiding"

(Fontana & Frey, 1998, p.55). The discussion guides for the FGDs were generated

through preliminary in-depth interviews (Morgan, 1997).

In addition, focus groups discussions were in keeping with feminist sensibilities.

Firstly, the group discussions privilege the social context by focusing on group

interaction. Secondly, the researcher as moderator was able to shift the power and flow of

the discussion to the respondents' themselves. Thirdly, the group dialogue served as an empowering and consciousness raising tool for the participants as they were able to articulate their individual standpoints and voice their beliefs and practices through collective talk (Wilkinson, 2004).

Participant Observations

Participant observation refers to the research method where the researcher "is playing an established participant role in the scene studied" (Atkinson & Hammersley 1998, p.111). The participant-as-observer method of participant observation was employed which views the researcher as an observer and a participant in the site of research (Adler & Adler 1998). I spent an average of eight hours everyday for six weeks divided between the Minga office in Lima and Iquitos, the Tambo training center, and Santa Cruz and Gallito Communities, totaling to 160 hours of participant observation. I also observed several sessions of the production and recording of the radio program and a community meeting held by *promotora*s. Detailed field notes were taken whenever possible during these observation sessions or at the end of the day.

Participant observation requires the researcher to observe the processes as they occur in their natural setting while the participants carry out their daily activities. This method was particularly useful for me as I was an outsider to the setting and gave me the opportunity to look, listen and learn. Participant observation stems from the understanding that to understand one must participate in the interaction and not just observe from a distance (Silverman, 2001). This rang true while in the field because I would be asked to participate in various daily activities be it joining the family for a meal, sipping tender coconut water while listening to a recording of *Bienvenida Salud*

infront of a *promotora's* house, helping with an email in English, drafting a document

describing Minga's new business for social change project or explaining my research and

development history to the group of volunteers from the American Jewish World Service

program who were living and working at Tambo during my fieldwork. I agree with

scholars who argue that participant observation is not just a research method but a way of

being in the social world, all social research is participant observation because we cannot

understand the social world without participating in it (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998).

Ideally, the aims of observation should be, (1) to see through the eyes of the people

studied; (2) to describe and include details; (3) to situate occurrences within historical

and social contexts; (4) to view the process; (5) to avoid premature impositions of

theories; and, (6) to use a flexible research design as observations evolve (Silverman,

2001 citing Bryman).

Participatory Sketching

Participatory research uses visuals tools such as photographs, maps, sketches can

"provide rich, descriptive insights into local worldviews and realities, serving as

instruments of both research and praxis" (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006, p. 25).

Additionally participatory studies validate alternative ways of knowing while reducing

the subjectivity of the researcher. By being participant driven, the role of the researcher is

of a facilitator; the sharing of narratives by the participant themselves privileges their

voice not the researcher's. In addition, alternative research tools serve marginalized

communities well as they may not be able to articulate their thoughts, feelings and

perceptions through mainstream research tools.

Such visual representations are useful in depicting spatial issues, identifying geographical features, locations of utilities or water sources, and land ownership and use among other issues. Community maps and sketches are particularly useful to reflect location of opinion leaders, change agents or households that have members suffering from certain diseases, alcoholism, or are sites of violence (Singhal, 2001). Sketches are an efficient way of gathering data, participants enjoy the process while it elicits information that may not emerge in other forms of data gathering. A total of 10 members from the Gallito community were invited to present their community to me in visual form. Participants were provided with paper and color pens and then asked to visually walk me through their community and map the various places of interest and importance. After the drawings were completed, participants narrated the story behind their pictures.

Participatory Skits

Western science has tended to value texts as opposed to other forms of knowing such as performances or visual representation, while participatory models of research in particular have made a distinct shift to privilege the participants' voices (Conquergood, 2002; Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). I had intended to conduct a participatory sketching activity with the women in Tambo. The group consisted of *promotoras* and women's net members, however after explaining the activity and its objectives, they suggested that we do skits instead. It was a hot afternoon and they were keen to be involved in something as a group, so we agreed to do group skits instead of individual sketches. Participants divided themselves into groups of five, and took 45 minutes to prepare a 10-15 minute skit. I only gave them broad guidelines stressing that the skits should reflect how their lives had been affected at the individual, family or community

level after their association with Minga. The groups dispersed around the Tambo

compound and then regrouped to perform the skits in front of the larger group. Each

group performed their skits which were scripted by them, the audience were engaged,

particularly in scenes where the women acted the role of the drunken husband or the

community leader who didn't think much of women. After each skit, the group was asked

to narrate why they chose the particular theme and the audience members would discuss

the theme. A total of three skits were performed involving 15 females (10 *promotora*s

and 5 members from the women's groups).

Audience Letters

Some 45 letters written to Minga by listeners of the radio program *Bienvenida*

Salud were qualitatively content analyzed. Some 5-6 letters were selected per year

starting from 1998 to 2005; for each year I tried to find at least one letter representing

each of the five thematic areas of the radio program. Copies of these letters were made

and then they were translated and transcribed into English. These letters have played a

key role in providing feedback and in shaping storylines and other aspects of Minga's

programming and hence offer an important source of data. Audience letters are

considered a "pure" from of audience feedback, they are in the audiences' own language

and speak to audience needs rather than to researcher posed questions (Singhal & Rogers,

2004). They are unsolicited feedback and an outward act representing how people are

internally affected or motivated to share their feelings and thoughts with the program.

Furthermore, they provide a glimpse into the writer's world reflecting how they are

affected by the mass media messages. Letters are a particularly important medium of

communication in areas that have limited access to telephones and other means of

communication (Law & Singhal, 1999).

Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are an important means of data for a researcher and contributes to the

richness of qualitative data. They are descriptive accounts of what occurred during the

day. The researcher takes down brief sentences, excerpts of conversations or mention

events that took place, people interacted with and other such daily occurrences.

Fieldnotes help keep track of observations and prevent the researcher from forgetting or

leaving out details which could add to the completeness of qualitative research (Morse &

Field, 1995). Particularly in the cases such as this where the researcher is in many ways a

"foreigner" to the people, observations and interactions beyond formal data collection

methods are important to gain a more holistic understanding of the community and the

people being studied. Also since the environment and the people were new to me it was

helpful to take down notes and keep track of all my observations and reflections. I was

able to re-visit my notes during the writing process to help embellish and at times make

sense of my findings.

The research design is shown on Table 3.2

Table 3.2

Research Design

Method	Number and Participants	Purpose	M	F	T
In-depth	4 with *Promotoras*	RQ1,	-	4	4
interviews	6 with Minga Team (Lima)	RQ 3	3	3	6
	5 with Minga Team (Iquitos)		1	4	5
	2 community members		1	1	2
Focus group	2 with Listeners' groups	RQ 1,	2	8	10
discussions	1 with Correspondents	RQ 2,	3	2	5
(FGD)	1 with men	RQ 3	7	-	7
	2 with *Promotoras*		-	10	10
	1 with women's network		-	5	5
Skits	3, with 5 participants each	RQ 3	-	15	15
Sketches	10 community members	RQ 2	6	4	10
Letters	45 (5-6 per year from 1998-2005)	RQ 2,	13	32	45
	from listeners	RQ 3			
Participant	160 hours in Lima, Iquitos, Tambo	RQ 1,	-	-	-
Observation	and in 2 communities	RQ 3			
	Total Participants		36	88	124

Note. M = Male, F = Female, T = Total.

Data Analysis

Social actions are comments on more than themselves…small facts speak to large issues.

Clifford Geertz, 1973, p. 23

Denzin (1998) refers to the process of converting field observations and findings into text for the reader as "the art of interpretation" (p. 313). The "researcher, as a writer, is a bricoleur. He or she fashions meaning and interpretation out of ongoing experience" (p. 315). Interpretation, thus, is a complex and reflexive process of storytelling, where the stories we tell fit in with the paradigms or perspectives we espouse (Denzin, 1998). The data interpretation and analysis was guided by four phases as put forth by Denzin: (1) sense making – where the researcher sieves through the data and decides what to include; (2) representation – where issues of voice and presenting the self and the other are addressed; (3) legitimation – where the author provides a rationale and credibility for their text; and finally, (4) desire – where the writer strives to create a text that is both engaging and inviting to the reader.

Applying Denzin's (1998) art of interpretation technique, the entire data set was transcribed and read multiple times prior to the coding process. On the third reading, emergent themes were manually coded into sub-themes. Sub-themes, which had considerable overlap, were collapsed into a single overarching theme. Margin notes on the field notes and transcripts and emergent themes were organized on a summary code sheet. Through initial "noting of patterns and themes" the data was analyzed further through the use of "clustering" and "metaphor making" – which involves conceptual and figurative grouping (Huberman & Miles, 1998, p. 187). I continued analyzing the data to

the point of saturation, where no new themes or sub-themes were emerging. Finally, several themes were clustered under each research question.

In addition, I referred to my fieldnotes and notes from the participant observation during the analysis. During the analysis and interpretation I treated individual and group responses as discourse, situating them within the context it occurred in and connecting it to the larger narrative account shared by the participant (Mishler, 1986).

While writing I used "thick descriptions," which add richness and depth to ethnographic studies in particular and generally speaking to other qualitative methods. Thick descriptions allow for the "multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed or knotted into one another" (Geertz, 1973, p.10) to be grasped fully by the observer and the reader. Further, Geertz calls for the cultural context to be incorporated into studies, which transforms "thin descriptions" into "thick ones." Geertz reminds us that anthropological or qualitative studies are second or third order interpretations. We can never experience what our subjects do and we inherently filter and process the information they provide through our own biases when we analyze data. Therefore, by providing thick descriptions in the writing of qualitative research we can convey the specific context that events and conversations occurred.

Reflexivity, the process of reflecting critically on ourselves as researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), is important because the multiple layers of my identity shape the research process. "Reflexivity […] demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). Reflexivity in research can produce richer and more thoughtful findings (Olesen, 2000).

Traditionally, high value is attached to objective knowledge, and the lack of objectivity in interpretive studies is often considered a potential weakness (Bostrum & Donohew, 1992; O'Hear, 1989). However, all measurement requires some amount of human inference and all observations require interpretation and are inherently theory-laden - we do not ever see bare facts but facts from a particular theoretical lens (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995; O'Hear, 1989; O'Keefe, 1975). As O'Hear (1989) states, "no observations can be made at all, without some initial predisposition to notice some things rather than others" (p. 24). Thus, all theoretical or observational choices are inherently subjective and my findings are influenced and shaped by my theoretical and methodological leanings.

Further, depending on the nature of your research, being value-free may or may not be relevant criteria. As a feminist researcher, I do not adopt the stance of a distance objective researcher but instead I approach the research as someone committed and passionate about the subject of the research and the research participants (Fine, 1988).

I acknowledge my active role in the research process and the influence of my lived realities over my research findings. As an outsider but not a *gringa* (the term used to describe Caucasian women in Latin America) placed me in a unique position. I agree with Harding (1987) that: the researcher is "not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" and that the "beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research"(p. 9).

As a feminist researcher, the issue of ethics spans far beyond informed consent and human subject protection. Feminist ethics involve issues such as sensitivity,

privileging voice, action, reflexivity and collaboration (Olesen, 2000). The question

of who has "control" of the research process and how much "voice" the participants have

are important ethical considerations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I tried to be mindful of

these during the data collection and analysis.

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing my orientation as a researcher, particularly

the influence of feminist and participatory frameworks on my research effort. I provided

an overview of the research setting and the ethnographic approach, along with a detailed

explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures. In the next chapter, I present

the findings from my research as I analyze the data and as I cluster the emergent themes

under the research questions posed.

Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter, I present a co-constructed narrative, weaving between the voices of participants and my own voice as a scholar. I draw upon group and individual interviews, participatory sketches, participatory skits, analysis of letters, and fieldnotes based on several hours of participant observations conducted over six weeks of intensive field work. In my analysis, I focus on common patterns and overlap in the data transcripts. In some cases, I have also included non-typical responses that serve to add an additional dimension and enrich the analysis. As much as possible, I have tried to convey the contexts in which the conversations occurred and represent the voice of the participants as best as I could. I organize this chapter as per the three broad research questions that were posed at the end of Chapter 2.

Enabling Communication for Social Change

Research Question 1 asked: *What communication for social change practices does Minga employ as they engage with community members and what are some of the distinguishing aspects of Minga's approach?*

The distinguishing aspects of Minga Perú's communication for social change approach in the Perúvian Amazon can be clustered along four broad themes:

First, the theme of "reversals" elaborates Minga's vision and understanding of communication and social change. Minga positions communication as central to development and social change, as opposed to communication being a support function used in an "ad-hoc" manner – a one-off campaign, an occasional training workshop or use of outreach workers to promote health.

Second, the theme of "relationships" which Minga consciously and purposely nurtures and builds relationships within its team and with the communities they work with. The internal communication practices are marked by a spirit of egalitarianism and foster open and horizontal communication.

Third, the theme "localized" which describes how emotions and feelings are respected and privileged in Minga's internal communication.

Finally, the theme "emergent and community driven" highlights the community member's involvement and role in shaping the various projects.

I hope that in answering the above research question I can shed light on the values and practices that make Minga a unique organization, worthy of study. In so doing, I hope to find answers to what initially sparked my curiosity about Minga.

Reversals: Re-centering Communication and Community

It is very hard to define development for our region when for years those with power and money have been shaping what we understand by development. We in Minga are constantly questioning and re-defining what development means for our region. We don't want to try implementing rapid development initiatives that do not take into account the existing knowledge in the Amazonian region and are designed by experts who are exogenous to the culture. We don't want to do this type of development….The access points [to development] are money and technical knowledge and people are divided between those who know and those who do not know. Those who know define the path to development and those that do not know follow. Development is measured by the number of people or

beneficiaries or the geographical space reached, most often quantitatively and not qualitatively.

We see development differently. We at Minga work for social change and, we see development as social change. People are central in our work and they tell us what their needs are and how to find solutions for their own needs. They are the center of our initiatives. We first listen and then we speak. If you don't get to know the people and their realities you cannot do anything. They also need to get to know us. Minga is not only an organization, we are a group of people. In my understanding, communication is at the heart of development and Minga has taught me over these years how essential communication is in the process of social change. Unlike other models where money and technical assistant are the most important aspects, for us it is communication.

Luis González, Co-Founder Minga Perú

As apparent from the above quote[5], Minga Perú is an organization that believes in the role of communication for social change. The founders, the husband-wife team of Eliana Elías and Luis González, view communication for social change as the process that focuses on changing unequal power relationships into ones that are more just (personal conversation, July 7, 2005). Further, the Minga team understands development as being communicative, that is, development and social change occur through communicative experiences and processes. According to Eliana, because exclusion and discrimination occur through communicative acts, Minga chooses to work toward social justice and change using communication as a key resource. Communication is viewed as an essential

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[5] All quotes in this study are cited from the orginal data transcripts, unless specified otherwise.

and important part of every human being, family, community and region and its role

is emphasized to create possibilities for more equitable relationships. In her own words:

> We see that most of exclusion, discrimination, injustice, violence, and inequities
> are expressed communicatively. When your voice is not represented, when the
> way you speak is not considered appropriate in public places, when the way you
> dress in not considered good enough, then there is always someone who teaches
> you how to look, what to wear and how to behave, how to eat, what to write, how
> to write, what to study, and what work to do; someone is always telling you what
> your place is in society. You are taught all those things through communication.
> Someone teaches you or tells you or shows you or represents you or pictures you.
> These are all messages and communicative acts. We have to start working from
> these acts of communication to rebuild all these inequitable relationships of
> power.

Therefore, Minga endeavors to create "communicative spaces" where people are able to

express themselves in multiple ways. Though Minga's social change initiatives are broad,

including activities such as training women to produce and market handicrafts, poultry

and fish farming, teaching them how to advocate for their rights through appeals to the

local government, communication is emphasized as the key catalyst of change.

Communication is thus understood not as a peripheral sector of development, but a

critical component that enables change. Elías emphasized that far too often

communication is viewed as the "olive in the martini," something that adds flavor, color,

and panache, but is not the essence. For Minga, communication is not just a tool or one

aspect of development but is the core ingredient. For instance, Minga's radio program,

Bienvenida Salud creates a space for voicing concerns and issues that affect indigenous communities whose points-of-view have otherwise been overlooked, silenced, or rejected. Listeners write in regularly to the program as a means of providing continuous audience feedback and more importantly provide inputs for subsequent programs. The scripts are usually derived from the life stories, conflicts, and dilemmas that are expressed in these letters.

At the community level, Minga's *promotoras* serve as peer facilitators and informal community spokeswomen. Through dialogue, negotiation and community participation these previously "passive" women have become active voices and sparkplugs of change in the community. The training sessions for *promotoras* are viewed as dialogic communicative spaces where women learn and exchange new skills and knowledge while sharing stories about their lives and connecting with other women as friends and colleagues. After completing their training, usually held at Minga's Tambo training center near the town of Nauta, *Promotoras* return to their communities and are required to hold a community meeting where they share what they learn with the local men and women, thus creating another site for community level exchange, dialogue and networking. Luis articulately summed Minga's vision of communication and social change:

> *Bienvenida Salud* is more than a radio program, it is a communicational space. Similarly a workshop of *promotoras comunitarias* in the Tambo is more than information and training, it is communication. The workshops provide communicational spaces. Tambo is the women's space to reach people like María and Kiké [Minga's resource persons and facilitators] but also other women. It is a

place where they can connect with other women who are going through

similar life experiences. We understand communication as the process of creating

communicational spaces, where people can connect with one another to identify

their needs and look for strategies to solve them. These spaces help women feel

that they are not alone and instead a part of a *colectividad* [community]. If the aim

of development is to make possible a better quality of life, then communication

creates the spaces where people, collectively, find answers and solutions to their

problems.

Minga was started with the vision to do things differently in order for programs to

resonate with people's real needs, thus the emphasis is on engaging community and

communication as central elements in development. Elías had seen how messages created

in Lima, during the cholera epidemic of the early 1990s, failed to engage the community.

The messages were culturally off-the-mark; the Amazonian people found them irrelevant

and boring. She was determined to move away from the centralized system and create

messages that not only took into consideration the realities of people living in the

Amazonian riverine communities, but actually emerged from their lived realities. Having

traveled and worked extensively in the region, Elías had noticed how radios were a very

precious resource; homes without doors with children who barely wore any clothes would

have a cloth-draped radio displayed in the corner. Men in the communities would joke

about whom they loved more – their wife or their radio. So radio seemed like a natural

channel to tap. Convinced about the need for communication to be locally grounded and

relevant, the founders put together a team of facilitators from the Amazon who were

conversant with the local Amazonian culture, beliefs, and sensitivities.

Often described by the Minga team as the "*corazón*" (heart), the starting point

and core of Minga's outreach efforts in the Amazonia was the radio program *Bienvenida*

Salud. It is a program that is directed from the point of view of the audience. Everly

Egoavil, *Bienvenida Salud* coordinator, explained that the program "is directed by

communities for communities ….The audience like *Bienvenida Salud* because they feel

that we [the program and its attributes] are close to them….We speak like them and our

messages are simple so that they can understand." Everly added that while creating the

program they constantly ask themselves "whether or not the audience member would

understand [the message] and if it would be useful for them." The radio program

combines educational messages in an easy-to-access entertaining format ensuring that

audience members are engaged. María Isabel, regional coordinator of Minga, rightly

pointed out the impetus and inspiration for all their various projects of Minga are the

community members themselves: "we talk among us about how what fuels our work here

is our trips to the communities, they are the gasoline (*gasolina*) for what we do. This is

what makes us different."

Another interesting principle that undergirded Minga's initial work was their

inherent faith in the community's strength and native capacities. Eliana recounts:

> The thing about Minga is that we were not so focused on people's needs but
>
> instead on their potentials. We kept asking what do we have to work with? When
>
> you work in an area which is so full of needs – as in the communities there is no
>
> potable water, no electricity, no healthcare and no so many things – you need to
>
> focus on what they have, not what they don't have. They have an organized
>
> community, very brave women, rich previous knowledge. So we had to start

building from that. We never saw them as needy people, but as people full of potential.

Indigenous communities are conscious of their marginal status in the Perúvian context and feel that their cultural practices, customs and dialects are looked down upon by other groups within Perú. However, Minga was begun with a commitment to focus and privilege indigenous Amazonian communities. As Eliana emphasized: "We invest in the community and have a commitment to the community. We respect the structures and systems within the community." Therefore valuing local customs and knowledge is inherently a part of Minga's agenda. The rich history and cultural identities of different indigenous groups are portrayed on the show, including, for instance, a discussion of local foods and beverages. Training sessions for *promotoras* also focus on re-claiming the lost heritage of the Amazon.

Everly narrated the following incident which demonstrates how indigenous people are reticent to talk about their native culture, or to even speak their language, and emphasized how Minga strives to revalue indigenous cultures:

Once I wanted to interview a *Cocama* person [for the radio program]. I went and asked who spoke *Cocama*, so they directed me to a lady. I went to her with my tape recorder and she didn't want to talk in *Cocama* so she told me she didn't speak it. She said she only spoke Spanish. So I said 'Señora, you should be very proud to be speaking two languages, why don't you want to speak your own language.' I told her I wanted to send her community a greeting in her language on my program. Then she told me that when she spoke *Cocama* people would laugh at her. I had to convince her that nobody would laugh at her, I told her she

was better off than me because she spoke more languages, I spoke only one.

Finally I convinced her and she said the greetings in *Cocama* and allowed me to

tape her voice. After this incident I made an entire program about this issue. We

talked about why we don't have to feel less in front of other people if we are from

an indigenous community.

Indigenous knowledge is also valued and tapped purposively in Minga's income

generation projects. Initially when the organizers decided to train the women in an

income generating skill, they asked the women what skill they would like to learn and the

women responded saying they wanted to learn crocheting and knitting. People in these

communities are very good at making things with leaves and natural fibers so they took

to needlework quite naturally. Luis González, Co-founder of Minga, accounted for their

needlework skills by pointing to their native acumen in weaving fishing nets. Though

they had never done crochet or knitting before, they could draw upon their native

knowledge and skill base. Minga promoted handicrafts as they believed that through

these art forms they could "liberate their creativity and find a channel to express

themselves." Women were able to make things for their families and could sell their

products such as clothes, bags, baskets, fans, jewelry and other artifacts. In addition,

through handicrafts women were able to connect with other women thus merging

materiality, creativity and camaraderie.

Minga's approach values and builds on local knowledge that already exists in

communities. As Luis put it: "It [referring to "previous knowledge"] is not always perfect

but we want to build on it. We see people as knowing useful things not as empty vessels."

The team explained that they don't look just at the future and the results, but begin by

looking behind and fully grasping the person's or the community's background and situation. So during training, *promotoras* are asked to first share their life stories and then discuss what they already know. A training on reproductive health, for instance, would begin with María showing the participants the models of the reproductive organs and then asking the group what they colloquially called the organs. After some initial hesitation women would share an array of terms that they used to refer to the male organ and María would then tell them the biological term after reiterating that it is "something they have known and previously called by several names." These data reinforce how Minga's work is deeply steeped into Freirean thought – drawing on people's wisdom and knowledge as a starting point for learning new ideas.

Similarly, the women are told to tell the trainers about what methods of birth control they know or use, including natural, traditional herbal formulas and hormonal methods. As disclosure begets more disclosure, a sound indigenous information base about birth control methods is built upon and clarified. In this manner women are encouraged to value the local or indigenous knowledge that already exists among them and the information provided by Minga is seen as adding to what people inherently or instinctively know.

Another distinctive aspect of Minga is that it is both community driven and women led. Luis pointed out how other organizations with similar budgets tend to hire experts who are men, often city-bred (from Lima) or foreign experts. However, Minga sees the value of employing women from the Amazon. Other than three male members,

Luis, Kiké and Rafael[6] the organization is run by women. Further the *promotoras* and the women's networks spearhead community projects, thus women are the community level leaders and entrepreneurs. Luis asserted: "the fact that Minga is led by Amazonian women - such as María and Everly - is itself a way of challenging the system" and these women have had to work hard to change people's perceptions about them and the work they do. Initially, people would look at them as women with a loose character because they traveled alone and accompanied American visitors on community visits but with time they have begun to be recognized as "very respectable and respected women professionals." Presently when the team members independently handle problems or are contacted directed by other organizations, the founders feel proud that they have at long last succeeded in making other's accept "*Loretanos* [the women of the Department of Loreto] as leaders."

At the community level, Minga's long term goal is for *promotoras* to take on the responsibility to run local projects so that Minga can move their attention to other communities. Minga focuses on building capacities at all levels and just as the radio production team have become proficient in producing the program without supervision from Lima, the organization expects the *promotoras* to independently lead community development and sustainable income generation projects. According to Luis:

> Our institutional vision is that the power of knowledge is transferred to the technicians [i.e. *promotoras* trained in the technical aspects of poultry and fish farming] and to the women [in the community]. We know that Kiké [Minga's trainer and technical resource person] is important but we want that he and us can

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[6] Luis González, Co-founder of Minga, Enrique Agnini (Kiké), Minga's coordinator for income generation projects, and Rafael Elias, Minga's business for social change coordinator.

eventually be replaced by the people themselves. We wish that in the long run

we are not needed and people can manage on their own….We don't want to be

indispensable. If we want to grow we will need to hire more and more people, but

we don't want to do that, we don't want to be full of engineers and other staff, we

want the women to grow and take charge.

In sum, this theme illustrates how Minga endeavors to put people and communities at the

heart of their work in the Peruvian Amazon. Minga's vision is grounded in the belief that

sustainable development privileges community ownership, and in doing so facilitators

and technical experts need to provide space and opportunity for community members to

own the program over a period of time.

Relationships: Equal and Caring

I tell my colleagues that I am the regional coordinator but I don't want you to see

me as an authority. My title says I am the coordinator and I co-ordinate but I am

not Señora, I am Mari for all of you. I am a friend of yours and please don't

hesitate to come and talk to me. I am open to talk to you about anything.

María Isabel, Regional Coordinator, Minga Perú

As an organization committed to promoting just and equitable relations, Minga's

founders inculcate a culture of mutual respect and non-hierarchy within the organization.

Initially it was difficult for the team members to break out of the entrenched system of

hierarchy and to see themselves as equals with important responsibilities. The working

relationships had to be built and developed from day one; the new hires were asked to not

call the founders Señor and Señora, recalled Elías. Everly shared how initially they would

send every script of *Bienvenida Salud* from Iquitos to Lima for Eliana's approval, but

now the local team decides the content, format, and production attributes of the

program. Similarly, María Isabel (as quoted earlier) the regional coordinator for Minga

Perú stressed how she wanted her colleagues to see her as an equal and not their superior

and insisted that the team called her by her first name.

Aroma, a trainer and educator from Lima who has joined Minga's team recently

shared that she couldn't help noticing how Minga as an organization encouraged its team

members to "grow." Aroma pointed out how Emira who became a *promotora* at age 13 is

now a mature 20 year old working as part of the production team for *Bienvenida Salud*.

Aroma also emphasized how both Everly and María in the Iquitos office have developed

their sense of confidence and are now increasingly taking on more responsibility. Eliana

talked of Minga as an organization that is open to change, growth, and learning. Another

case in point is Rosbita who moved to the city of Iquitos in 2003 from the nearby riverine

community of Gallito. She was a youth correspondent[7] in her community but when

circumstances forced her family to migrate to Iquitos city she decided to become a

domestic worker in order to support her family. Minga offered to help out and pay her a

stipend in lieu of her doing some office work. Rosbita recounted how frightened she was

when she joined the organization. Laughing as she remembered her own apprehensions,

Rosbita shared how she felt incapable of doing any office work and even feared the

computer mouse. Two years later, in 2005, Rosbita was a transformed person.

When I met her, I learned that she browses the Internet, knows how to use word-

processing, runs errands such as depositing or withdrawing money in the bank, organizes

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[7] In order to ensure that adolescent issues were included in *Bienvenida Salud,* Minga created a network of adolescents in several communities. These correspondents write to the program regularly and have been trained on various aspects of Minga's work including radio script writing and conducting interviews. They provide a local youth support base for the program and promote it among the youth in the communities.

the letters written by the audience members, and occasionally writes scripts and lends

her voice to *Bienvenida Salud* when needed.

When I visited Rosbita's riverine community in Gallito for fieldwork, she was in-

charge of the visit and managed all logistics including arrangements for our board, lodge,

and boat journeys. In addition she served as a key informant and local facilitator. As an

"insider," Rosbita connected me with several research participants. On the first day she

helped translate the interviews and was not shy of posing some questions on her own. She

astutely observed the manner in which we conducted the interviews over the first and

second days. Noticing her enthusiasm, on the third day, I briefed her and shared the

Spanish version of the question guide and asked her to facilitate the focus group

discussion. With little prompting from the translator and I, Rosbita conducted the

interview with poise and aplomb, probing respondents' when appropriate (Fieldnotes). I

told her before leaving that she now could conduct focus groups for Minga and she

laughed and told me that her next goal was "to learn how to speak English!"

I had a long, fruitful discussion with Everly about how she and her team created

an episode of *Bienvenida Salud*, and how they used audience letters. Additionally, I was

fortunate to have an opportunity to see how the team functioned in an egalitarian

environment.They were open to suggestions from one another and appreciated each

others contributions toward the program. Everly stated:

> We try to figure out which letter will be important for the next episode and we all
>
> decide. It could be Emira, Rosbita and/or me. This is what makes us different
>
> from other institutions where they have very clear roles and they have a boss who
>
> decides and tells people what to do and the other employees do not always get a

chance [to decide]. Here in Minga, even the lady who cleans the office can get

opportunities to improve her life if she wants. For us we don't have a boss, we try

to let everybody be equal and maintain an equal relationship among us. We

respect everybody's opinions equally. For instance, if I write a script it doesn't

mean that the script is good and cannot be changed. María can read it and make

suggestions. I could also share it with Rosbita, Emira, Eliana or Luis and get

suggestions to improve it. When others read and review the scripts they may have

other ideas and give suggestions to make it better.

As I observed the radio recording sessions I noticed that suggestions for script

enhancement or dialogue delivery were welcomed and the group felt free to tell each

other if they didn't like how a certain part was done. The younger girls, Rosbita and

Emira, who were relatively new to the production aspects were comfortable giving

suggestions or asking Everly or Doña Rosita (who is in her eighties) to re-record a

segment (Fieldnotes). Everly stated: "before we wanted a Director [for the program] who

would take charge, but we don't have a director…. we are now all Directors –Doña

Rosita, me, Emira and Rosbita."

This sense of mutual respect and equality was apparent in Minga's relationship

with researchers such as I or funding agencies. For example, at the first Latin American

conference on Entertainment-Education and social change in Morelia, Mexico in 2005;

an Ohio University team including a senior faculty member and three graduate students

presented a panel on Minga Perú along with representatives from Minga. The Minga

group comprised Eliana Elías and Everly Egoavil. Upon their return from Morelia, Eliana

and Everly shared the conference highlights with the rest of the Minga team. In this

meeting, Everly emphasized that the fact that she, who had never been to a university, was on a panel presenting with a Professor of communication, three graduate students, and the founder of Minga, was in itself an example of social change (E. Elías, personal communication, November 7, 2005). This conference was Everly's first overseas visit and demonstrates the non-hierarchical spirit that Minga espouses, where team members are given opportunities to grow and thrive.

Several other incidents emphasized the organization's deep belief in equity. For instance, the initial interview protocol for the present research read "interviews with Minga officials and field staff," and Elías suggested changing it to "interviews with Minga team." Similarly when visiting the Tambo training center, it is customary for everyone including the team, trainers, volunteers and visitors to live together in the two residence areas (one for men and one for women) which comprises a large dormitory like room with several bunk beds. While I visited Tambo, there were 15 women from the communities with several children, two Minga team members, several youth volunteers from the United States, and I living together in the women's dormitory. We ate our meals together and took turns to use the two latrines and washing areas. There was no running water in Tambo and the only "difference" between the community women and the "outsiders" was that we were not brave enough to venture down to the river after dark or in the dusk to bathe in the river stream. These women on the other hand would stroll together to the river and take leisurely baths. One could hear the chatter and the laughter coming from the river bank; the act of bathing together appeared to be a ritual that the women enjoyed. The team explained that when they went to bathe by the river these

women would talk about their lives and their joys and struggles; it was a time to bond

and connect, more than an act of physical cleansing (Fieldnotes).

Conversations with the Minga team and community members also suggested that

"emotionality" – considering people's emotions and feelings – is a guiding ethic in

Minga's work. Closely linked to emotionality is the broader belief that human

interactions boil down to the quality of relationships. The Minga team believes in the

"pedagogia de affecto" (pedagogy of affection) and connotes an attention to honoring

emotions, sensitivity and feelings. Eliana stated:

> Feelings are central to our work. We speak about them, we don't prioritize
>
> objectivity. There is a subjective reality that needs to be respected and needs to
>
> have the same value as the objective reality. Objectivity is important because it
>
> gives you a sense of reality but the other levels of reality are also important, we
>
> speak about it and care about it that is why we invest in it. A lot of time, energy
>
> and money is spent on phone calls, visits and joint decision making as we respect
>
> feelings and build relationships.

Overall, Minga "feels" for the people they work with -- both their team and the

community members. Minga endeavors to understand and empathize with the

community and in turn the community feels connected to the Minga team. As Luis

emphasized:

> We try to create spaces -- the necessary conditions where feelings, emotions, and
>
> personal needs are recognized in addition to health and economic needs. These
>
> are things that are often ignored in other development models. When you are so

focused on measuring impact and economic indicators it seems improper to

mention emotions and feelings.

Minga believes in "programming with care" and their internal and external interactions

are relationship-centered. Luis continued:

> Firstly, we pay attention to feelings within our team. We value the relationships
>
> among our team members. Since our inception, this has marked our institutional
>
> style. Feelings and emotions have their own place in our work. Even in the letters
>
> we receive, we see how our relationship with our audience is changing. Though
>
> they are talking about health issues, the letters have a relational context and they
>
> display a personal connection between people and the *Bienvenida Salud* team.

The audience letters are not formal letters written to an institution or institutional

members; they reflect a warm personal tone and a sense of connection between the writer

and the receiver. Consider these excerpts from letters written by community members' to

the *Bienvenida Salud* team:

> To: Señorita Everly,
>
> Esteemed and recognized friend, I hope that upon receiving this small letter you
>
> are in perfect health especially you and your family. First, even though I do not
>
> know you other than through this letter, I am sending you a thousand
>
> congratulations for the work that you have done with your program *Bienvenida*
>
> *Salud* ("Welcome to Health"). I hope the moment will come when we
>
> will be able to meet each other in person. I would like to tell you that I received
>
> your letter in which you said that you and your family were all in good health, and
>
> I received your card Señorita Everly on Wednesday, July 4th. It was a great

pleasure and at the same time a surprise that we have begun corresponding

and also with Señor Enrique (Kiké)….May God bless you and the program –

goodbye my friend.

Rosa Aydi Murayari Cahuamari, 23 years old, Lower Amazon.

Letters with such a personal tone are regularly received by Minga and underscore the

relational aspect of Minga's interaction with the communities and listeners in particular.

Consider this excerpt, written in September 1999 by Jessica Gutierrez Murayari, that is

both relational and amicable:

Señorita Everly Egoavil,

Dear friend I am writing to you to say a respectful hello. I hope that you find

yourself in good health with your little girl and also close to your work friends so

that you can continue to move ahead slowly in your work.

Another letter by Lilia Tamani Rios, a resident of Santa Cruz Community, written in July

2001, reinforces the relational and personal connection between the listeners and the

Minga Team:

Señora Eliana Elías, Executive Director of Minga Perú.

By way of this letter, I send you my most sincere greetings and congratulations

and hope that you are in good health along with your husband, your son and the

entire team (of Minga). Señora Eliana, I would like to tell you what has been

going on in my community. Two young men who were 16 years old tried to rape

two girls in our community and it has become a danger for both young men and

women. For this reason, I, the mother of six children, three boys and three girls, it

is of great concern and I ask earnestly Mrs. Executive Director of the non-

governmental organization "Minga Perú," that one or two of your professional

representatives come and give a talk about this, which is dirtying my community.

I know that your organization is non-profit and gives assistance to those dealing

with any kind of violence throughout our homeland. Thank you for your

continuous work in spreading the knowledge of human rights to women, young

people, teachers, children and other social actors and bringing about changes in

attitude with respect to human rights. I'll say goodbye until another time, hoping

to talk about this teaching in our community. I send a greeting to the entire team

of Minga Perú and wish you success in your professional career.

Initially the Minga team was heavily focused on the organizational aspects for the

workshops, including creating and following a certain syllabus and agenda, and soon they

realized that they were paying far too much attention to content issues and overlooking

the importance of "feelings" between the team and the *promotoras,* and also among the

promotoras. Eliana recalled:

We then decided to spend time and resources to build on those spaces of exchange

and affection. The relationship was not one of just a trainer and trainee, but also

two people, concerned about similar things and two women. These relationships

manifested themselves during meals and late at night. The most important

moments were when people talked late at night after eating and chatted from

inside their mosquito nets. Inside those mosquito nets you could hear the

promotoras joke, laugh, and cry.

In my fieldwork, several *promotoras* told me that they feel that Minga cares (*cariño*) for

them and they appeared to have formed personal relationships with team members.

Several children in the Amazon are now named after Minga team members. For instance, one *promotora* introduced us to her daughter Everly Eliana -- named after the coordinator of the radio program and executive director, respectively. I also heard about children who were named Luis (after the co-founder) and Kiké, Minga's trainer and technical resource person.

Another telling incident occurred when I visited the riverine community of Santa Cruz and conducted a focus group discussion with a group of men. They expressed unhappiness that they had not been informed about my visit ahead of time, and felt that visitors routinely arrived in their community without prior intimation. While their complaints had a gender-power angle (an issue I discuss later), these men expressed their concerns openly and asked me to convey them to Minga. Though they were meeting me for the first time, they were forthright. Reflecting over my fieldnotes, I felt it was heartening that the men of Santa Cruz did not just present a glossy picture and felt enough *cariño* for Minga to convey their feelings, even if they were not positive.

The close bond among the Minga team members and between them and the community is an important priority for Minga. While explaining his responsibilities within the organization Luis González said that one of his core duties is to look after the team's well-being: "My work is to understand the team's needs and take their suggestions. In general, I look after the team and our various projects so you can say I take care of their professional and personal interests." Similarly, Everly described her working relationship with other Minga colleagues as being "very good, we treat each other well and help each other."

While fully aware of their individual work responsibilities, Minga team members find ways to do things for each other. For instance, Everly usually takes the recorded *Bienvenida Salud* program to the radio station for broadcast, but in case she is held up at home or one of her children falls sick, Cesar (who is in-charge of the recording and editing) on his own initiative delivers the CD to the radio station without waiting for Everly to ask him to do so. There is also a high level of flexibility in what they do, which provides team members an opportunity to appreciate each other's responsibilities. María Isabel, the regional coordinator pointed out that Minga team members are never shy of stepping into another's shoes when the need arises. So if Everly has laryngitis, and her voice is hoarse and croaky, María will step in to lend her voice to the opening and closing announcements. If a certain community or project requires any of the team member's to make a field visit at short notice, there are several volunteers.

María, also described their internal communication as being open, honest and "horizontal":

> We refer to each other by our first names. If any of us have a need or a problem and we want to speak to Luis or Eliana about it we can just call them and speak about it. There is no rule about how we should reach them. There is no hierarchy and we have a horizontal relationship between us all.

Kiké noted that the team communicates among themselves and are transparent about their work. He emphasized that they work as a team like a family would:

> The truth is that the team here is a family. Most of the time we are together and we try to achieve this as much as we can. Whenever I come back from the riverine communities, I propose that we have a meeting so that we in the team can

share and have all the information.We want all of us to know what each other
is doing….We try to ensure that our communication is fluid….I am out of Iquitos
very often, but I call the office routinely to provide updates on the project. Mari[a]
takes down the information and the data. I don't have to be here in the office all
the time as long as I can call Mari and keep her up to date. We talk to each other a
lot and work as a family.

The radio production team for *Bienvenida Salud* too shares a collegial relationship. While observing some recording sessions, I instantly noticed the light and friendly work atmosphere. The team members often joked amongst themselves and noted that they needed to exercise caution as sometimes the jokes (including the off-colored ones or ones with sexual innuendo) got recorded and needed to be deleted before the CD was delivered to the radio station. Everly and Emira recalled the afternoon when they finished recording the program and said goodbye to the audience and then Everly made fun of Cesar and called him "gay" thinking the recording was over. Cesar on the other hand thought the joke was part of the "informalness" of the program and included it in the final edit.

Minga's caring approach extends to the radio program as well, according to Luis González, *Bienvenida Salud* is not just a program but an affectionate way in which Minga interacts with people. Everly explained that they consider the audience members' emotions and feelings when designing messages. She elaborated: "Each message we produce we think whether or not the other person [audience] would understand it and if it would be useful to them. We consider how the person will feel when they hear the message."

Further, the Minga team from Iquitos frequently makes home visits to audience communities, often staying the night as may be warranted. These visits occurred initially as a response to the increased violence by men toward the women *promotoras* after they returned from workshops. Some husbands became suspicious of their wives when they would go for week-long training sessions. The team member would live with the family to explain to them what their wives were doing at the Tambo, including its importance for their children, family, and community. The home visits helped convey to the men that their wives were learning useful and important things at the workshops. Besides reducing incidence of domestic violence, these visits created close relationships between the Minga team members and the *promotora's* family. By spending time and living under the same roof with Minga team members, families' trust in Minga grew. Kiké, Minga's trainer on agro-forestry projects, fish farms, and the like, recalled that men were initially suspicious but after he visited them at home and stayed with the family, the relationship became closer. As they ate meals together, and bathed and swam together in the river, this suspicion was gradually "washed" off.

The Minga team routinely travels to the riverine communities to meet with the community and personally promote the radio program. When team members visit the communities, they are welcomed with fanfare. To see the radio program's host and characters in flesh and blood is a treat. According to Everly, it is very important for the characters from the program to visit riverine communities. It builds a special relationship between that community and the radio program. Everly recalled how once when she was in the community of San Pablo (near the Brazilian border), she met a lot of men who regularly listened to *Bienvenida Salud*. They were happy to see Everly and treated her

well. When she asked them about specific messages in specific episodes, she was amazed that they were able to remember the minutest details. One of the men told Everly that he feels "ill" if his radio did not work and if he could not tune in to his favorite program. Clearly the men of San Pablo had formed an intimate relationship with both the program and its characters.

In sum, this theme captures the extent to which the Minga team engages and extends themselves to build relationships with the *promotoras* and the community members. Minga takes peoples' emotions and feelings into account while interacting with them. The organization also ensures that the team and the community both forge strong ties with one another, through regular visits. During these home visits, the Minga team members stay with the *promotoras*' families to explain to the men the important work their wives/partners are engaged in.

Localized: Real and Relevant

The entire production team of *Bienvenida Salud* is from the [Amazonia] region…. we are all from here and know the region. The messages and programs are produced and created here. All our messages are real, they are not invented, we don't make them up, they are real problems. We try to be as realistic as possible. It's not just the messages, even the [jungle and river] sounds – we try to reproduce the environment as best as we can.

Everly Egoavil, Co-ordinator *Bienvenida Salud*

Minga's co-founders Luis González and Eliana Elías have traveled and lived for extrended periods in various regions of the Perúvian Amazon and pay careful attention to respecting the "local." Luis, who was born in Argentina and raised there, shared with me

how he, first-hand, lived and experienced life in the Amazon: "It was important for me to get to know another reality -- their reality and to identify with peoples' struggles and eventually to feel accepted as part of the community."

Listeners' of the radio program, *Bienvenida Salud* particularly comment on how their reality and lived circumstances are well reflected in the program. For instance, in a fairly typical letter written in December, 1998, Chota Vasquez writes: "Señorita Rebecca [a previous team member], your program is very in tune with the community and we learn a great deal of things." Similarly, in a letter written in December 2001, Margarita, a *promotora* from the riverine community of Elmer Pacaya, wrote:

> I would like to tell you Miss Everly that I love listening to the program
> *Bienvenida Salud*, because outside of what I learn in training sessions, listening to
> the program helps me learn more. It especially helps me talk to people about
> domestic violence, pregnancy, self-esteem, and family planning. We listen to the
> program because it represents our real life.

The listeners also emphasize their connections -- at a personal level -- with the characters of *Bienvenida Salud's* socio drama. A male listener from the Santa Cruz riverine community noted:

> They do the program as if it is real life [*la vida real*], you know just like how we
> are living here. For instance, when a man comes home and goes to hit his wife
> and the children scream [he shudders] and are afraid. We can hear all this on the
> program – the only problem is that we can't see the characters like in a movie, but
> it is so real.

Another man from the same community agreed to what his friend had said and added that violence was a very sad part of their lived reality and that it bothered him. Listening to what these two men said, another gentleman commented that *Bienvenida Salud* emotionally moved him. He cautiously added: "If I were a violent person I wouldn't feel like hitting anymore (other men laugh at his comment). We really feel very bad and guilty when we hear it." Another listener, Judith, shared how she used to be constantly fighting with her husband and he would yell at her and ask her to switch off the radio when she was listening to the program. Then, one day her husband heard one of the episodes on domestic violence, and felt the program was speaking directly to him and portraying what was going on in their house. Judith recalled:

> He said it hurt his heart when the children on the program would cry when the father was hitting the mother. It hurt his heart so much to see what was happening in his own house being re-enacted on the radio. You know the children yelling and crying while the parents fought.

The popularity of the radio program can be explained in large part to its accurate and real life portrayal of life in the Amazon riverine communities. As Everly stated: "One of the reasons for the success of the program is that it deals with our lives in Loreto" and that "you need to know about life here to talk about it and we know a lot about life here and the customs in the community." The program is thus produced by a group of people who belong to communities and this adds to the authentic flavor of the program. For instance when we asked Emira if it was difficult to write scripts for *Bienvenida Salud*, she smiled and told us that "it was very easy". All she had to do was think back about her own life in her community, and the ink would begin to flow.

When goaded to recall a favorite episode, the following detailed account from

a listener in the riverine community of San Antonio reiterated how *Bienvenida Salud*

engages with its listeners through its authentic portrayal of community life:

> I liked one episode where they explained how a baby was born and about family
>
> planning options. [In the socio drama] there was a girl who was about to give
>
> birth and she was in labor [imitates the moaning]. Some one goes to the health
>
> post to ask for help and we hear the footsteps of him running [imitates the sound
>
> of someone running]. Then the husband goes and knocks on the door and calls
>
> Pashuca [a character on the radio program] to help deliver his baby (continues to
>
> repeat the sound of the woman moaning in labor and alternates it with the sound
>
> of the husband knocking) and requests her to come and help. Pashuca asks for
>
> herbal plants to help the woman in labor. The delivery goes off well and the baby
>
> is fine. The stories they tell are real and are things that happen in the community.
>
> This happens to us when we deliver babies. We do not have attendants and need
>
> to go and seek help from the Pashucas of our community.

Minga regularly receives feedback from community members vouching that the program

provided them not only useful information but also knowledge that could be lifesaving.

Given the physical isolation of riverine communities and their lack of ready access to

health information and services, *Bienvenida Salud* serves an important function. Everly

shared:

> There have been many cases where listeners have told us that through listening to
>
> the radio, we have saved a life. There was a couple where the husband was very
>
> sick and the wife prepared oral rehydration solution for her husband because she

remembered there was a program about it on *Bienvenida Salud*. So she
prepared it and gave it to her husband and he got better. She told us that 'through
listening to the radio I have saved my husband's life.

According to Everly, *Bienvenida Salud* is well accepted by audiences in Amazonia
because it strives incessantly to address real local concerns. Mellita Chota, a listener
agreed:

I feel the program is directed to us specifically, because it gives us the training
and orientation we need. We get together and listen and hear things that apply to
our community. Violence is something that happens a lot in our communities;
young girls are getting pregnant very early. Many girls get pregnant very young, it
is very good for girls to listen to the program.

Practicing birth control and having fewer children appeared to be an important concern
for women, especially mothers, in riverine communities. In my fieldwork, I encountered
several listeners who personally told me that the program had helped them plan their
families and prevent unwanted pregnancies. Early pregnancies among young girls is a
common problem and I spoke with mothers who encouraged their daughters to listen to
Bienvenida Salud hoping that the information would prevent them from getting pregnant.
One mother whose daughter got pregnant when she was very young was listening to an
episode on early pregnancy and found it highly very relevant. She then called her second
daughter (a teenager), pointed to the radio receiver on the shelf and said "listen to what
they are saying."

As has been noted previously, family violence is a great concern in the riverine
communities, including the ones I visited. Hilda a listener felt that *Bienvenida Salud* is

popular in the region because "they talk about violence and there is a lot of violence

in the jungle." Several listeners noted that the radio program coupled with the *promotoras*

workshops and community conversations had decreased incidents of family violence

(discussed in greater detail later). A woman who had left a sick child at home to speak

with me narrated how Minga's programs had made life more harmonious for her and her

family:

> Before I was very bad with my children and there was so much violence between
>
> my spouse and me. With the orientation [referring to the information provided by
>
> the radio program] things began to change and the violence between my spouse
>
> and children has passed. We were fighting a lot and very badly. No longer.

Violence was a major problem in these communities and hence merited attention and

action. As part of the research methodology, I included three participatory skits that were

performed and scripted by *promotoras* and community members. I had intended to

conduct participatory sketches but the women decided to do skits at their own behest. The

following story line reflects how community members face violence as part of their daily

lives:

> Based on a familiar scenario and one lived by some *promotoras* themselves, the
>
> skit portrayed a wife cooking at home when her husband came home drunk. Her
>
> daughter was petrified and the wife was worried that her husband had come home
>
> with no food for the family. She was hoping he would bring home something to
>
> add to their dinner. The girl went up to the father to see if he has brought any food
>
> and saw that he had nothing. Observing this, the wife asked the husband how she
>
> was supposed to feed the family if he didn't bring any food. They began to fight

and he started to hit her, so she called out to the daughter for help. The daughter didn't know what to do so she ran to the neighbors for help. The neighbor happened to be a *promotora* and came in to pacify the enraged man. When asked why they chose this plot one *promotora* replied "because violence is the most important problem in our communities." Interestingly out of the three skits performed by the women, two dealt with domestic violence.

Audience members that I spoke with felt that *Bienvenida Salud* conveyed a genuine local - *Loretano* style. Listeners loved to hear accents that sounded like theirs, and found the language used in radio program to be colloquial and easy to understand. For instance, Carmelita, a 16-year-old listener said she loved the character Passionaria, stating "I would love to meet her and know her. She's very nice and happy and I like the way she speaks. She speaks like she is singing, that's how we speak here." Carmelita's father, who also avidly listens to the program, told us that his favorite character was Doña Rosita because she spoke just as they did in the jungle. The artists playing the characters on the radio program also make it a point to use their own voices and speak as they normally do. During rehearsals they monitor each other and flag dialogues that sound overly exaggerated or the accent appears odd. They try to ensure that the delivery in all cases sounds natural and not as if someone was just reading a script.

In addition to portraying the local accent, *Bienvenida Salud* also makes it a point to use words that are common in the region. Eliana Elías noted that at times she was very uncomfortable with some of the words used, but the radio team insisted that those words were what the Amazonian people understood. For instance the word "*topar*" used for sexual intercourse is considered crude by people from Lima and other urban areas, but

the team decided to use it because they felt it was culturally accepted and that the audience were not used to hearing the more accepted word.

In my interviews, I grasped that listeners particularly liked the background audio sounds and felt that the program was geographically based in their region. One female listener, Mellita, told us about how she loved to hear the jungle sounds on the radio:

They record everything from here, when I hear the sound of a *peki-peki* [a small motor boat common in the Amazon] I tell my husband where do they get the sound of the *peki-peki*" (chuckling)? And I hear the birds from around here and I wonder how they got these sounds. It's so familiar and normal for us.

The *Bienvenida Salud* team tries to make the program as life like as possible. For instance if one of the artists has a cough they weave it in to the storyline as its normal to have such ailments. They also capture "real" audio tracks for their program. So if a scene is one of night time, they record sounds of a jungle night with birds and animals that the locals know are active at night. Everly recounted how she has chased real pigs to record their snorting, slipped in a recorder inside a mosquito net to record snoring, and asked one of her male colleagues to even record himself while urinating! When I was observing one recording session, I noticed that the cast was slapping themselves as if to ward away mosquitoes. It seemed out of place in an air-conditioned recording studio which was free of mosquitoes. It soon dawned on me that the cast was trying to re-create a normal jungle sound to make the program real.

In sum, this theme elaborates how listeners' identify with *Bienvenida Salud* as resonating with their lived realities and local circumstances. The style of the radio

program, particularly the accents, language and sounds are perceived as being real

and hence close to peoples' hearts.

Emergent and Community Driven

> We believe in incorporating peoples' feelings and sensitivities and agendas -
> letting them define the institution and not having the institution define them….
> Minga doesn't have its own institutional message to tell the people of the
> Amazon. We are constantly co-constructing these messages with the people. This
> makes it harder for us to approach donors. They think we are not serious enough
> to have an agenda, but our agenda is to let the others voices be heard and to give
> back to the people the power to speak and to define themselves. The people have
> been so wise; you can see that with what they have made out of Minga.
>
> Eliana Elías, Executive Director, Minga Perú

Minga endeavors to strike a balance between meeting the goals of funding agencies while

staying true to its mission of addressing the needs of the communities. In approaching

funding agencies, they make it clear that the agenda of the program must be decided by

the people, their needs, and their realities. Eliana explained that it would be expeditious

and convenient to get a large grant that would cover their costs for several years but they

are not willing to compromise on the goals of the organization and therefore opt to go for

smaller grants with agencies that respect their emergent approach and allow their

programs to evolve with the community's needs. This approach makes things more

difficult for the organization as budgets are limited and they are always concerned about

where the funds for the next year will come from. Luis and Eliana visit the United States

every year for several months to raise funds, but they insist that the spirit of Minga and

the relationships they foster with the stakeholders (i.e. funders and project

participants) is more important than receiving a large grant.

In a joint conversation I had with Eliana and Luis, they collectively reflected on

the growth and evolution of Minga:

> We want to be seen as an organization that produces radio programs but also
>
> builds peoples' capacities. We are an organization that is learning and all of us
>
> who are in Minga and those who have passed through us are learning. We need to
>
> strengthen Emira and Everly's skills so that they can move beyond being program
>
> producers to being leaders in the region.

Like all organizations, Eliana and Luis believe they too have made mistakes but they

believe these have helped them listen, learn, and improve as a team and an organization.

From their very inception they have been open and willing to listen to and respect the

opinions of the communities they work in. Initially, *Bienvenida Salud* targeted health

technicians but to their surprise they had little response from this predetermined target

group and received an overwhelming response from women. Luis stated:

> We did not expect a response from the women, but they responded and helped us
>
> re-define our program and our work. Through their responses we got to know
>
> about who our real listeners were and who was making the best use of our [radio]
>
> program. This was how we began to give more and more importance to the
>
> listeners' letters.

The letters helped concretize the thematic foci of the radio program as the women wrote

about the daily aspects of their lives that they wanted to discuss and learn more about.

Eliana explained that she "asked for and encouraged letters from the first day because I

knew I was in the dark and that I needed to learn." Through these letters women

asked for training workshops and expressed an interest in getting to know the Minga team

and the cast of the radio program. Such feedback helped sow the seed for the *promotoras*

comunitarias (community promoters or peer facilitators), a growing network of 56

community promoters in 35 river communities, who in turn have trained and work

closely with over 500 local women. Luis reminisced that "when we began our

relationship with the listeners through their letters, we realized that these people wanted

their own role and identity in the program and we decided to have *promotoras*

comunitarias." Since most of the initial letters were from the Marañon River basin the

team decided to initiate the peer facilitators program in that basin. Currently Minga has

trained three groups (of 18 to 20 individuals) of *promotoras*, two from the Marañon and

one from the Tigré basin.

The *promotoras comunitaria* were nominated by the community themselves. The

listeners were asked to nominate women whom they considered to be leaders within the

community, whom they thought capable of acting on behalf of the community, and whom

they "considered a good neighbor with congenial relationships with the rest of the

community." Minga representatives first discussed their idea with the local community

leaders and after explaining their proposed plan and gaining their consent and support a

community meeting was called where women were nominated and later elected as

promotoras. Keeping local realities in mind and realizing the difficulty the women may

face in leaving their families and communities to attend workshops and training sessions,

two women were elected from each community, so that if for some family or health

related reason, one was unable to attend at least the other could take her place. Further

more, the Amazonian people tend to move frequently and training two women served as a backup in case a family moved to another community.

As the title suggests, *promotoras* foster community well-being by promoting women's rights, reconciliation, and harmony. Luis explained that "it was important to include the word community in their title as it conveyed both a sense of community and the organization's commitment to the community." *Promotoras* are "social entrepreneurs at the community level and they distinguish themselves by their sense of solidarity with and commitment for (*compromiso*) the women in their community and most importantly their eagerness to share what they learn [with the community]," emphasized Luis. He further explained that these women "do not have solutions for everything or everybody's problems but they are convinced about the power of sharing their personal knowledge with others and are determined to stand up with other women in their joint struggle against unjust practices of the establishment."

When Minga initially began the training sessions for *promotoras* and they returned to their communities demanding their rights, domestic violence escalated. Minga was very concerned about the resistance from the men and asked the women for advice to address the problem. The women suggested that they invite the men for a training session so that they can be sensitized about women's needs and rights and could first-hand understand Minga's objectives. Also by stepping foot in the training center the men would understand where the women were going, what they were doing, and how they were being treated. Following the women's suggestions, training sessions are held annually for men – either fathers or spouses of the *promotoras*. The men I talked to noted

that they learned a lot from these visits and got a chance to discuss and share the role

of *promotoras* with other men.

Community members' ongoing suggestions continue to play an important role in

shaping the direction of Minga's activities and programs. Once the radio program and

promotoras initiative were underway, the women themselves decided what they wanted

to be trained in. Luis recounted how the women wished to be trained in developing and

running fish farms as fish is a staple in their diet and it was something that shaped their

cultural identity:

> After some training sessions when we saw how empowered they were feeling, we
>
> realized that they could do with some extra income. They couldn't even afford to
>
> be *promotoras*. You know there are traveling costs, or the cost to gather women
>
> together, and process appeals (*gestions*). So we began to think of what project we
>
> could take up that didn't require a lot of investment and was suited to their
>
> realities. We wanted something that could generate income while making use of
>
> the environmental resources. That's how we came upon starting fisheries. It was a
>
> new project for us but it was something they [the native people] have been doing
>
> for a long time. Their daily lives revolved around fish and water. Especially for
>
> the *Cocamas* (indigenous group), fishing was a very important part of their lives.

Interestingly, in the participatory sketching activity that I conducted with the participants

when respondents were asked to depict their communities, each one of them highlighted

the river, fish, and fruit trees. The fisheries project was an instance of how Minga took

into consideration peoples' physical and social contexts/realities and incorporated

peoples' suggestion into its on-the-ground programs.

Minga's next project was chicken farming. Once again the women themselves asked for it and asked for Minga's help in raising chickens. They had been raising chickens previously but through Minga learned newer and more efficient techniques. When Minga or the *promotoras* train the women they build on what the women already know. For instance, it is emphasized that "This is how you used to raise chickens but this is another way of raising them." The chickens serve like savings account that could be cashed in difficult times. When a child got sick or they needed money for medication, the women could sell a chicken and raise instant cash. The eggs greatly supplemented their diets. Many *promotoras* I met used the income from selling chickens to buy stationary for their daughters and encouraged them to stay in school. Minga provides the money for an initial start-up poultry coup and when it began producing chickens, the beneficiary woman has the responsibility to provide the start-up resources for another woman in her network. The *promotora* is trained in poultry raising techniques as well as basic book-keeping and selling and she serves as a local technical resource person for other women in the community.

Much like the agenda of Minga Perú, which is emergent and open to change based on peoples' interests and needs, the radio program, *Bienvenida Salud* too is shaped by what people want to listen to. As was noted previously, the content of each episode is based on inputs from listeners, either through letters, or personal interviews, or surveys. Listeners write in to the program and shape the content of *Bienvenida Salud.* Through letter writing listeners become in-direct producers of the program and gain an esteemed sense of identity. In designing an episode, the radio team begins by reading the audience letters and sees what catches their attention as being an important "real" problem. Then

they find a way to convert it into a story for the next episode. The radio program focuses on five broad themes - reproductive health, gender equality and empowerment, family violence, managing natural resources, and maternal and neo-natal health. The five themes of the program were listener-driven and emerged over time as Minga's producers began to categorize the letters into thematic areas.

Some letters, particularly those with pressing questions are read out during the program. People feel very proud and important when their letters are chosen to be read. One young correspondent I spoke to said he has been writing to Minga for many years, but none of his letters have been read out so far. However he was happy when his friends' letters were read or when he heard names of people from his community called out on-the-air. Occasionally, Minga distributes prizes to letter writers as an incentive. Some listeners I spoke to said that they were motivated to write to the program hoping to win a prize and thus have their name announced on air.

Besides the letters, Minga also conducts regular surveys and interviews with listeners to gain feedback. Everly explained that the production team regularly visited port towns (to meet people traveling to and from communities) and market places to glean peoples' opinions about the program. The Minga team also frequently visits communities to understand their problems, needs, and their perceptions of the program. Changes to a script or to a plan are often made upon receiving suggestions from the listeners. For instance, initially *Bienvenida Salud* was aired in the morning, but the listeners wrote in saying that the radio signal was weak and they couldn't listen to the program easily. They said they preferred to listen to it at night, when they could relax after finishing the day's work. The teenagers also asked for the program at night; they

noted that in the morning they couldn't listen to the program at home as they had either household chores or school work to do. Minga acted upon these requests and changed the timing of the program. Many find the new timing to be convenient and more amenable to group listening and conversations. For instance, one listener, Mellita Chota stated: "We listen to the program at night; there is no light and we have finished our work so we can sit together and listen to the program."

The Minga radio team is flexible about the format of each episode and uses a variety of approaches as warranted by the chosen theme. For instance they may talk about real life stories that listeners might have shared, or they may read out letters. They often use socio-dramas which are very popular with the audience members. Sometimes experts (i.e. doctors, psychologists or sociologists) are called in to talk about issues. Given the audience tends to find the technical jargon difficult to understand, the Minga team often has to remind their guests to simplify their language.

In overall terms, in answering research question one, I highlighted the distinguishing aspects of Minga's communication for social change approach, including stressing the role of community and communication in social change efforts, building relationships, and privileging the local knowledge and context. The next research question explores how participants perceive the lived realities of the Perúvian Amazon.

Contextualizing the Lived Realities of the Perúvian Amazonia

Research Question 2 asked: *How do participants who are intimately associated with Minga's activities perceive, experience and co-share the material and physical context they live in? What do their narratives and sketches reveal about the lived realities of the Perúvian Amazon?*

The community members' perceptions of the physical and material context they live in can be clustered around five major themes:

The first theme, "strength in unity," describes the strong sense of community as felt by the participants, highlighting how unity, equality, collaboration, and healthy relationships guided their lives as a community.

The second theme, "connectivity and access," elaborates how those living in riverine communities struggle with issues of access and connectivity, relying on the river and river boats for the transportation. This theme emphasized how locals experience geographical and physical isolation.

The third theme, "natural resources," highlights the beauty and bounty of these resources in this region and illustrated how the land and the jungle sustained riverine communities.

The fourth theme "material realities," situates materiality as closely linked to the physical and geographical uniqueness of the area.

The final theme on "adolescents," presents challenges experienced specifically by this group in the Amazon, illustrating the conflicts, struggles, and choices they face on a daily basis.

I present findings culled from (a) analyzing letters from listeners of *Bienvenida Salud*; (b) participatory sketches and their accompanying narratives; (3) my field notes; and, (d) the transcripts from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. All the above data sources reflect the sentiments of a somewhat self-selected group of highly involved listeners and community members who strongly identify with Minga's mission.

For the participatory sketching activity, 10 members from the riverine community of Gallito were invited to visualize their community in the form of a sketch. One of Minga Perú's staff members in the Iquitos office is Rosbita, who hails from the Gallito community, and often lends her voice to the rafio program. For this reason, radio listening to *Bienvenida Salud* is high in Gallito, perhaps more so than in other riverine communities. For participatory sketching, participants were invited to visually map the various places of interest and importance in their community. After completing the sketches each participant narrated their sketches (as per the methodology discussed previously in Chapter 3).

Community: Strength in Unity

In an undated letter received in 2005 a listener of *Bienvenida Salud* wrote:

To The Program *Bienvenida Salud,* Minga Perú.

I write to the entire team of *Bienvenida Salud*.

I am writing to tell you that we here in our community are tidying up our village. We are tidying up everything that looks bad. We are farming the woodlands that are dangerous; we are praying to God that everything goes well for our (community's) anniversary that is approaching quickly.

For this purpose we are working together, men and women since unity creates

strength and this sacrifice is for development and future betterment of our

community.

I leave you now,

Your friend

Viviana Sanchez M.   Caserio Nueva Vida

My analysis of multiple data sources revealed that those associated with Minga's

activities in the Perúvian Amazon, and especially in the riverine community of Gallito,

considered their shared sense of community to be both a key strength and a defining

characteristic among them.[8] Community emerged through amiable relationships within

the family and within the various members of the community. As Reynaldo summed "the

heart of our community is that we are united and have good relationships among us."

Collective strength and group efforts were valued and considered central in the daily

functioning of their community and their individual lives as community members. Hilda

from Gallito stressed that "one of our strengths is that we are united and we have the

power to come together as a community. We usually work together as a community and

we do the community work together as a group." As the following narrative illustrates,

collaboration was central to being a part of the community and a duty expected of

community members:

---

[8] The meaning of community has shifted over time for the native people. For them, the present times is the first time they have lived among each other, free of the power and domination of outsiders such as the *gringos* (caucasian foreigners), *padres* (priests), *patrónes* (bosses), or *wiracochas* (white locals). This historical context is important in understanding how the locals understand the meaning and nature of community (Gow, 1991).

There are many good things in my community. We are involved in community work, we have meetings, assemblies and *minga* (the term refers to collaborative work). All the neighbors pitch in and help each other and work to raise the chickens or other animals. But there are always some bad things everywhere. Here some neighbors are good and some are bad and don't help each other. Some people make little mistakes or errors and have problems. But, in general, we like to live united and share among ourselves. We want to offer our services and share the work equally. In our community right now, there are instances when people say they are going to help and that we will all work together, and then some people don't show up, so that is unfair.

Interestingly, many letter-writers often used the term *comunidad* (community) and used the term *pueblo* (village) far less frequently. The following listener letter illustrates how community members were willing to contribute to their community and how they perceived collective strength as an invaluable resource:

Santa Clara, Marañon River

Parinari District, Loreto Province

April 2, 1998

Last year, the community of Santa Clara suffered a natural disaster (possibly a landslide or erosion) that completely destroyed the community and its fields (*chakras*).The good news is that not one member of the community collapsed and gave up. Each with our own strength helped rebuild and today it is a new village with the same name.

The best thing is that we already have a lovely medical post (*botiquín*) made with the help of the community and the Pacaya Samiria Program. The community contributed local materials and the work force and the program contributed keys, tables, and a carpenter. Thank you to the Pacaya Samiria Program and María Ines Arroyo who worked with the program and donated one clock and various other logistical materials.

Thank you for everything.

Jose Alvez Ricopa

Health Promoter

Emphasizing the link between community and unity, Jeanet stated "Community to me means unity." Similarly, Jarmi Cachique shared that he feels his community is progressing as they are coming closer to one another and the people see eye to eye on most issues. Unity was thus considered not only an essential element for the community's existence but as being synonymous with community itself. The importance of coming together as a "community" is nicely reflected by Mario Perez as he commented on his community's needs – "We do not have electricity and drinking water. We also don't have a big meeting place for the community to get together." Mario further asserts "the most essential part of our community is that we are all united."

Much like the manner in which the radio program *Bienvenida Salud* means welcome to health, but construes health broadly (beyond physical maladies) to include overall well-being, our participants too understood health as beginning with individuals but extending beyond – to the family and community. A community member from Gallito explained how she understands health: "health has various parts. I didn't know

there was more than having a strong healthy body to walk and work, but now I know

there is more to being healthy." Mellita, another woman from Gallito, stated: "[Being

healthy] is to be good. When I am healthy, I am without illness, without problems and

nothing bad is going on. Sometimes when we are in poor health, we are sick or we

problems. Now I feel happy and healthy. Everything is good. I feel happy with my

husband, my children, and my parents." Lucinda also emphasized the relational aspect of

health:

> About health I can say it is about having a good relationship in the family, like I
>
> have with my husband. It is about having a good understanding with people in the
>
> household – your husband, the children and with your neighbors – with all the
>
> people here. Being united and together is health. Good relationships with people
>
> you work with and your community is health.

Reynaldo Fasabi emphasized: "The most important thing for our community is health.

Health is when you have good health inside your house and outside in your community."

Thus health was construed more broadly than a physical state; being healthy entailed

having good feelings, being motivated and inspired, having a positive attitude, and

nurturing relationships with people.

Another point of commonality between our participants centered around their

sharing a similar socio-economic background. Homes in the communities looked similar

– simple wooden structures raised on stilts with thatched roofs. They had openings for

doors and windows but nothing to actually close. Having "open" homes represented in

part the community's norms and values, symbolizing amicable, trusting, and reciprocal

relationship among the community members. Clearly, the conception of "privacy" was

different than what one sees in the west. Not having an open home or gating one's

property was not normative, as 17 year old Carlos Mozambite pointed out:

> Here is my house and here is a palm tree. This is the evangelical church and here
>
> is the mamei tree next to the church. This is the house of the rich man, we call
>
> him anaconda. This is his fence around the house. His is the only house with a
>
> fence.

The fenced house was highlighted in several sketches and labeled as the "millionaire's

house" or the "rich house." (see Figure 4.1, the big house in the center). The other fenced
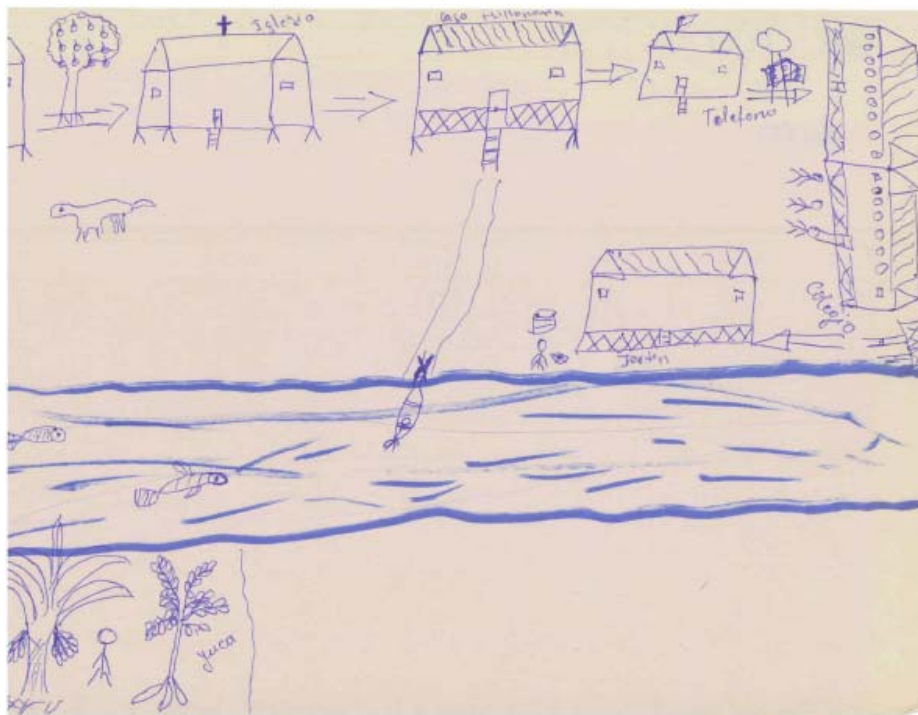
buildings are the school and kindergarten.

Figure 4.1. A sketch showing fenced and non-fenced houses and public buildings in the

community (Clery Ahuanari, 16 years, Female).

The feeling of equality went hand in hand with a strong sense of community, as people appreciated being treated as equals and as contributing equally to the work in their community. In fact, according to Hilda, women and men have begun to understand their rights as equals in the community:

> If my husband has a problem and he treats me badly I can report him [to the local officials]. If I have a neighbor who is treating me badly I don't have to tolerate it. I can tell him that I have my rights and you cannot talk to me in this way. Here there are so many people that criticize or talk ill to you and they will not respect your rights till you tell them that you have rights.

Human rights were understood as situated practices within communities. Lucinda explained: "Rights are very important; it means that as a woman I have the same rights as a man in my community. I now have the same rights as a man, and I have the right to live peacefully with my husband in my house and with my neighbors in my community."

In sum, this theme summarized the multiple meanings of community that emerge when participants discuss their lives more broadly and in relation to their close interaction with *Bienvenida Salud* and the Minga team. Not only do the various vignettes and stories point to the strong sense of community as an asset, but the data also reveals how Minga's vision of promoting broader social development – beyond physical health – has been embraced by the community members.

Connectivity and Access

> I try to make sure that I have a letter when the boat comes. But it is difficult because the boat does not go to Iquitos as often as it used to.

> Martha Cacique, Gallito Community

The riverine communities in the Perúvian Amazon are remote and isolated. The only

viable means of transportation in most cases are river boats, which can be expensive,

time-consuming, and infrequent. Jarmi, one of the participants of the participatory

sketching exercise aptly highlighted the role of the river and riverboats in connecting

Amazonians to the rest of the country. In his sketch of a local passenger boat (*collectivo*),

he explained: "This is the river here in front of my picture. For us to go to Iquitos we

need this type of transport. This is a *colectivo* that carries many people" (see Figure 4.2).

For shorter distances people use hand carved canoes either with paddles or a small motor

boat. Several of the participants included canoes in their sketches (Figure 4.1 and 4.3).
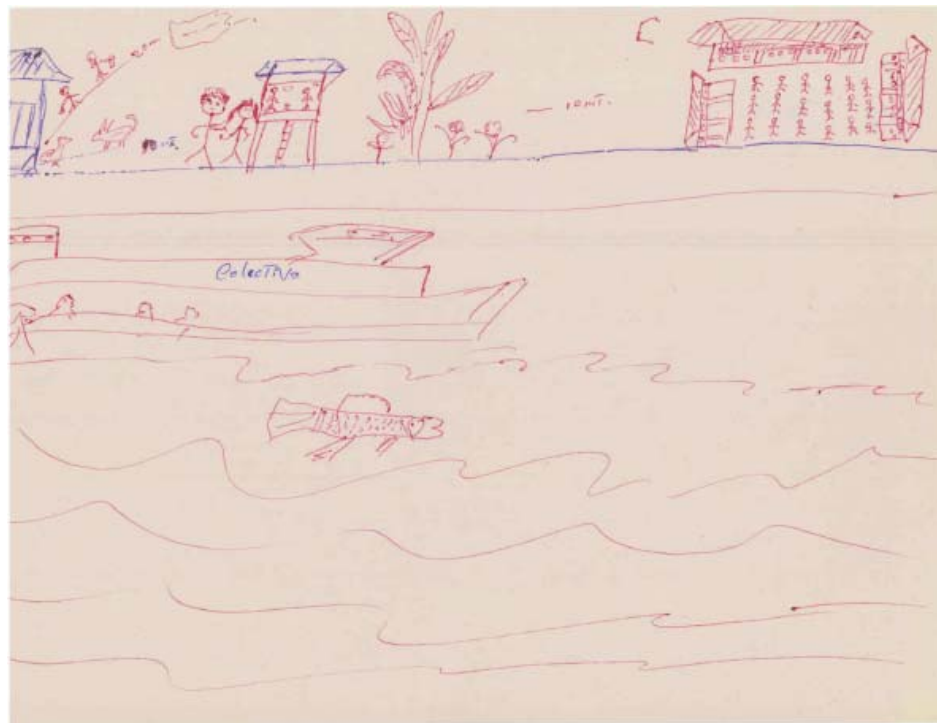

Figure 4.2. A sketch showing the central role of the Amazon River in the lives of the

riverine communities (Jarmi Cachique, 20 years, Male).

Participants voiced their physical isolation frequently. As one *promotora* put it: "I am grateful to Minga [for inviting us to the workshops] because they care about the forgotten women of the communities, who live so far away from everything." As a consequence of being remotely located, many communities did not have access to health centers or high schools. Furthermore, the limited access to riverine towns posed serious difficulties in accessing even basic health facilities. As another *promotora* noted:

> For instance in my community which is about two hours away from here (Tambo training center), when the children get sick there is no community *botiquín* (a medical post where basic medicines and first aid supplies are kept and made available to community members) and the (primary) health center is too far. It takes two hours to reach with a sick person. There is no nearby health post to take the children to when they get sick. Mothers too do not have good services to deliver their babies. It is a problem.

The problem was compounded as in several communities there were no trained primary or auxiliary health care providers. So community members were forced to travel by boat to avail health services in distant towns. The limited modes of river transport between riverine communities and the towns posed a serious barrier. I experienced this first hand on my visit to Gallito community:

> We were meant to spend tonight in Gallito but it started to pour and we were not getting much done [life comes to a standstill with the rain in the Amazon and we couldn't visit any of our research participants] and Linda [my translator] got an upset stomach and we were both badly bitten by insects so we decided to go back to Iquitos and return in the morning. However we realized we had a problem -- we

were stranded! You couldn't get back unless you had made prior

arrangements with a boat or a boat passing by stopped to pick you up. After

waiting for about 45 minutes and trying in vain to flag a boat down we decided to

ask a local if he could ferry us in his *peki peki* [hand carved wooden boat attached

with a small motor]. He agreed to take us for 50 Soles [approximately.$15 U.S.],

five times the usual fare and paid in advance so fuel could be purchased for the

boat. We waited anxiously for him to return as it was already late afternoon and it

is not advisable to travel after sun down. When our boatman returned it took

about 15 minutes for the boat to start and much to our fright it stopped twice mid

river [*peki peki's* don't have life vests]We reached Iquitos in 45 minutes as the

boat was slow, the *rapido* [larger motor boat] we came by in the morning had

only taken 25 minutes. The sheer inaccessibility and inability to move to and from

the communities at freewill struck me. (Fieldnotes)

Listeners routinely encountered difficulties in sending letters to Minga Perú. Martha Mili,

a 16 year old correspondent (dedicated letter-writer to *Bienvenida Salud)* from Gallito

explained that she writes letters frequently, but she has to rely on the boat service to get

them over, and has no other means of contact with Minga in Iquitos. Thus her letter

writing was constrained by her physical location. Minga pays for the delivery of letters

and has made arrangements with the people who operate the boats to pick up letters as

they pass communities and deliver to a Minga team member who comes to collect it at

the Iquitos port. However, boat services are rarely on schedule and are not reliable. Also,

all communities are not close to the main river so it could take several weeks for a letter

to go through serpentine tributaries to finally reach Iquitos.

Participants' sketches and their accompanying narratives drew attention to the importance of the *carterra* (community walkway), a concrete path passing through certain areas in the community and connecting peoples' homes to places such as the school, health post, telephone and general store (see Figure 4.3). Another participant Carlos highlights that the walkway is a "very important thing in our community is the little walkway …we can use it to get from the river to the highway (the main road)."

Figure 4.3. A sketch demonstrating the importance of the *carterra* (community walkway) (Melis Cachique, 19 years, Male).

The walkway thus served as a bridge which connected people to places within the community. People also used it to get to the river in order to go to the town. Reynaldo pointed out in his drawing:

> Finally, here is the walkway. Below the houses and the walkway is the river, we have a little canoe here and here is a person with a paddle navigating through the river. The most important thing in the community is the walkway. It is good for our health too because the children can access school and good health. Instead of walking in the dirt and mud when it gets wet, they can use the walkway.

Similarly in her sketch Nila, a mother of several children, directed our attention to the walkway and stated: One of the good things [in the community] is the walkway that we have. Before the children had to go to school covered in mud now they can go to school clean.

However, the walkway does not pass through all areas and people were very conscious of where the walkway was present and where it ended. For instance, Mario's sketch shows the walkway running across the area where the school, kindergarten and health post are located, but a unpaved trail is shown passing through the area where he lives (see Figure 4.6). He pointed out: "The blue part is the sidewalk, where it turns green is where the sidewalk ends." Another participant, Reynaldo also showed the walkway and commented that "In the walkway, this part is not finished because we ran out of cement." Participants' narratives suggested that the walkway stood for both connectivity and progress, and the need to finish and extend the walkway was presented as an aspirational goal, associated with the advancement of the community.

Much of the Amazon region in Perú is not connected to mass media and though *Bienvenida Salud* is aired on a radio station that has relatively high reach, it does not fully reach all the areas where Minga works in. *Promotoras* and community members expressed that they could not receive audible signals for V*oz de la Selva* (Voice of the Jungle), the radio station on which the program was aired, and would like the program to be aired on other radio stations that have smaller footprints, but outside the present area of broadcast. However, for budgetary reasons, when I was in Perú, Minga broadcast its program on a station with maximum reach and was still looking into possibilities to air its program on additional radio stations. In some cases community members could hear parts of the program but the reception was not good as they received poor or interrupted signals. To overcome this problem, Minga loaned radios and cassette recordings of *Bienvenida Salud* to these communities so that they could listen to the program. These radios and cassettes were circulated among different communities. In some areas, Minga provided a radio, a set of cassette recordings of the program and set up a loudspeaker for community listening.

Houses in the communities I visited did not have electricity, though the school usually had power. Solar panels were to be seen in some of the health centers. The participants' sketches showed that the only telephone in the community was near the store and the rich man's house. Gaining access to electricity was high on the priority lists of the community members. As one of them noted, "We are fighting to get electricity in the community." Wilder from Gallito noted: "Our community at last has got some electricity and generators. We don't have cables and lines but the electricity through the

generator is a sign of progress." Participants looked forward to the day when they

would be connected to uninterrupted power supply.

Increasingly it became clear that the Amazonia lacked access and connectivity to

basic infrastructural facilities, largely due to its physical isolation. Consider my

fieldnotes from July 18, 2005; they speak to feelings and experiences of an outsider:

The morning began badly, it was raining heavily and we went to the port at 8 a.m.

and had to wait 1.30 hours for our boat to arrive. We were told that Señor Clausi

would meet us at the port and take us to Gallito but we did not see him there. At

around 9 a.m. [by which time we were totally drenched] another boatman asked

us whom we were waiting for and we told him we were waiting for Señor Clausi.

He told us Clausi was further down the river but he would tell him that we were

waiting for him when his boat passed his. At around 9.35 a.m. Clausi finally

arrived. Clausi apologized for the delay and we figured there had been some

miscommunication about what time we had to be picked up and were glad that

our ride had arrived never the less. The weather was overcast and the river was

choppy but I was happy that our message had been conveyed in true riverine style

and that we were heading to Gallito for what we hoped would be a productive

day. We reached Gallito and headed for the school where we were meant to be

meeting the correspondents for a focus group discussion and found no one there.

Linda and I waited for another hour by which time I was beginning to fret about

losing time and not being able to get my research done. Then we decided to walk

toward the houses and met Rosbita who told us that the correspondents had come

to the school and waited for us but since we were late they had to leave to go to

their school to rehearse for the upcoming national day celebrations. The

morning reflected some of the challenges of connecting, accessing and

communicating with people in the vast riverine area.

In sum, this theme captured how marginalization is experienced by the community

members as a lack of access to basic services and infrastructure. Community members

are conscious not just of their social marginalization but their physical remoteness and

isolation as well. Their appreciation of the river and the community sidewalk (*carterra*),

are telling examples of how the communities perceive connectivity or the lack of it. What

would be a narrow and possibly insignificant sidewalk for city dwellers like myself,

becomes a critical mode of transport to and from the community. Likewise, access to

schools in some communities and use of solar panels to generate electricity were seen as

important steps toward overcoming the physical isolation of the region.

Natural Resources: Beautiful and Bountiful

One of our richness is our fish and fish farms. Our poultry farms and chicken

coups are another strength, as also are the medicinal plants that we have in our

jungle. These are our various riches or treasures.

Adela Shapiama, *Promotora*, Santa Cruz Community

The people of the Perúvian Amazon rely on the natural resources for sustenance and

hence look upon Mother Nature as beautiful, bountiful and beneficial. In his sketch,

Carlos beautifully depicted his surroundings showing the river bordering the community

and houses ensconced within the verdant foliage and lush trees. At one end of the river

you can see two men on a canoe (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4. A sketch showing the rich natural resources in the community (Carlos

Mozambite, 17 years, Male).

When I told the participants that I come from a landlocked country (the mountain

Kingdom of Nepal), their first question was "how do you live without water?" Water

(symbolized through the river) for them represented life, livelihood, food and

transportation and they couldn't fathom a region surrounded by mountains and not

traversed by rivers or bordered by oceans. When I requested them to describe their

natural surroundings to me, the following responses emerged:

Hilda noted: Our environment is beautiful, the jungle is beautiful….we have so

many birds, trees and fruits. We have the water from the River Amazon and we

have more water back here. All of the plants are so green and so fresh. I love the

jungle, the rain, the sun the fresh air and the trees.

Judith noted: This area is beautiful at night, especially with the moon. There

is no other light but with the moon we can watch the boats pass by on the

Amazon. It is so tranquil and beautiful living here." Lucinda said: "It is

incomparably wonderful here. We have the trees and we all are sharing the same

air and water. And we don't have cars and pollution.

Possibly because of the vital role nature and natural resources play in their lives, the

people of riverine communities closely identify with nature. The sketches, in general,

illustrated natural fauna as being close to the homes. The school, church, health post,

cemetery and the kindergarten were usually shown as being a little distance away from

the homes. Most sketches depicted homes surrounded by fruit and plantain trees, chicken

coops, the river, and fish. Mario provided the following narration to go along with his

sketch:

The first house here is my house. Not far from the house is the farm. Here are

some chickens and a mango tree. From my house you can go to the river to

fish….Further on there are other trees. This is a mamei tree and the children are

playing under it. Here is a Guaba tree.

Clery, a young woman in Gallito provided the following narrative:

Along the river bank are people's farm, they plant things there. These are the

people who came and helped build the walkway. This man is going back to his

house, he is taking the yuca with him, he also has bananas. This guy is fishing in

the river from his canoe.

In her sketch (see Figure 4.1), Clery shows a large river mass with fish and traces the

pathways from the homes to the river. She drew a tree filled with fruit next to her house

and a farm across the river on the same side of her house. Both Clery's and Melis'

drawings depict the only telephone in the community being near the rich man's house

(his house is clearly demarcated by the fence and labeled as the rich man's house). In

several of the sketches the solar panel, schools, shop and sidewalk are shown away from

their houses while the river, trees, chicken, fish are always shown close to homes. Figure

4.5 shows a typical riverine community with its "open houses" surrounded by fruit trees

and the community football ground.

Figure 4.5. A typical riverine community with open access and fruit and plantain trees.

Fish and the river are central to Amazonian's lives and it was no surprise that they

were highlighted in all the sketches. In some of the sketches the river occupies up to two-

thirds of the page. Some drawings show the river as passing through the community; others show it running either above or below the community. In a particularly well illustrated sketch, Wilder draws fishermen in a canoe with an intricately drawn fishing net and plentiful fish about to be caught (see Figure 4.5). His sketch has captions such as "*pesca en el Amazonia*" (fish in the Amazon) and "*el pescador de Gallito es muy bueno*" (the fishermen of Gallito are very good), reflecting the centrality of fishing in his community. He drew his home and his mother's home on the back of the paper to show it is behind the school. The fish are shown as being larger than the people, though the Amazon has large fish such as the *paiche* (see Figure 4.2) it could denote the larger-than-life role of fish in their lives. The river occupies a substantial portion of the page. He explained his sketch:

> These are fish and fishermen. The fish serve as food. This is the fish farm that we want to have. In this part of the picture you see the people going to fish with the nets. They go to look for fish. They make this round thing to scoop out the fish with from a small piece of net….these are medical plants and is used for protection from disease.
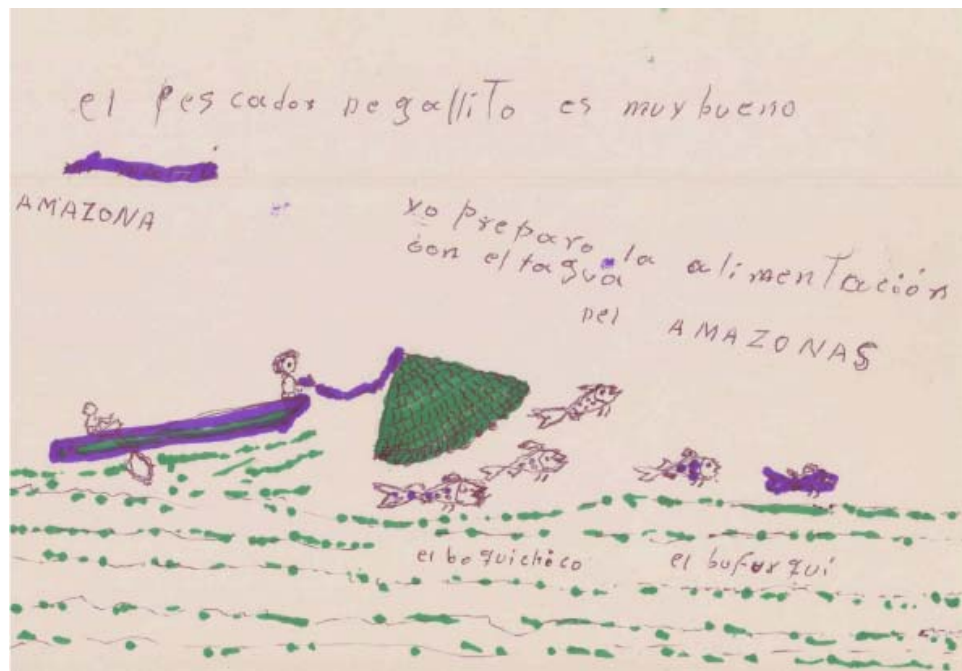
Figure 4.6. A sketch depicting the centrality of fishing in the riverine communities (Wilder Rengfo, 40 years, Male).

Residents of communities in the Perúvian Amazon generally do not have full time employment or a steady income; they rely on the local resources for food and sell surplus fish or produce to earn money. During my fieldwork, the man whose house we were eating in had a great catch that particular day; so we had two different fish preparations and in enough quantity. The family told us that they are not always so lucky and that on days that they did not have much fish, they ate the chickens they raised or relied on plantains, potatoes and fruits. As a *promotora*, Elsa noted: "We don't have a stable source of income and employment. We work in the farms to produce food – yuca, bananas, vegetables and then we sell it for money. We have many vegetables and fruits here." Community members also take up work as daily laborers on farms or construction

sites. Projects such as the fish farms or chicken coups are sought after because they generate additional income.

While the local natural resources have and continue to sustain the people of this region, their continued reliance on natural resources means that in the event of a shortage of fish, or a poor harvest of fruits and vegetables, their nutritional status and income can be seriously affected. As Judith, an avid listener of *Bienvenida Salud* pointed out:

> We are having a tough time right now because there is not much fish to catch. The children need food to eat and we don't have anything to give them, they are suffering a lot. We don't have money to buy medicines and there is no money to buy them medicines and get them better so they are lying ill in the house. We are ashamed that we don't have the money to get them well.

Jeanet also pointed to the vagaries of depending on nature:

> Sometimes we don't have any fish in the river -- that is bad for us. It is unusual for that to happen but it does happen sometimes. Also, sometimes the river gets really high and comes up it is very dangerous then. When the river comes high it reaches our houses and that is a bad time for us.

Participants also shared that they often turn to natural remedies which have been traditionally used in the region for several generations. Adela one of the *promotoras* described:

> We may not have the money to go to the health centers or be able to buy medicines, but we have our own strengths. We take the medicinal plants from the jungle and cook it and use it as medicine. This is a richness of our community. We don't need to spend money for medicines.

Adela proceeded to create a list of different herbs and plants for various ailments. For instance, a certain plant was beneficial for improving vision and eyes and you could also drink it like a tea for stomach aches. A form of oregano was also used for stomach ailments. Barks of a particular type of tree were used to induce abortions while yet another plant was used to stop the bleeding when a woman suffered a miscarriage [not uncommon in the region].

The Amazon is a region with high fertility rates and women discussed how they used plant-based potions for birth control. Not only did they vouch for the reliability of these herbs in preventing pregnancies but they also considered them to have less harsh effects than hormone based contraception. Surprised by their abiding faith in these natural methods, I asked the Minga team if they indeed were efficacious. Minga staff told us that the women used them and believed they prevented conception, so the organization did not discourage them from using these means but instead positioned hormonal or artificial contraception as merely "another way" of planning families. Irrespective of whether or not the methods work, the following statement reflected how the Amazonians turn to their trees for natural remedies. As Hilda noted:

> I didn't take care of myself with the method we use now (referring to oral contraceptive pills). I used to take care of myself with natural and herbal methods. There is a tree called *uboos*, so we take the bark and boil it, let it cool and then drink it. You also bathe with the same plant. This is how I took care of myself for many years. Now I don't have my period anymore, though now I want more children! The medicines from the trees and the plants help us, that is why I like the jungle because the trees take care of us.

In sum, this theme captured how the residents of the Perúvian Amazonia look up to the natural environment as a rich resource that sustains their livelihoods. By giving descriptive examples ranging from the role of fish and plants from the river to the medicinal herbs from the jungles, the above narratives highlight how life in the Amazon is intricately connected to the region's natural resources. Given the shortage of surplus income, community members relied on river or forest game and locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Material Realities: Constraints and Possibilities

> Here in the Amazon, the men engage in different kinds of farm work. For instance they fish, they sell their fish and they have money. They also cultivate rice and corn, bananas, yuca so that they can sell it and invest in their children's nutrition and education. But the work is very hard, because to have a little bit of money you need to work a lot. Sometimes it is not even enough to buy clothes. That is life in the Amazon. The men here work on different tasks, one week they may be fishing and the next they are working on the land, another week we may be looking for other work or exploring other resources for money. Sometimes there are people from outside who come here to look for people who can do woodwork. Then we go with them and do their work. I have finished high school but couldn't study further because we didn't have the money.
>
> David Macuyama, Santa Cruz Community

As I noted in the previous section, the physical or environmental context is closely linked to the material realities of the people of the Amazon. Although nature is bountiful, it also represents an impediment to accessing essentials. The river is a source of food and

income but it was also the reason for the marginalization and physical isolation of the

riverine communities. Further, the river serves as a barrier in accessing health, education,

and other services. Thus the material and physical realities in the Amazonian context

were both complex and paradoxical; at once a resource and a constraint. The following

excerpt from a conversation with Nila, a listener of *Bienvenida Salud* reveals the

challenges faced by community members:

> Like they say, there is no money to buy rice or sugar in the community. The kids
>
> go to school and sometimes there is no money to give them food that day. And
>
> the children need medical attention in the little post [the health clinic]. Some
>
> times they too don't have what we need. Or some times there is no money to buy
>
> medicines in the health clinic. At times medicine is not available here even if you
>
> have money we have to try and get it from the Iquitos hospital and it costs a lot
>
> more.

Several participants noted how access to healthcare facilities coupled with the lack of

money for medicines and treatment was a big problem in the region. Besides the cost of

medical treatment, transportation to Nauta or Iquitos were both time consuming and

difficult. *Promotoras* expressed a desire to be trained in health issues. They also wanted

basic medical supplies (*botiquín*) to be available within the communities so that sick

people and particularly children could be attended to without ado.

As noted previously, in addition to the portrayal of natural resources in the

sketches, almost all the sketches also highlighted facilities such as the health post, the

school, the kindergarten, and boats and canoes. For instance, Mario's sketch shows his

home, the river and the farm. Then on a separate paper (possibly indicating the distance)

he shows the facilities in his community (see Figure 4.7). The blue line passing

through the facilities denotes the walkway, while the green line indicates where the

walkway ends and shows the trail as explained in the previous section on connectivity

and access.

(A)
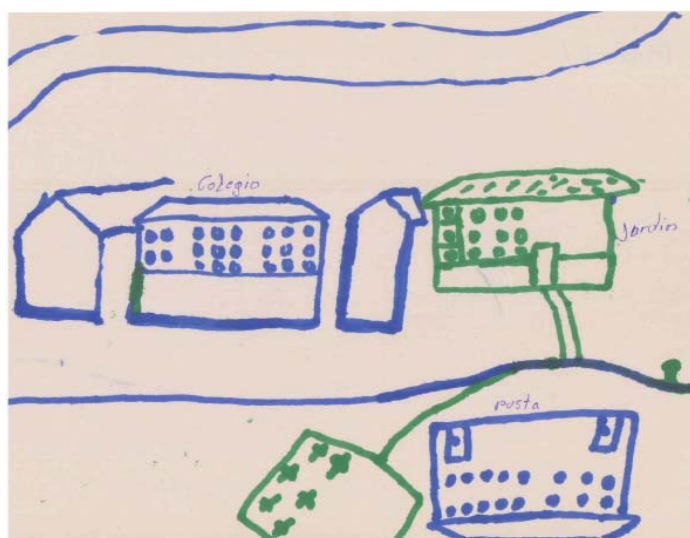
(B)

Figure 4.7. Sketches (A and B) of a community and its public services (Mario Cachique,

22 years, Male).

Another challenge that was highlighted was about men resorting to alcohol abuse and domestic violence (this issue will be explored in great detail in our answer for research question 3 that follows). As Jarmi (whose Figure 4.2 was displayed previously) recounted:

> Fifty meters from my house there is a family who has many problems. When her husband comes home he hits her. They can not live happily. These are the husband and the wife (pointing to the figures outside the house) and their children. The children are inside (the children are looking at their parents who are outside fighting) and the parents are fighting outside the house. The husband comes home drunk and hits her. He comes home to eat but gives no money to his wife to make food. She does not give him any food because there is no money or any way to get food.

An emotionally moving incident occurred during one of the focus group discussions in Gallito. Judith and her daughter Patricia were participating in the focus group discussion and toward the end of the session Judith started crying and told us that she had a very sick child at home who had been sick for many days and they were unable to treat her. I asked her what was wrong with her daughter and she said she had a high fever.

After commiserating with her, when I tried to steer the conversation back to the radio program, Judith stood up and said she had to leave but would really appreciate some monetary help to take care of her child. She was distraught and helpless and we sensed she felt very bad about having to ask (us) strangers for money but she had invested her time hoping that she would be able to get some help from us. Both my translator and I were concerned about her child and felt bad for her so we gave her some

bills. It wasn't much but she was profusely grateful and said she had to leave. This was a stark instance of how poverty and health intersect on a daily basis in such riverine communities (Fieldnotes).

My ongoing conversations with *promotoras* suggested that they were initially drawn to participate in Minga's activities because they thought they would learn skills (such as pottery, knitting, carpentry) that would bring them tangible financial and material benefits. In essence, it seemed that material skills and benefits appealed to these women before they fully understood Minga's integrated human rights and health approach. As Marcelita recalled:

> I started as a *promotora* and was chosen by the community. I came to the meeting because I thought they were going to teach me knitting. I was interested to learn it but then I realized it was not just knitting. I didn't know what the training was about then. When Minga first used to make us take exams and tests it was very difficult for me. The themes of self esteem, rights, violence were important and I soon realized they were helpful and good for my family and me.

Adela also shared how she became a *promotora*:

> There was a man in the community that came to Nauta and said that they needed two women to train as *promotoras*, I was in a canoe going to Nauta. He asked me if I wanted to be trained in handicrafts and other things. Then I said ok, I thought I was going to be trained for one day, I wanted to learn carpentry. I didn't know how to knit and it was hard.

Promotoras were appreciative that they had learned various skills that could help them support their families economically. They also expressed a desire for Minga to help them

find markets for their handmade goods. Narratives such as these clearly identify how the community members value the importance of learning new skills for income generation.

Even some listeners of *Bienvenida Salud* who participated in the program by writing letters did so not just to share stories about their life and circumstances in the Amazon. These listeners stated that an additional reason to write in to the program was the possibility of winning prizes. They were motivated to write letters when they heard other letters read out or the names of letter writers announced, but the prizes too served as an added incentive. According to one listener:

> In my letter I wrote that sometimes my husband would come drunk and he would be looking for food and when he did not find any food he would be really mad. Sometimes he would come and scare the children who were sleeping, late at the night. Now we do not fight any more. When we listen to the program on Mondays at 7 o'clock at night, they read the letters that have been sent from various houses and we hear that. It makes us want to write more letters and listen more. That is how it works…. I want to write because they give prizes. That is why I also wrote my little letter to send to them so that I may win a prize.

In a letter dated February 14, 1998, Gladys Cahuaza Cariajano a listener wrote:

> This is all I have to tell you Señor director. I hope that I am the winner of a radio in the drawing being held by Voice of the Jungle. For me, winning a radio would be tremendously satisfying. If I won the radio, then I could listen to the Voice of the Jungle Programs everyday. Thank you, Señor Director and I will say goodbye until the 24th when I will be receiving my prize.

Community members expressed that the income generation projects such as the chicken coup and fish farms were "a big help" and were one of the community's key resources. Consider these accounts:

> Marcelita: [The chicken coups] helps us feed our children and keep them healthy by providing good nutrition. If the children are sick we can sell the birds and we can get money. It is very good for us to raise the birds. They are a great economic resource and a necessity in the house.

> Elsa: I think the fish farms are very important. It is convenient because we don't need to go fishing at night and we may not always be able to find fish [in the river]. When the fish are big we can eat them and they provide food for the children. By selling the fish in the market we get money and we can buy clothes for the children.

Certain material constraints prevented families from listening to the radio program on a regular basis. Some families did not own radio sets and hence could not listen to the program either when it was aired or when cassette recordings were available in their community. Those who had radio sets listened to the program contingent to their supply of batteries and the availability of funds to purchase more batteries. For instance, Mellita Cachique is fond of listening to the program and ensures that she hears it when so ever it is aired, provided she has batteries for her radio. Nita, who is also from the same community shared Mellita's predicament: "I listen sometimes but then the batteries get low and then they go off and I do not get to listen."

Another correspondent told us that she writes regularly to the program but when I asked her if letters are responded to in the program she told me: "I can't answer that

because we don't always listen to the program and we can only hear it when we have

batteries." In some families there were competing demands on the radio and women or

children couldn't listen to *Bienvenida Salud* if the parents or men wanted to listen to

something else. One schoolboy reported that he wanted to listen to the radio program

more often but all his father listened to on the radio was music, he added that he liked

music but also wanted to listen to *Bienvenida Salud*.

The above theme on material realities describes the tension between the natural

resources provided by the river in the form of food, medicines, and income, and the

marginalization and isolation of the communities due to the lack of easy access to basic

services. This theme also foregrounds how community members place precedence to

material constraints/realities affecting their lives. Through *promotoras'* narratives we

glean that they place equal (if not more) importance on income generation as they do to

protecting and promoting women's rights and health.

Adolescent Challenges

We the young people have many problems. The majority of the young men

dedicate themselves a lot to drinking. Some of them are real drunkards and start

drinking at 13-15 years. They do not drink local rum or beer as it cost very much.

Carlos Mozambite, Gallito Community

Parents and adolescents both expressed their frustration over the lack of

opportunities both in terms of education and employment in the Amazon. According to

Lucinda, "mostly the young folks are uneasy and restless, they are not satisfied with their

lives. You live in the United States, it's very different in the jungle." Young people were

caught between the conflicting tensions of wanting to seek higher education but not

having the money to go to school or a high school in their community, further more if

they did pursue higher education there were no suitable employment opportunities in

their community. Lucinda further elaborated:

> Our strength is our youth, without them we cannot progress. At the moment the
>
> youth don't have work or employment, because they don't have the money to
>
> continue their education. Finding work and continuing their education would be a
>
> great advantage to the community.

So in a sense, educating oneself both necessitated and served as a means to leave the

community in search of better opportunities. As one community member shared:

> Ami: What is the role of education in your community?
>
> David: At this moment, education is the most important resource but the problem
>
> is that at times people don't have the money to educate their children. In this little
>
> town, most people have finished the fifth year of high school, there are more than
>
> thirty children going by the sidewalk to the school to reach school. Now both men
>
> and women study together and go to school, but before it was different.
>
> Ami: What do people do here after they finish school?
>
> David: Sometimes people get frustrated if they stay here, others go to the
>
> university and prepare to become professors [school teachers are referred to as
>
> professors], otherwise they go to the city and never come back.
>
> Ami: What do you want for your children's future?
>
> David: If I had the money I want to make them study as much as I could, we are
>
> going to do everything possible to make them study.

> Ami: But if they do study further won't they leave the community like all the
>
> others?
>
> David: Yes they will, they won't live here anymore. The parents stay behind and
>
> the children leave because they cannot find any jobs here. They have to go to the
>
> cities, if they stay here they are not going to find anything to do.

Schools were depicted in several sketches, indicating how the community members perceived education as a gateway to an improved quality of life and future. For example, Jarmi who was 20 years old, pointed to the school in his sketch and stressed that it was a place of great importance because, "when you go to school and finish school you are more educated. Education is important for me to leave this place for another place to look for work and for me to better myself."

Early childbearing was another challenge faced by several adolescents. Anyone with children and with a partner was considered an adult as they had to take on adult roles and responsibilities. Though still adolescents, many Amazonian slipped into adulthood as early as at thirteen or fourteen years of age as it was common for girls to get pregnant with their boyfriends and start living together. In a letter from Miraflores community, dated May 12, 2000, an adolescent girl wrote:

> I am a 14-year-old girl and I am in my 1st year of high school in the community of
>
> Miraflores. Also since I am an adolescent, I am thinking about how I should plan
>
> my future and that I must take care of myself and protect myself from sexually
>
> transmitted diseases so that I do not get sick from one .

Judith, who has a teenager daughter felt the program was well suited to the lived realities of the youth in the communities:

The young people are helped too because they now know about family

planning, before (the radio program) there was nothing to tell us about such

things. Thanks to the program we have family planning now. I have a young

daughter and I am teaching her to listen to the program so that she doesn't get

pregnant.

Other issues that effected youth were drinking and dropping out of school, more so

parents of girls feared their daughters would end up in the cities and "go the wrong way"

by either getting pregnant, becoming promiscuous or worse still ending up in commercial

sex work. As this letter dated September 4, 1999, from Jessica Gutierrez detailed:

Señorita,

One day I was walking down the road with my cousin when we passed by a

corner and saw a girlfriend drinking with a group of really bad teens. She just

turned 14 years old and it really hurt me to see her doing this to her life because

she is very young and is a happy girl. She must not start drinking because it is

dangerous for her and she might do something that she wouldn't normally do. For

example, she could be raped, killed, or forced into prostitution.

In sum, this theme delineated how adolescents were particularly affected by the material

and contextual realities of the Amazon. Also, the narratives reveal how the constraints of

being within the community and the attraction of leaving the community for "better

opportunities" posed conflicting and sometimes dangerous options for these young men

and women.

Overall, this research question reifies the contextually grounded nature of

Minga's communication for social change approach. The themes and the concerns

identified by community members correspond with the various areas of Minga's projects such as community building, making communication accessible to the marginalized, harvesting the natural resources, and addressing adolescent needs.

<center>Altering Gender Roles, Norms and Relationshps</center>

Research Question 3 asked: *How do Minga's efforts enable or constrain gender equality and how are gender roles, norms, hierarchies and relationships affected and altered?*

Our understanding of how Minga's programs have affected gender equality can be clustered around five themes:

The first theme, "gender as inclusive," explores how Minga approaches gender holistically, recognizing family and community structures within which normative ways of gender are enacted.

The second theme, "increased family harmony," captures how couples have been able to grapple with family-based violence, which is rampant in Amazonia. The narratives describe how a series of training workshops involving men and women have contributed to the steady decline of domestic violence.

The third theme charts the journey from silence to "gaining a voice," where the *promotoras* and other community members share their new found confidence to express and assert themselves.

The fourth theme, "*protagonistas*," speaks to how women came to be recognized as local authorities through a process of realizing that they were equal citizens and had equal say in community decisions.

The final theme, "struggles, resistance and conflict," captures the complexities that emerge when traditional social structures are challenged and contested.

Such an inclusive understanding of gender can lead to more harmonious families and improved relationships between men and women. However, when power structures and local dynamics are challenged by women who now speak up, conflict (and sometimes violence) emerges as a natural response to the hierarchies being contested. I also analyze how through communication women can become not just "equals" but also become local leaders and change agents. In so doing, I trace the struggles of these women as they move from silence and passivity to becoming equal citizens and passionate *protagonistas* (protagonists) of social change.

Promoting "equitable situations and equitable relationships" is a guiding tenet in Minga's work. Given the local context where men tend to be *machistas* (sexist) and women tend to have little or no value, the power dynamics between men and women becomes a primary site of inequitable relationships. According to Minga's co-founder, Luis González, the organization is committed to "establishing equitable relationships between men and women in and through communication" and the organization aims to extend women's opportunities in multiple spheres such as "their capacity to speak, to be heard, and to decide." Juana Yumbato from the riverine community of San Jose recounted her experiences as a *promotora*:

> When I came here [Tambo Minga training center] I realized that I had never had such an opportunity before. I had been quiet all my life, I didn't talk. I was now learning that as a woman I could help my family and community to become better. We learned many things that could benefit the community….After I began

to work with Minga I felt so good that I could help and support women in my

community.

Minga Perú endeavors to increase women's abilities and opportunities in the home,

community, and beyond, valuing the multiple roles women perform as mothers, wives,

community representatives and leaders. Whether it is a women speaking up in the home

or at a community meeting or the realistic representation of a woman's life on the radio

program, Minga strives to give "unheard women" a public voice.

Minga Perú furthers women's rights and promotes gender equality through an

integrated and multi-layered communication initiative. Women community members who

work closely with Minga Perú describe the organization as one that cares for and is

committed to the otherwise "forgotten" women of the Amazon. According to Emira

Montes Zuta who has been attending Minga's workshops for several years and is now a

member of the radio production team, "Minga is the only organization [in this region]

that works with women and sees men and women as equals." Similarly, Kiké, Minga's

coordinator for income generation projects in the Amazon, explained that though there

are several other organizations working in the region, most focus their attention on men.

According to him, gender equality is the cornerstone of Minga's work in the Amazon.

Gender as Inclusive

We understand gender as being interrelated. Women do not suffer as just women,

but as women who are poor, with no [or little] education and belonging to

[indigenous] minority groups.

Eliana Elías, Co-founder of Minga Perú

Though women from riverine communities are the primary participants in Minga's programs, the organization understands gender as a systemic form of exclusion, one that includes but is not limited to biological sex. Minga's approach to gender is inclusive and attempts to incorporate various aspects of difference between and among men and women. The co-founders stressed that they felt it was "unjust that women did not have a right to express themselves," and highlighted that in the Amazon "gender is not just about men and women at an individual level because the pressure and the influence of the community is very strong." Thus Minga's approach to gender addresses the broader community structure within which gender hierarchies and relationships operate. For instance, when Minga's women *promotoras* began to travel to the Tambo to attend workshops, they faced resistance not just from the spouse but also from other men and women in the community. As González explained "the entire structure of the community was against these women" resulting in women being treated as inferior.

Minga also pays attention to the culturally specific aspects of gender in the Amazonian region, as they view gender as being grounded in culture. As a result of recognizing gender as a "systemic" and structural construct, Minga reaches out to men while striving to empower women. Elías explains:

> You cannot work for women's well being without taking into account their husbands or partners. All our women listeners' concerns naturally concern their husbands also. They live as a couple and we cannot leave out their husbands because men are an important part of their reality and appear in the content of [almost] all their letters. Men are also listening to our radio program. Peoples' houses are open and have a common area where people listen to the radio, it is not

like the women can go to one part of the house and listen to the program alone

or that they listen to the program while driving in their cars to work! Men listen

and are affected by the messages and cannot be ignored. They are a part of

women's reality and have to be a part of the solutions.

Minga is sensitive to the roles women play in the family and realize that children are

another important aspect of the women's lives. So, *promotoras* are encouraged to bring

their children to the training center when they attend workshops. The women tend to

bring the younger children and leave the older ones at home. When I visited the Tambo

training center to meet the *promotoras*, I noticed that several women had brought their

children with them. The infants would be with the mothers during the group sessions and

would be routinely breastfed, while the older children played outside. Visiting the Tambo

was like an extended outing for the children. They seemed to be in high spirits,

especially during mealtimes, when they sat down with the rest of the group on the long

wooden table and relish treats such as soft drinks, meats, fish, bread and other

confectionery (Fieldnotes).

Consider the case of Minga's regional Co-ordinator, María Isabel. She was

awarded a three month scholarship sponsored by the Population Research Bureau and

Michigan State University to enroll in a training course in reproductive health in Costa

Rica. Although this scholarship promised enormous professional growth opportunities, it

was impossible for María to leave her young infant behind for three months and travel to

Costa Rica and Ecuador. Neither of the sponsors could provide support for her to take her

child. Minga understood her situation and was keen that María availed this opportunity.

So, in an unprecedented move, Minga offered to cover the travel costs for María's

husband and her baby so that the father could look after the child while María

participated in the training. When I asked Eliana why Minga chose to do so, she noted

that if Minga encouraged *promotoras* to bring their children to trainings, they should

create similar policies for their own employees. To me, this example illustrated, loud and

clear, how the organization works toward promoting gender equitable practices both

internally, within the organization, and externally with the communities they work in.

The social construction of gender affects all aspects of women's lives and

accordingly Minga employs a multi-pronged approach to address them. While the

organization's initial goal was to inform women about their human rights and

consequently help them make informed reproductive choices, it soon realized that income

generation skills were crucial to women's individual and family well-being. Though the

radio program *Bienvenida Salud* remains at the core of Minga's outreach, the *promotoras*

and the communities they live in, women reap the benefits of income generation

programs such as chicken coops, fish farms, and sale of handicrafts (Fieldnotes). For

instance, Marcelita told us that by learning crochet and selling her wares she can now

purchase food and medicine for her children. Marcelita learned how to crochet at the

Minga workshops and now makes and sells crochet products such as handbags out of a

locally-available fiber, *chambira*. Though she views her primary responsibility as taking

care of her family and home, she makes these products in her spare time, knowing how

they improve the quality of life for her family.

Having a "productive role" and access to money helped several women have a say

in the household finances, thus directly influencing their gendered relationships. As Elsa

Ahuanari a *promotora* from San Antonio explained:

Women have begun to do crochet and knit products that they can sell in order

to have some money in the house. I think this has changed people's thinking and

attitudes. When they have money, women are able to participate in the family's

economy and this has changed the relationship between men and women.

This theme elaborates Minga's integrated and inclusive approach to gender. The

organization situates gender within the larger social structure and involves both men and

women in their programs. Narratives reveal that women's reproductive, productive

(economic) and social roles are addressed by Minga's multi-pronged projects. In turn, we

see how women are able to gain a sense of agency, which alters traditional gender roles

in these communities.

Increased Family Harmony

I will tell you about my life; before I was a victim of violence and abuse and I

suffered a lot. I didn't know how to live, possibly because I was not educated. I

had been living with my partner for two years when the violence began. He was a

very jealous man and he didn't like me talking to anyone. He thought every man

that talked to me wanted to seduce me. He also thought that I was having sexual

relations with all the men I knew or talked with. In this manner, my abuse and

physical violence continued. I was hit a lot. I was very afraid when he would

drink. My children also felt very scared and would run out of the house. I have

four children – all boys. I received no advice from anybody and I didn't know

where to go or whom to turn to [….] He didn't like it when I stayed here for

several nights during trainings. When I returned from the workshops and

conducted meetings with other women and community members, he slowly began

to help me with some of them. It was then that I began to explain to him what

I had learned at the workshop. But our fights and violence continued. So I talked

to him about how difficult it was for us to continue to live in this manner. I told

him that our children would grow up seeing this and when they grew up they

would behave in the same way. We had many such conversations and he

promised me that he would try to change and be less violent. However the

problems continued and we would still fight and he even threatened to kill our

children. I suggested that we separate and I took all my things and was ready to

leave. Then he said 'where are you going to go….you don't have family here [she

comes from another region]'. He promised that he would change. Now it does not

seem that he had ever been a bad man – violent or jealous. He has changed a lot

and so has my life.

Adela Shapiama, *Promotora*, Santa Cruz Community

Similar narratives emerging from men, women, and children from riverine communities,

as well as members of the Minga team revealed that family-based violence was rampant

in the Amazonian region. As one *promotora* stated "violence is the biggest problem in

the communities." It is common for men to drink and be violent toward their spouses.

Women would fight back, both physically and verbally, and often would vent their anger

and frustration on their children. Most of the participants spoke about how their

association with Minga, be it through training or listening to the radio program or, in

some cases, their interaction with the *promotora* had led to increased family harmony and

had lessened the violence in the homes.

This theme emerged repeatedly in the data. For instance, Adela told us that her husband had now become a new man; as if Minga had "cut his hands and stitched his lips because he didn't hit anymore and didn't say anything bad." However, violent behavior is not easy to stop overnight and Adela explained that, once in a while, her husband still gets angry and slips back into violent behavior. The *promotoras* explained that it had been both a difficult and a slow process, and it was because of their training and increased awareness about their rights that had contributed to this noticeable change.

Promotoras played a vital role in improving their own and other community member's family relationships by stimulating dialogue on such topics. Several women negotiated with their partners by talking about the negative impacts of family-based violence on their children. As Leydis noted: "First I began to talk to my partner during mealtimes. Then when we were in bed I told him that we have kids and it is not good for him to talk to me like this. How can you say such things in front of them? We can't live like this in violence, because of the children. Someday they too will be parents, and do the same."

When possible, *promotoras* served as informal peer counselors in their communities, informing women about their rights and advising couples about the ills of living in violent relationships, particularly the detrimental impact on their children. Juana shared an incident in her community. A young woman was being beaten by her spouse and ran over to Juana's house to seek help. This woman was married to Juana's nephew, and her husband was in such a rage that Juana sought the help of local authorities at that time of the night. She asked that the man be punished for his irresponsible, violent

behavior. The authorities put him in the community jail house[9] (*Calabozá*). After serving his punishment (which required he work on a large farm single handedly), the man seemed to have realized his mistake. Juana noted that the couple is still together and "every time he sees me he says 'thank you *Tia* (Aunt) for helping my relationship and improving things with my wife.'" Clearly, the *promotoras* tread on delicate ground while playing the role of community mediators and counselors. In this case, the abused woman wanted to leave the man after she learned about her rights. Juana had to somehow explain to them that she "was not trying to separate them but instead wanted them to reconcile and live harmoniously." Further, to maintain harmony, she apologized to the couple if she had caused trouble and applauded the man for trying to change his behavior toward his wife. Fortunately, this couple worked things out, although Juana was not sure that everyone could.

Minga's efforts to increase family harmony includes reducing domestic violence and promoting better communication and increased understanding among partners and between children and their parents. As Emira noted: "Minga's training has really helped me to develop as a person and has helped improve my relationship with my family." She added: "Now I see a lot more communication between couples. Before many did not talk and now through talking they have become closer to their spouse." Leydis recounted her story to reinforce this point. She lived with her husband who was a jealous man and often violent toward her. She recalled that after a fight they would often not talk to each for

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[9] Community authorities are called upon to negotiate domestic disputes when they either get very violent or when the couple cannot resolve the issue. In such cases the wrongdoer may be locked up in the (*calabozá*)communal stockade. Receiving such punishment is considered very demeaning and shameful among Amazonian communities (Dean, 1995).

several days. When her community nominated her as a *promotora,* she told us that she "accepted without even asking my husband. I hadn't even talked to him and agreed without asking him. I used to do whatever I wanted." Leydis shared that at the present time she and her husband talked about various things, and often settled their matters with words not blows. This began to happen particularly after her husband began to attend the workshops for men:

> I noticed that he began telling me what he had learned at the workshop – just the way I would tell him things when I returned from a Minga workshop. He changed a lot – for instance he used to say he cared about me only when he wanted to have sex with me, but now he really cared about me. He was changing.

Many other participants also expressed that the degree of physical and verbal violence had decreased in their homes. For instance, 46 year old Mellita Kachique said that previously she would argue a lot with her husband but now she didn't argue as much and didn't respond negatively when her husband was angry. She had learned from the radio program and from Minga's training that "families don't need to live in violence and parents need to show their children how to behave." Now she believed that she and her husband were setting a better example for their children to follow. Similarly Marcelita confessed that previously she would hit or shout at her children whenever she was angry with her husband. She described herself as a "closed person" who didn't want to listen to her husband or to try to reason with him." Minga's workshops gave her a chance to reflect on her behavior and realize how badly it was affecting her children.

Our conversations with men from the community were suggestive of changes occurring in familial relationships. For example, David Macuyama, who lives with

María, a *promotora* from Santa Cruz community, felt that María has changed a lot

and they now "live in a more solid home." He added that "her relationship with the

children has changed totally" as she is no longer violent with them. David vouched their

relationship had evolved and improved over the six years that María had been working as

a *promotora*. Now both partners granted each other the freedom to travel away from the

home and were no longer physically violent toward each other. However, David admitted

that there were still moments when they would fight; but the confrontation was mostly

verbal. Another man from David's community concurred that though violence still exists

in the community, it decreased a lot compared to what it used to be previously. He added

that one of the most important changes that had taken place in his community was the

seemingly increased trust between couples, among parents and children, and within the

community. He stated: "we never had conversations with them [children] but now there is

more trust and we talk. There is also more solidarity within the family and in the

community, and with other communities."

The Minga team felt that through the workshops where women learned of their

rights, and through income generating vocations, which contributed to the quality of

family life, family relations improved over a period of time. According to Kiké, a key

reason why women were abused by their partners was because they were economically

dependent on them; however, now that they were trained in productive skills, these

women were able to earn money and support their families or themselves, lessening their

dependence: "Previously men would say 'without me you will die of hunger' but now the

women who work with Minga are no longer scared as they have learned to survive on

their own."

Nila Mozambité, a regular listener of Bienvenida *Salud,* makes sure she listens to the program regularly with her family. She also frequently writes letters to Minga. She told us that previously her husband would often come at night drunk, cause a scene, be verbally abusive, and scare the children. Nila felt that listening to the radio program had gradually influenced her husband, contributing toward a more peaceful relationship between them and with their children. Nila shared:

> I hear about family violence on the radio and it's good, I like it. It teaches me how to live with my husband. It also teaches us how to treat our children. I like to listen to the program by Minga Perú because it has many good things that we can learn. We began to understand that we should not live the way we used to live before. Now I am listening to things on the radio about other issues. We are changing the way we live here in our house.

In sum, this theme spoke to how familial relations became more harmonious, marked by open communication between spouses and between parents and children. Another important effect of Minga's interventions as supported by the data was the self reported decline in domestic violence. This was corroborated through interviews and group discussions with both men and women in the communities. *Promotoras* played a particularly critical role as peer counselors as they supported women in their efforts to confront domestic abuse.

Gaining a Voice

> The radio program has taught me that I have rights and I can defend myself when someone treats me badly. Now I know that I should not keep quiet. Previously our husbands told us what to do and also to not question things. We didn't know we

had any rights and were always scared. When they [men] hit us, we thought

we needed to be quiet and timid. But now we know better. When my husband

treats me badly or my neighbor does not behave properly with me, I now have to

speak up and defend my rights.

Hilda, a listener from Gallito Community

Many women in the Amazon have gained a "voice" through their association with

Minga's program. Marcelita a *promotora* from San Francisco community poignantly

explained the changes these women had undergone:

As we say, the air doesn't cost anything. We live because the air is free. Now we

know so much more, we value ourselves as women and are so grateful to Minga.

We have high self-esteem, we can talk with other people, we have opinions and

we can talk at community meetings. Before we were not brave enough to talk or

have any opinions, we stayed in our homes, thinking that we were just useful for

serving other people and to make food and nothing else.

Women shared that previously their role was relegated to the domestic sphere but slowly

their presence was now being valued beyond the home. This sentiment was well reflected

in one of the participatory skits put up by the women at the Tambo. It portrayed how

women did not participate in community activities prior to attending Minga's training

sessions. The first act of the skit depicted a community assembly, where the women were

not invited. After the meeting, a group of women approached the local official (a man)

who was chairing the meeting and asked if they too could sign the petition. The official

brushed away this request stating: "they didn't need women's signatures to make a

petition on behalf of the community," and the women left the meeting belittled and

disappointed. The second act of the skit began with a similar community assembly, the only difference being that of the 40 members present, 15 were women. One of the women stood up and told the group how happy they were to be actively participating in community activities. Other women agreed and added that they were happy to be working as equals to men; that they were no longer individuals living on the fringes. The local official commended the women. He had attended Minga's training program and acknowledged that women had rights, and should exercise them (Fieldnotes).

Participating in community building activities strengthened the women's position in the community, making them active stakeholders in community decision-making processes. According to Elsa:

As part of the community I should be able to participate in community meetings and have a say in what is happening in my community. Now I talk at meetings, I tell them what I like and what I don't like. I give my opinion and let people know whether or not I agree with their decisions.

In addition, more active participation in community affairs aided the women financially as they were paid for working in some of the projects (e.g. building a water tank). This income helped them buy food and other essentials for their children, enabling them to both contribute to the well-being of both their community and their families.

At a personal level, it was striking how conversations with the *promotoras* reflected a palpable increase in self-confidence. Kiké explained the process through which women in the Amazon have gained a voice:

> After learning new stuff, women are empowered. They feel that they need to be heard…and are able to say that they are women with rights. They say 'because I know how to work … and can support myself, you have to listen to me.

Promotoras agreed that earlier on, they thought that only men "had a voice and a right to say things" but now they knew better. When asked to share how they had changed as individuals through their association with Minga, all their narratives traced a pattern of personal growth from their previous state of fear and shyness. Each one of them said they had lost their shame or fear using the word *vergüenza* (shame). One of the *promotoras,* Lourdes most eloquently shared her story:

> I was very shy and felt ashamed all the time. I was afraid to stand up and talk in front of people. I used to hide from the others. María [the regional coordinator and trainer] kept urging me to go in front and speak, I used to be so scared I felt the blood was draining out of my body. But that was in the past when I used to come for workshops, now I have the courage to speak in front of people.

In another conversation Lourdes stated: "because of María I have lost my shyness. Now I can talk with people, I am not afraid or scared of people. I have changed a lot and I continue to change every moment." Yet another *promotora* Leydis shared: "before I was shy and ashamed to participate in any event. I was afraid to talk, but after coming to the workshops I have changed. I have stopped being ashamed and now freely give my opinion." Enthused to share the story upon hearing her colleagues express themselves, Elsita stated:

I have learned about self-esteem and I love myself as a person. I feel good

about myself. I am so proud to know all the new things that I never thought I

would learn. I am not shy, not ashamed, not afraid and I can travel alone.

The *promotoras* felt that overcoming shyness and the deep-rooted feeling of fear and shame that they associated with being indigenous and poor women was not easy. Emira, who was only fourteen years old when she became a *promotora*, shared that "It was not easy to participate and to talk with all the Señoritas. I was very afraid because I thought people would make fun of me and say that I was not talking well." Emira's father like several men in the communities didn't think she was capable of learning or teaching anything as she was "just a woman." However Emira continued to attend training sessions as she gained encouragement and confidence. She recounted: "Slowly I grew up. After two years of receiving training as a *promotora* I told my father that I wanted to study [further]. I told him that if I did not study I would be nothing and would have no hope for the future." Emira joined a school and rowed her balsa boat two hours each way on a daily basis in her quest to seek education.

Women also were able to speak up within the domestic sphere. Juana recounted her own journey of gaining a voice: "I had been quiet all my life." We learned that her relationship with her spouse lacked dialogue and she would keep things to herself. The situation grew worse when she began to receive training from Minga and would return home wishing to talk about "[their] life together and the problems [they] had as a couple." Her husband wanted her to stop attending the workshops but she insisted and even mustered the courage to say "I would rather lose you than lose out on my training." She emphasized that she was committed to attending the workshops session not just

because she was learning about her rights but also because she was "learning about our value as women."

Reflecting about his experiences working with Minga over several years, Kiké told us, "The women and Minga have taught me a lot. I have learned that women have a right to speak and to be heard and that their opinions need to be heard." After learning about their rights and knowing that they were equal to men the *promotoras* were able to speak up for themselves. As Nelida Pizango Huaratapairo a *promotora* from Santa Fé pointed out: "Before we thought we couldn't speak up for ourselves even when we were hit by our husbands. Now it is different."

Another area in which women "gained a voice" was with respect to making more informed reproductive choices. For instance, Ofelia a listener from Gallito community told us that her grandmother had 19 children, while her mother had nine, and she had three "one is 11 years old and the other is 3, my third child died and I don't want anymore" asserted Ofelia. Her friend Lucinda, commended the radio program "for providing important information to these young mothers" on issues such as birth control and pre-natal care during pregnancy. Women's narratives suggested that though the region is characterized by high fertility rates, the information and training made available to these women may have helped women to exercise more control over their biology. Another instance of women making reproductive decisions was this letter from a listener from the Itaya riverine community which read:

> I also want to tell you that I have four children and I have decided along with my husband that I do not want to have any more children. I am taking care of myself using a family planning method from the health center near by.

However, in some cases, women decided to have more children after their association with Minga. A case in point – after learning about her reproductive rights, Adela Shapiama decided to make the choice of having another child. So after a long gap, Adela had her fourth child. This was her way of asserting that she had control over her own reproductive decisions.

Contextualizing the high fertility rates in the Amazon region, Luis González, co-founder and director of Minga explained the social pressures that lead to women having several children. According to González, high fertility rates exist in the region not merely because of the lack of birth control information and services but also because women tend to want more children as they feel this will make the men more "fulfilled" and happy. Similarly men feel the women are under their care if they have more children and aspire to be men whose "wives are full of children." Men also feel that women are less likely to leave them for another man if they have had several children together. As we discuss this, Luis laughed and added that this was not a feminist interpretation but something that he has observed first hand having lived and worked in the Amazon for over a decade.

Children become a reason to stay on in relationships, as it becomes a more complex decision to leave a man who has fathered several of your children. Further, women fear losing their children if they do decide to leave or complain about domestic abuse. Consider the case of Leydis who married her husband when she was only 15 and was somehow coping with a very violent marriage. Her husband was a jealous man, and would constantly be suspecting that his wife was having affairs. In the second year of being trained as a *promotora*, she got fed up with her situation and told her husband "I

don't want to continue with this kind of life and even though I have several children I will leave you." Previously her husband would keep telling her that "if you complain about me [to the local authorities] I will leave you and take the children away." And Leydis was scared to complain. No longer.

In sum, this theme illustrated how women gained the confidence to speak up and assert themselves within their homes and communities. They overcame timidity and were able to resist domestic abuse, expressing themselves at community meetings and making informed choices. In sum they "gained a voice" both at symbolic and physical levels.

From Being Passive to Protagonistas

We participate in various activities in the community. In my community there is a lot of violence and I have always provided support to the woman who was being hit…..I really like to support and advice people who are living with violence, because that is not a good life and I wouldn't like to live in that way. I put myself in the place of the women and think how I would feel if I was her. Now in my community I am considered an authority. I like to know the problems my community is facing so that I can be a part of the solution.

Elsa Ahuanari, *Promotora,* San Antonio Community

The transcripts suggest that people's exposure to and involvement with Minga activities – the radio program, training sessions, as well the community level training (*replicas)* conducted by the *promotoras* – had resulted in an increased awareness of women's rights, helping promote a sense of equality between men and women. As these quotes from Emira, Martha Luz, Adriana, and Rosa, illustrate. Emira noted: "Before I began working with Minga I thought women were just women and they had no rights, but now I know

we women have rights." Martha Luz noted: "I now know that I have the right to work. I can do whatever work I want to. We can do any work just like men." Adriana stated: Before the men were supreme and the women were nothing [uses the term *nada* in Spanish] and we had no rights. But things have changed now and women can take up leadership positions. Rosa added: "Before the men gave us no importance, they didn't care about us. They thought we should just stay at home and felt we didn't know anything. We had no value in their eyes. But now things have changed. Men now recognize our value.

While women clearly had learned that they had rights equal to men, men too had slowly realized this. For example in a letter to the radio program dated September 23, 2003 Robert Tamani Nashnate from San Jose de Sarapanga wrote:

> I want to tell you that before I believed that being a man I had more rights on account of my gender, but afterwards I changed my mind when the community *promotoras* gave a talk about human rights. Now I am aware that we all have the same human rights, women as well as men.

Women's ability to play football (i.e. soccer), a man's game, was a powerful symbolic expression of them being no less than men. Ofelia from Gallito told us: "now we have the right to play football, just like the men. We have two teams now one men's and one women's." A *promotora* recalled "when we were small if our parents saw us playing football they would hit us and tell us to go inside and clean the dishes. Now both boys and girls play football." Juana, another *promotora* laughed and noted that the men would comment about the *promotoras* saying "who are these women who have taught the little girls to play football like men?" Football is a very popular sport in Latin America and is a

source of entertainment and a site of community organizing. When I visited small

riverine communities, I noticed all of them, without fail, had an open space with two goal

posts – the community football ground (see Figure 4.5). In some communities there was

no walkway connecting the village to the local school but there was always a football

field. In the late afternoon, men and youth (both male and female) would come out to

play. I noticed that football jersey's of various international teams (Brazil, Italy, and

Perú) were very popular among men and boys (Fieldnotes).

It was not easy for women claim their rights because their primary role continued

to be seen as being mothers, homemakers and caregivers. Amazonian communities

undervalued women, believing they couldn't work in the fields as much as men and could

at best look after the house and raise children. They didn't think they were strong enough

to do hard labor and smart enough to learn new skills. Parents preferred to have sons as

they perceived them as being able to do harder labor and didn't have to worry about them

getting pregnant. Emira noted how she and her sisters tried to break this stereotype:

> That is why we worked like boys, helped with the farming and everything else ….
>
> When my father was building our house we would go with him to the hills to cut
>
> the leaves of the *palmera* plant. We helped him cut the leaves, carry them back,
>
> paddle the canoe and then lay the roof. We wanted to prove that we could do the
>
> work just like the boys.

The workshops that Minga undertook for men and local (male) officials were key in

sensitizing them about women's rights and gender equality and, gradually, helped

overcome the steeply entrenched male resistance. As things began to change around

them men, over time, became more accepting of women making decisions within the

household, and began to be more accepting of women's participation in community activities. A *promotora's* spouse described how his wife's role had changed in his community: "Now the village values her and the community respects her a lot. Everybody – the old and the young say hello to her and wish her good morning or good evening. At meetings her opinion is respected in front of the whole village."

Presently women are increasingly accepted in local leadership positions in the Perúvian Amazon and have taken up leadership roles in their community. Over time, they have gained respect among community members, and participate in community decisions. Kiké shed light on the transformed role of some women in the communities:

Now some *promotoras* are considered as authorities. They have achieved what we were looking for. They are now *protagonistas* (protagonists) in making community decisions. Her role has risen and grown, she is considered an important person in her community today. I want to tell you that now, if an inhabitant of a community wants some help from Minga, then the request document needs to have the signature of the *promotora* as well as the authorities. Before she was trained, the *promotora* would be sitting in her house, hidden from her community. But now she is working and occupies a prominent position in the community, she is no longer waiting around for a man to come and tell her what to do.

Leydis a *promotora* from San Francisco added to this:

When we began as *promotoras* a lot of people talked very badly about us and didn't give us opportunities. They felt we were silly people and didn't know

anything and hence had nothing to teach. Slowly they began to realize that we

did in fact know something and have started respecting us.

According to some of the *promotoras,* the *replicas* (replications of meetings they

underwent at the Tambo) that they conducted in their communities were responsible in

part for their community acceptance. Minga requires that after every training session the

promotoras return to their communities and hold a training session for women and other

community members where they share the skills they have learned. These community

training sessions are called "*replicas*" as the *promotoras* replicate the training they

received. As one *promotora* Marcelita "the replicas confirmed to the people that I am

doing something useful, now they know I am not wasting time."

Having gained a voice and the ability to express their opinions, many women

found it easier to participate in community activities and become both peer counselors

and agents of change within their communities. As Nelida, a *promotora* stated: "I was

shy and ashamed to speak up. That's why I never participated in meetings. I would hide if

someone asked me something. But now I have changed and actively take part in

community work." Adela stated: "I think I am capable to do things. I feel I can teach

people what I have learned." In similar vein Juana, another *promotora,* noted: "Now I

feel I am a person with responsibility. Before I used to only stay at home, but now I have

responsibilities in my community." Kiké aptly described how these women who were

previously silent onlookers have become key community mobilizers: "I saw women were

knocking on doors and talking to people in their community in order to garner support for

their projects. This had never happened before my eyes."

According to Kiké, more and more riverine communities are now ready to accept women as authorities and leaders in their communities: "it wasn't that the women offered to become leaders, it was their community that proposed that they became leaders. It was obvious to them that they were knowledgeable and learning useful things." In some communities when the local officials were traveling they would ask women to take charge of things in their absence. In one case the *Teniente Gobernador*, the highest official in the community was away and the community members asked the local *promotora* to represent him at the meeting, as the "*interim teniente*."

Promotoras shared that they saw gender roles slowly but surely changing in their communities. Women were gradually taking on community level responsibilities. This change can in part be attributed to Minga's sustained efforts. The awareness raising activities among men and women have helped the community members to realize that women have equal rights. Further, Minga's skill development and income generation activities have enabled women to become economically productive, thus contributing to their increased agency and bargaining power. Another contributing factor to an increased sense of community may lie in the socio-historical context of the Amazon region where people have lived under the control and domination of either religious groups or commercial bosses. Women and children, in particular have been exploited over years as slaves for domestic service. The present time period is the first time that people in the Peruvian Amazon have lived among equals as equals. Hence, there is a deep desire to promote equality and live in harmony and mutual respect.

Women of the Peruvian Amazon have also gained in confidence by effectively carrying out community level projects. While there are not very many non-profit

organizations working in this area, and the women continue to refer to themselves as

the "forgotten women of the Amazon," the local government now recognizes women as

active and valued community members. Consider this case in San Antonio community:

> We are trying to construct a water tank in an elevated place in our community and
>
> women are participating in this project. It is mostly women who are doing
>
> everything to build the water tank. Since it is the women who carry water from
>
> the river to their homes, they are the ones who are most interested in seeing the
>
> project completed.

As a way of making women more self-reliant and to slowly do away with the role of the

external engineer, Minga trained a small group of women as "technicians." According to

María who has been trained as a technician, their job entails helping others to build fish

farms. They begin with assessing the suitability of the land and then go on to collect all

the raw materials and oversee the actual construction. Fishing is both an integral part of

their culture and a lucrative source of income and food. Traditionally men would go out

to fish and women would mostly, cook and preserve the fish, though some said they

would occasionally help with the fishing. Consider Rosa's account:

> María [the *promotora*] invited me to the community meeting. At the meeting
>
> María asked us if we wanted to work in the fish farm in our community. We
>
> talked about the problems that existed between men and women and we decided
>
> to have a fish farm exclusively for women. We thought that even women could
>
> have a fish farm and it wasn't as if only men could run a fish farm. So we got
>
> together a core group of interested and began our own fish farm. Until then only
>
> men had worked on fish farms. Our children helped us too and now we have our

own fish farm. The men continue with theirs and we have ours, they see that ours is doing well and want to work even harder on theirs. They joke about how we are winning because our fish are doing well.

Figure 4.8. Maria, Rosa and Adriana standing in front of their fish farm.

Women appeared to have gained respect and recognition in their communities in their new role as "technical experts" an area that was previously exclusively a male domain. Women even provided advice and guidance to men on how to run fish farms. The draw of the equations was changing.

For the Minga women, being accepted as a community leader was a slow process and came with its own tribulations. Emira's experience captures the gradual process of acceptance. Few women would attend local meetings held by officials as nobody really valued them and many men would be busy and would not attend meetings. Yet Emira made it a point to be present at all the meetings. Her commitment to the community and

her sense of responsibility helped impress the authorities. She laughed remembering how "the authorities were surprised that in spite of being a woman I was present where as many men were absent. They would joke and say you are better than the men." She set an example for the other women by her continued presence and enthusiasm and ultimately the authorities began to recognize her presence and with time other women also began to come to the meeting.

While conversing with a group of *promotoras* they stridently shared how they had previously never participated in community decisions but now that they were *promotoras* they were invited to attend meetings and their opinions were valued. One of the women, stated: "before nobody trusted women so they never had meetings with women, mostly men participated in the meetings. Now just women can hold meetings for other women or they can lead meetings with both men and women." *Promotoras* are now looked at by the community as a "kind of authority" and always asked to give their opinions at community meetings. Further, the authorities feel women are often times more responsible than the men so they want women to participate more and take on more responsibilities.

In sum, this theme highlighted how women became active in community work, playing important roles as community facilitators and gradually taking on community leadership roles. They began to spearhead several community based activities such as organizing meetings, sharing information and skills and leading women in building fish farms. Promotoras shared how the community looked up to them and appreciated the work they were doing. However this also came with the community having high expectations of them and wanting these women to take on more responsibility than they could manage.

Struggles, Resistance and Conflict

> The *promotoras* began to realize that they could not let their husbands beat them
>
> anymore, so they began to talk back and resist the beatings. Often this led to more
>
> fighting and violence among couples. Everyone used to say that because of Minga
>
> all this has happened, the men blamed us for spoiling their wives.
>
> Everly Egoavil, Co-ordinator *Bienvenida Salud*

Initially, as one would expect, Minga's efforts to promote women's rights in the region

was met with a lot of resistance from the community. Women recalled how they

previously lived "with their eyes closed." Now they were open. This awareness and

consequent assertion of rights instigated violence within several families. There were

men who did not like their wives and families listening to the radio program as they

viewed the program as corrupting their previously submissive wives. However, with time

and after listening to the program themselves, and also attending Minga's male

involvement workshops, many of them began to take an interest in Minga's programs.

Unintended consequences such as the initial increase in domestic violence usually

follow a temporal order. With the passage of time, as women gain in power, the levels of

domestic violence may decrease and even level out (such an undulating trend was, for

instance, characteristic of sexual harassment cases in the United States). As Chambers

(1998) points out, "for gender equity, much that needs to change concerns the power and

priority of males over females…[and] conflict can be an essential and creative factor in

change for the better"(p. xviii). However, for women to gain equal power does not mean

that men lose. Men gain by living less violent lives and enjoying more harmonious and

productive relationships (Chambers, 1998).

The Minga team looks back and sees the increased violence in certain households as a consequence of Minga's intervention as "teething trouble." Not deterred, they continued in their efforts, trying even harder to raise awareness about the value of what they were doing. The women too did not give up. In one case, there was a *promotora* whose husband didn't like the radio program and blamed it for making her "talk back to him." One day when he heard the radio playing he threw it on the floor and broke it, so she couldn't listen to the program any more. But the woman continued to listen to the program. She would go to the neighbor's house to listen to the program and she continued to write in to the program sharing her story (E. Egoavil, personal conversation, July 16, 2005).

The community did not immediately accept the *promotoras* as leaders and often many hurdles were posed to deter their participation in community activities. When women began to attend community meetings, the men would sneer and make comments such as "from when have women started to come to our assemblies?" The men and community authorities took time to realize that women were more than being a "*mama de casa*" (the local term used for a homemaker, it literally means the mother of the house). In several locations, male members of the communities continued to perceive women as ignorant and not worthy of any role outside the *casa*. Some women too opposed the changes that were going on in the community. Luis González recalled how it was women who spread all sorts of rumors about the *promotoras* saying things like "I saw her wearing high heels and all made up."

Additionally, the *promotoras'* spouses didn't like their wives going away for weeklong trainings. In Kiké's words:

These women have made many sacrifices; they encountered many family

problems and faced a lot of pressure from their spouses and communities. I would

go to the community and the husbands would be so mad with me. But with time

they began to understand what we were doing. They realized that what they were

hearing was pure gossip.

Leydis described the struggles she encountered:

The first time we had a meeting about violence in the community nobody came,

they didn't want to listen to the *promotoras*. But we continued doing more

meetings and we began talking about violence and all other things, then some men

started asking us 'how and why we were trying to be just like them?' How can

you be equal to men? Men thought we were trying to be more than them and that

we were teaching very bad things to their wives. The *promotoras* kept saying that

we have equal rights, and we were not trying to be more than men, we said we

were equals and there should be equality between men and women. It was not

easy to convince the men, there is so much *machismo*, they continued saying that

we were learning stupid things in the workshop and my husband got really angry.

We had a big fight and hit each other, but as time passed I continued attending

meetings and the violence lessened. In the community sometimes they tell our

husbands that we are not really coming here [Tambo] to learn but to find men and

lovers, they say we come here and drink and go to the disco.

Clearly, being *promotoras* and traveling to the training center was not easy for these

women. Most of the women's spouses were unwilling to let them travel to attend

workshops and many had young children who needed parental attention. For instance,

Rosmila did not face opposition from her husband but she herself was hesitant to

leave her children and household responsibilities; she worried about who would do the

cooking while she was away and how her children would be fed. Elsa, a *promotora* from

San Antonio, also noted that is was difficult for her to leave her home and family to

attend the workshops. She noted that people thought she "was being lazy and wanting to

avoid housework by going away." People in her community thought she was wasting her

time and not really doing or learning anything. They would make the *promotoras* feel bad

by telling them that they didn't even receive any money as compensation for their work.

They were trying to drum up support to hinder women's involvement in Minga's

activities.

Several *promotoras* shared that their husbands had strongly opposed their

attending the training sessions. In some cases, such as Juana's, her husband was resistant

because the power dynamics within the community and more so in the home were being

transformed. Although men initially welcomed the idea of their wives being trained, once

they realized they were learning that they had equal rights and were taking on new –

sometimes more assertive –roles, the men attempted to regain their previous status as the

one's in-charge and in control:

> Yes, he supported me [to become a *promotora*] in the beginning but when he saw
>
> me trying to fix and improve our life and take part in other things he didn't like it.
>
> He always wanted to be the one who managed things and made decisions…then
>
> he began to tell me that I could go only if he wanted me to.

In some cases the resistance manifested as jealousy. Adela recalled how her husband did

not like her spending nights out and when she returned from the workshops. He would

not let her into their bed till she bathed and cleansed herself thoroughly because he was convinced that she was with other men while she was away. Luis González explained that the jealousy on the part of the husbands was largely a result of the "transformations that have taken place in their lives and their society." Earlier on women stayed at home and did not take part in community work and it was only the men who traveled out of the community. Now the women were taking charge of community projects and traveling to other cities such as Nauta, Iquitos, Cuzco and in some cases also visiting other countries. The men felt the women were moving beyond "their control." Further, they feared their "male image" would be hurt when others saw them sitting at home and looking after the children. According to González, jealousy and suspicions were common among Amazonian men but these feelings increased with the gender transformations taking place locally, often at home. In several instances, women would return home from the workshop and be beaten and bruised by their spouses as "being violent was the only way men could restore their 'good' image in the society" (Fieldnotes).

The case of Everina is particularly telling about how men felt pressured to exhibit control by expressing their displeasure publicly. Minga had organized an exchange program for *promotoras* and Everina was selected to attend the program in the Andean town of Cuzco. The team asked her husband for permission to allow her to travel and attend the program and he agreed thanking the organization for giving such an opportunity to his wife. Further, he went and hunted some animals and sold the meat to give her some additional money to spend on the road. However, when Everina returned from the trip she saw a very different side of her husband. He beat her and shouted at her

very loudly- making sure that people in the community heard him. The next day, to Everina's surprise, he was back to his earlier self and was happy with her and asked about her trip and wanted to see the pictures she had taken.

Men would make fun of the *promotora's* spouse for allowing their wives to go off on their own leaving them to look after the house and children. This put pressure on the men to publicly prove they were "men." Consider the example of David who considers himself to be a supportive spouse and says he cooks and takes care of the children when his wife María goes to Tambo to attend workshops. However, David has faced ridicule and mockery from his community members. People tried to tell him that María is cheating on him and will soon find another partner. It was hard for him to listen to these comments and it made him angry and violent at times but he tries to not let it bother him, telling himself that with time people get tired of saying things.

The resistance and fear about women leaving their homes had some basis in the case of San Francisco community where one of the *promotoras* who was an adolescent ran away from the training center to meet her boyfriend and ended up returning to her community pregnant with his child. This incident led the community to become further resistant toward the training programs as they believed the women were going there "just to meet men." Consequently, this young woman gave up being a *promotora* and the community needed to nominate a new *promotora*. Leydis who accepted her community's nomination recalled how she was not their first choice "they chose many women but no one wanted to become a *promotora* because they were scared of their husbands." According to Emira, one of the younger *promotoras* (now 21 years old) who is still single, most of the other single promotoras either got pregnant or found a partner and

gave up being *promotoras*. She told us that in her community it was common to find a partner and start having children by the time girls were 14 or 15 years old. Members of her community wonder how she has managed to stay single for so long. The incident where the *promotora* ran away from the training center and got pregnant was not easily forgotten. This cast a shadow of suspicion on all the women as the fathers and the spouses of *promotoras* feared their daughters or wives were meeting men and carrying on illicit relations while attending the workshop. Emira who became a *promotora* when she was only 14 years old recalled how her family feared she would "go the wrong way" and come back pregnant like the other girls who left the community. She proved them wrong.

Younger *promotoras* faced even more resistance and were not taken seriously by the elders. Emira shared how the community and her family would try to undermine her role as a *promotora*: "when I came back from the training the authorities would say 'what are you going to teach me? You are so young.' They would say 'I saw you when you were born, what can you teach me?'" It was an uphill task for Emira to deal with her community members and her family. She witnessed a lot of violence in her family and when she tried to explain to her father that it was not a desirable way of living he got angry. Emira recalled: "my father was offended and said 'now you are trying to teach your father what to do.'"

Women also faced resistance as they worked toward reducing domestic violence in their communities. Leydis gained instant unpopularity with the men in her community and her husband's family when she complained to the local officials about his violent behavior. Though the officials punished her husband by putting him in the community

jailhouse (*calabozá)* for a day, in the eyes of the men she had gravely erred. The

promotoras also tread on precarious ground when they intervene in interspousal affairs.

Juana a *promotora* from San Jose de Sarapanga said her husband didn't appreciate her

playing the role of a community counselor and got annoyed if her work took up too much

time from the household work. So, at times, she gave advice to other women while

cooking. Many a times when *promotoras* would walk into a home and try to stop a

couple from fighting they were insulted by the men and told not to interfere. Often times

in an intoxicated state the men would not be in a state to reason and did not like a woman

telling them what to do. For instance, in Emira's case:

> One day my father hit my mother and I wanted to defend her. He told me I was
>
> trying to be his equal and he didn't like me interfering in their private matters.
>
> Then he said I wasn't his daughter anymore. I was very sad and felt very belittled
>
> and lower than the rest of my siblings.

Being a *promotora* is no easy task. For one, the women are expected to be role models

and are expected to exhibit exemplary behavior and the community closely observes their

behavior with their spouse and children. As Juana put it "I cannot behave like I did

before, I have to be different. I need to be like a model for women in my community."

Male community members had high expectations of these women, as a local authority in

Santa Cruz explained:

> The *promotoras* role is necessary in the community but she has to practice what
>
> she knows at every moment and in every respect. The people in the community
>
> see her behavior and model theirs after her, so she needs to practice what she

teaches. The promotoras here are not always practicing what they know and

do not always show the responsibility they should be showing.

Not only did the men set high standards for these women but they believed that they (the

men) practiced what they had learned at the workshops, making them better community

models and members than the women (Fieldnotes).

Women bore the brunt of these high expectations. For instance Nelida from Santa

Fé pointed out they always need to "attend to the community" and that *promotoras*

"cannot be selfish, we cannot gossip, we have to be an example for the community and if

there is a problem we have to fix it." Recently when a clock was stolen from the school in

her community, Nelida had to intervene. The teacher was blaming the children and was

hitting them. So she went and spoke to the director of the school. Consequently the

teacher was reprimanded and he agreed to not behave in this fashion again. Previously,

nobody did anything when such things happened but now as *promotoras* these women

felt duty bound to intervene. At times the *promotoras* felt their mandate was too broad,

the community gave them too many responsibilities, and yet were very critical of what

they did. As one *promotora* stated: "they try to give us all the responsibilities and think

because we are *promotoras* and have been trained we can do everything…sometimes

they get angry with us for not wanting to take on more responsibility."

Though men in the Perúvian Amazon are increasingly treating women as equals

they are still sensitive and easily angered by women who "try to be more than or better

than men and attempt to dominate them." An incident in Santa Cruz community

highlighted this sentiment. Santa Cruz community is the closest to the Tambo Training

center and is thus often visited by the Minga team and volunteers (and researchers such

as myself). When we visited the community and held a focus group discussion with

the men they pointed out that they appreciated visitors taking the time to come and visit

them but would have preferred to have received "a letter from Minga informing them

about authorizing the visit." When we told them that we had sent word through the

promotora they reiterated that they would like the "information in writing" to the

"authority" referring to the male local leader - an elected official who was part of the

local governance. They expressed that they wanted to plan their time and if they knew

about visits well in advance they could extend further hospitality but the underlying

suggestion/sentiment seemed to be that they also wanted the order maintained and wanted

us to follow the "official" system and structure in the community. This served as a

reminder that while the *promotoras* were considered to be "like authorities," the power

still did reside in the hands of men who were considered "*la autoridades*" or the

authorities (Fieldnotes).

In summary, the theme on "struggles, resistance and conflict," suggests that

establishing new roles for women in a male dominated society is often faced with

immense resistance. But as these narratives support, with commitment and persistence

change can occur over time.

I present an overview of the findings from this chapter in the final chapter, where

I discuss the implications of my research in relation to theory-praxis of alternative

communication for social change.

Chapter Five: Discussion

One of the disturbing truths that guided my work as a scholar-practitioner of communication and social change has been the vast differences between the third of the world who have so much and the two-third who have so little and continue to struggle with poverty, malnourishment, ill-health, and lack of education. Sadly, in spite of advances in all spheres of human life such as medicine, transportation, technology, and science, the majority of the world continues to suffer from hunger, poverty, and disease on a daily basis. Needless to say the status quo is not desirable, yet changing things, though possible, has historically been and continues to be an uphill struggle. Somewhere and somehow those of us involved in human development have not always got things right. Though human suffering and inequality form the basis of development work, this dissertation is not a story of suffering, it is not a dissection of what development communicators and planners did wrong, it is not an elaboration of how people differently situated from ourselves live their lives.

This study focused on how social change can take place and what role might communication play in this enterprise. Minga's work is testimony to how development work can be re-envisioned and how development workers can be advocates for social change when they organizationally and individually internalize what they are promoting. Finally, it is a celebration of the human spirit that is resilient amidst adversity and can reach its full potential with a little impetus.

I began this research in the Perúvian Amazon hoping to seek a better understanding of how we can communicate issues of health, gender and human rights more efficaciously. I was also interested to hear community members or project

beneficiaries' perspectives on why they choose to respond to and become engaged with certain social change initiatives. Further more, I wanted to learn about how socially and geographically marginalized women could be reached by communication-centered projects. I specifically focused on exploring (1) Minga Perú's approach to communication for social change and its distinguishing communicative practices; (2) the social, material and physical context in which Minga works and how contexts intersect with and influence communication practices; and, (3) the intersections between gender and communication for social change efforts and how gender is positioned within Minga' Perú's framework.

Through my findings I highlight several important ideas that concurrently contribute to creating meaningful social change. These ideas build into what can be considered an "alternative" model of communication for social change: a model that is grounded in lived realities, where beneficiaries find a way to create spaces that subvert the dominant hegemonic discourse. My findings suggest that an alternative vision entails re-thinking how development and communication for social change have traditionally been understood and enacted. The alternative vision is one of a people-centered, gender based, relational and localized model of social change. In my opinion, Minga serves as a unique case in communication for social change practices particularly because it merges tenets of two influential movements – participation and gender. Though they are two distinct movements, they have considerable overlap and are grounded in ideas of social transformation and inclusion leading to equality and empowerment. This dissertation provides an understanding of how both participation and gender can be simultaneously mainstreamed into communication for social change practices. Furthermore, participatory

efforts have often oversimplified the nature of communities, taking them to be

homogenous groups, thus obscuring hierarchies and differences within communities.

Gender among other factors such as age, ability and class has been overlooked by such a

partial understanding of community. Minga works to demystify communities, focusing

on those most marginalized within communities i.e. the women and adolescents. As Guijt

and Shah (1998) stress:

> Equitable participatory development requires explicit attention to gender
>
> relations. This, in turn, can only be effective if based on a sound understanding of
>
> the dynamics of power, the nature of conflicts and conflict reolution, and the
>
> process of social change. (p. 13)

Herein, lies Minga's unique contribution to communication for social change.

In this concluding chapter of my dissertation, I will reflect on my findings and

elaborate on how they may enrich the existing state of knowledge, and also inform future

communication for social change efforts. Further, I reflect on how gender issues can be

mainstreamed within communication efforts. I begin by providing a brief overview of my

research findings and discussing the implications for theory and praxis. The chapter ends

with a discussion of some of the limitations of the study and future research steps.

Revisiting the Findings

Distinguishing Communication Practices

My first research question asked: *What communication for social change practices does Minga employ as they engage with community members and what are some of the distinguishing aspects of Minga's approach?* Four broad themes emerged as a response to the questions I posed.

The first theme highlights how Minga understands communication as being central in social change efforts. This is a reversal in thinking about how communication has been traditionally understood. It repositions communication from the margins of development work to the very core.

People are discriminated against through communicative acts and communication forms the basis of renegotiating power and creating more equitable structures and systems. Minga Perú understands its role as facilitating the creation of "communicative spaces" where men and women are encouraged to express themselves in multiple ways. Some of these expressions are in the private sphere, when they discuss their new roles with their spouses; others are more public -- such as when men and women's stories are shared on the radio program or when audience members appeal to local officials. Women are also trained to produce handicrafts such as knitted clothes or embroidered bags which depict their dreams. These artistic expressions too are communicative acts where indigenous knowledge and culture are promoted and re-valued.

The second theme elaborates how the working ethos of Minga Perú is one of equality and care (*cariño* in Spanish). Hierarchy is done away with as much as possible and team members treat one another with mutual respect and care. For instance, the

younger and newer members of the radio production team feel free to provide

suggestions (or criticisms) to Everly, who manages the program, or Doña Rosita, an

octogenarian who plays one of the lead characters on the radio program. Similarly, the

community members are treated respectfully and well taken care of when they spend time

at the Tambo, Minga's residential training center located near the riverside town of

Nauta. Peoples' feelings are considered an important aspect of the organization's day to

day work and the team members describe their internal communication as being

horizontal. The team share a close personal relationship among each other and with the

community members. During my field visits to the communities the relational aspect of

the organization was evident in the interactions between Minga team members and

community members.

The third theme centered on how the local realities and needs are influential in

shaping Minga's ground-based actions. The radio program, *Bienvenida Salud* is produced

by a local team that is familiar with the region's customs and language. The stories are

relevant and real as they draw upon audience inputs. Listeners of the program feel it is a

realistic portrayal of their lives and respond to it favorably because it deals with familiar

problems in their community such as domestic violence or early pregnancy. Listeners

also appreciate the fact that the program uses local accents, background sounds, and

commonly understood colloquial expressions.

The final theme highlighted how Minga Perú's agenda is co-constructed with and

by the people. The *promotoras* are nominated by the communities themselves and take

back to the community the ideas and skills they have learned at Minga's workshops.

These women play important roles in their communities and are consciously referred to

as *promotora comunitaria* as they represent Minga in the communities and remind

people of the organization's people-centered commitment. Minga looks to the community

for inputs and direction and as co-founder Eliana Elías stresses "the agenda of the

program must be decided by the people, their needs and their realities." In this sense,

Minga privileges the community members' views and realities in shaping its activities.

For instance, the women from the communities suggested that they be trained in certain

income generation activities such as knitting and managing fish farms. After an initial

wave of increased incidences of domestic violence the women themselves suggested that

things may improve if the men too were trained and sensitized about the topical areas that

women were being trained in. As a consequence, Minga began to work with men too.

Further, Minga strives to build on the communities existing strengths such as locally-

available food and drink, natural remedies, and handicraft and fishing skills.

Participants' Perceptions of Their Lived Realities

The second research question asked: *How do the participants perceive,*

experience and co-share the material and physical context they live in and what do their

narratives and sketches reveal about the lived realities of the Perúvian Amazon? Five

themes emerged as I sought to understand how participants perceived their context. Their

narratives helped me make sense of the research context and provided me with a deeper

understanding of how community members lived and related to one another, what they

valued and how they defined themselves and their surroundings. As my understanding of

the local context developed I was able to more clearly see how Minga's vision and

activities were grounded in and influenced by the "local."

The first theme spoke to how participants in the present research project shared a strong sense of community. They considered the notion of unity and having good relations with each other as being fundamental to a community. As community members, they expected to be treated as equals, contributing to community work, and collaborating to meet its goals. The community members were also united by the fact that they, for the large part, shared a similar socio-economic status – one steeped in poverty. Furthermore, human rights were understood as situated practices enacted, protected or denied within and by communities.

The next theme elaborated how the physical remoteness of the Amazon region results in limited access to health facilities and institutions of higher education. Communities had limited connectivity to mass media (depending on their physical location) and other communication channels like telephones. Most of these communities did not have electricity either. Community members repeatedly pointed out the importance of the river and the river boats that ferry passengers across the numerous tributaries of the Amazon as the only means of transportation. The river was their connection to the world. Participants also emphasized how the community pedestrian walkway played a vital role in connecting the different parts of the community and providing access to places such as the school or the local health post.

The third theme elaborated on the various ways in which the region's rich natural resource "provides" for its people. People in this region do not typically have stable jobs or fixed incomes; they fish and farm for their survival. Daily meals comprise local fish caught from the river and fruits and vegetables grown in the farms. The surplus produce or catch is sold and provides the people with additional income to buy other

commodities. Nature was portrayed as being close to peoples' hearts and central in their lives. Participants frequently directed our attention to the fish, the fruit trees, and the various root and plantain plants that formed an important part of their diets.

The fourth theme spoke to the paradoxical and contradictory aspects of the material resources of the region: for instance the river is a source of food and transportation but was also the reason behind their physical isolation. Although the Amazonians depend on natural resources for their daily sustenance and nature has provided for them in most cases, their overdependence on nature could also become a bane when the fish are in short supply, or the tide is high, or their crops have a poor yield. Not having a fixed source of income resulted in people not having money, when needed, to buy essential food or medical supplies and hence was perceived as a major challenge. Nevertheless, the material benefits of learning income generating skills through Minga's workshops motivated women to participate in Minga' training programs.

The fifth theme elaborated on the specific challenges faced by youth and adolescents in the Amazonia, including unemployment, lack of opportunities for higher education, and teenage pregnancies. Those who were fortunate or committed enough to pursue higher education had to move out for higher studies and then had to eventually move out permanently as they couldn't find suitable jobs if they returned to the community. Thus, education was seen as a gateway for better futures and yet a vector of alienation with the community.

Minga's Influence on Local Gender Roles

The third research question asked: *How do Minga's efforts enable or constrain gender equality and how are gender roles, norms, hierarchies and relationships affected and altered?*

Five broad themes emerged as I tried to understand how men and women who were part of Minga's ambit related to one another, and how, possibly, they were beginning to take on new roles and behaviors.

The first theme spoke to how Minga Perú understands and approaches the construct of gender. Gender is viewed as inter-related with other forms of discrimination such as indigenous status, lack of education, and poverty. So women are marginalized in multiple ways in the Amazon. In addition, Minga addresses the broader social and community structures within which gender-based differences manifest themselves. Minga encourages women to learn income generating skills as economic agency tends to affect women's agency in general and can alter traditional gender roles.

The second theme elaborated on how, in overall terms, domestic relationships may have improved. Participants involved with Minga's activities noted that family violence, both physical and verbal, had decreased and that they were now communicating more effectively with their partners and children. Promotoras began to discuss the ill effects of domestic violence with their spouses and served as informal peer counselors to abused women in their community. Men and women described how they had begun to understand and trust one another more and were open to discussing issues among themselves instead of resorting to violence. A heightened awareness of women's rights

among both men and women in conjunction with women's independence, increased

self-esteem, and income generation helped contribute to such changes in the domestic

sphere.

The third theme spoke to how women who previously were silent and believed

that they had no rights symbolically and literally gained a voice. Women repeatedly

stated that they "were no longer afraid to speak" or that they "had a say" and could

"speak up" in front of anyone. Having overcome shame and shyness (*vergüenza*) was

another common refrain. Men and women now agreed that women had a right to speak,

to make decisions and deserved to be heard. Women's narratives marked personal

journeys and milestones toward higher self-esteem and confidence.

The fourth theme builds on the previous one and spoke to how women began to

establish their presence in the public sphere. The promotoras and the women in their

network began to participate in community activities and, in many cases, take on

leadership roles. In their new roles as active change agents and leaders in the community,

women felt that they were now treated as equal citizens who were valued and respected

by the community.

Social change and transformation of normative gender roles is neither easy nor

instant and the final theme elaborated on the community's response to women traveling

to the Tambo to be trained by Minga and returning to assert their rights as equals.

Women had to work hard over a period of time to counter the popular perception that

they were ignorant and quite incapable of knowing, learning, or teaching. Worse still,

they had to counter the notion that their journeys outside the community (spread over

several days) were indicative of their loose moral character. After an initial wave of

increased domestic violence and heightened community resistance, women gradually

began to dispel these mistaken perceptions.

Having provided an overview of the findings for each of the research questions,

the proceeding section sheds light on the implications of these findings on theory-praxis.

Implications for Theory-Praxis

This section draws upon the findings of the study to discuss how the learnings from Minga can enhance the theory and praxis of communication and social change. Through the unique elements of Minga's efforts we can glean useful lessons for future communication-centered initiatives. While contexts and local realities should predominantly define the exact nature of an outreach effort, Minga's approach to communication for social change reveals several tenets that may hold implications for strengthening projects in diverse settings.

 This dissertation documents not just a social change project but, more importantly, the process and beliefs that drive the project. In doing so, I find myself in the position of an advocate for Minga Perú and the work it is spearheading, as also an advocate for embracing alternative approaches in communication for social change. It is my hope that Minga Perú can share the findings of the study internally and externally (with funders and other stakeholders). In a nutshell, the findings of this study highlight how a people-centered and localized approach can contribute to meaningful social change.

Respondents' narratives reveal that they tend to participate actively in programs that resonate with their lived realities and address their real needs. In addition, community members feel the project recognizes and values their "voice." The study also legitimizes the role of emotionality in development practice. Minga's work is conducted with sensitivity and care. The community in turn responds positively to Minga's efforts because they feel Minga cares for them. Many community representatives and citizens have fostered a personal relationship with the Minga team members. Furthermore,

Minga's work is a rich illustration of a communication for social change project that addresses gender issues holistically, thus addressing what Moser (1989) refers to as strategic gender needs not just practical ones. Minga's activities also speak to how social structures and power relations can be transformed (Rathgeber, 1995).

The emergent themes illustrate the core of Minga's approach to communication and can inform future theory-praxis in the field of communication for social change. The findings strengthen existing literature in the field by exhibiting how tenets of alternative models of communication for social change can, actually, be put into practice. On the flip side, Minga is able to reassess and re-evaluate its practices in light of theoretical frameworks. Although literature reviews can be mundane and repetitive to many of us in the academy, and quite formidable to others, I was pleasantly surprised to see how enthused Eliana became after reading my initial chapters. I noticed she had generously made comments on my manuscript and particularly liked the section in which I reviewed the top down approach to development. She read out parts to me exclaiming "exactamente" numerous times, then she picked up on the term "endogenous," saying it aloud a few times and mused saying "endogenous, uh-huh this is a nice term for what we do. See, Sengupta, we have learned a new word for what we do."

Eliana Elías recounts that when she initially came across a book on entertainment-education (E-E), she was unable to put it down and went through the entire volume without leaving her hotel room. She was overcome by feelings, she noted. She felt excited about the potential of E-E and re-assured that Minga was not alone in implementing a radio program such as *Bienvenida Salud* and that in fact such programs

had a long track record of being efficacious in varied social settings. Re-iterating the

value of theory in practice, Eliana stated (Singhal, Njogu, Bouman, & Elías, 2006):

> *Bienvenida Salud!* had been on air for only a short time when Professor
>
> Rogers'and Singhal's collaborative writings on E-E (Singhal and Rogers, 1999;
>
> 2002) helped us to reassess our practice and gave us more elements to think
>
> strategically in designing and understanding the construction of the characters and
>
> in dealing with emotions and stories of our program. (p. 226)

On several occasions during my stay in Perú, Minga's co-founders Eliana and her

husband told me that they want scholars and researchers to study their organization

because we bring in theoretical knowledge and sensitivities which reify, validate, and

allow reflection on the organization's practices. My foray into Minga Perú's world

seemed to have reinforced the organization's belief in, and enactment of, the

interconnectedness of theory-praxis

Alternative Communication Practices

Cutting across the broad thematic insights on Minga, I believe is the idea of

participation, where audience members and project beneficiaries are transformed into

active participants who engage in the communication process. My learnings from Minga

reveal the in-depth and inherent linkage between participation and communication for

social change. Through this rich and detailed case study we see how central participation

is in a meaningful communication for social change effort. We see how through active

participation, people are able to express themselves, improve their situations and make

informed choices, thereby empowering themselves. As White (2003) reminds us:

The participatory process is a person's active involvement in interaction,

dialog, sharing, consensual decision-making and action-taking. Participatory

communication is the foundation of this process. Empowering people around the

globe to express themselves, develop their human potential, and begin to seize

opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty and become a person valuable to

the self and the community, has been the ultimate outcome of the participation

process. (p. 33)

The theme of "reversals" captures Minga's commitment to make a difference while not

being shy of doing things differently from how they have been traditionally done. This is

manifested in how Minga prioritizes listening to the people, relating to them in a human

and caring fashion, and looking upon them as wise citizens who provide valuable insights

and inputs. This epitomizes the mindset and moral commitment to truly "put the last

first" and begin from the bottom up (Chambers, 1997) and reiterates scholars' call that "a

participatory approach requires not only a totally different mindset, but also a whole new

set of attitudes and behaviors in order to achieve genuine participation" (White, 2003, p.

34).

A review of literature speaks about the need for development efforts to focus on

"the people." Minga takes this seriously, believing that people and their lived realities

need to be privileged and that people should play an active role in planning their own

projects. Minga's openness to learn from and with the people, and their willingness to

work on an emergent agenda that is constantly whetted by the people, resonates with the

dialogic and participatory tenets of the "alternative" (reversal) approach. Minga

represents an instance of development practitioners valuing the voices, experiences,

knowledge, desires and needs of the community to collaboratively plan how to address them. As Huesca (2002) states "such a process result[s] in a 'cultural synthesis' between development collaborators to arrive at mutually identified problems, needs, and guidelines for action" (p. 502). The gaping divide between development agent and development client/beneficiary is thus bridged leading to what Huesca refers to as "development collaborators." In addition we gain an understanding of how hard to reach populations can be reached and become engaged in communication efforts that are culturally sensitive and contextually grounded. In sum, this study details the processes and practices involved in promoting a people-centered and endogenous approach to communication-centered social change.

Furthermore, alternative communication for social change practices demand alternative ways of measuring their success. The narratives in this study point out clearly that Minga has made a qualitative difference to peoples' lives and that community members have been engaged meaningfully as program participants. While advocating for the alternative approach, this study also makes a case for re-assessing how we understand the success and impact of communication for social change efforts. As Ford and Yep (2003) put forth:

> We must encourage the legitimacy of alternative outcomes as a measure of
> success for health communication [and other social change] interventions. For
> example, these emancipatory projects often do not conform to conventional time
> lines and frequently are met by surprises and setbacks. Further, hypothesis
> generation and testing as linked to communication effectiveness cannot be a goal.
> Success may be measured instead by the accomplishments, small and large, of

individuals and communities and the type and quality of participation in the

community dialogue. (p. 256)

Minga's communication approach also has implications for E-E scholarship, reinforcing

the point that although E-E efforts can serve as powerful catalysts of social change, they

are rarely stand-alone initiatives (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). As case in

point – the men initially resisted Minga's activities and thought the radio program was

"spoiling their wives" by informing them of their rights. Some husbands smashed radio

sets, while others commanded their wives not to listen to the program. *Promotoras* and

women from the communities requested Minga to hold orientation sessions for men, so

that they could understand what Minga was all about. After attending training sessions

and becoming involved in some of Minga's income generation activities, men began to

increasingly turn into positive partners for social change. An integrated communication

approach was able to bring men on board on the ground that perhaps a solitary on-air

mass media program may not have been able to do.

E-E initiatives are often critiqued for being closely aligned to traditionally

diffusionistic programs that do not account for people's participation (Huesca, 2002;

Singhal & Rogers, 1999). However Minga's instance illustrates that E-E programs can

incorporate various aspects of participation -- such as horizontal communication,

community dialogue and involvement, contextualization – while addressing peoples' real

needs and spurring consciousness raising and collective action (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001).

Although participatory projects are often presented as counter to, or mutually exclusive

to, modernization or classic diffusion driven projects, we see that there can be

considerable "crossover" between the two paradigms and that elements from both frameworks can be suitably combined to create sustainable social change (Morris, 2003).

Another common critique against E-E programs is that is only reaches out to those who have access to media and leaves out the most marginalized, thus broadening the information gap (Melkote & Stevees, 2001). Minga Perú, addresses this potential shortcoming of E-E by ensuring that its program reaches those who are isolated by other forms of mass media. Minga's radio station, *La Voz de la Selva* (the voice of the jungle) has a relatively higher reach in the Amazon than any other national or regional radio network. Further, to boost coverage where radio signals are weak, Minga provides community loudspeakers and encourages promotoras to broadcast audio recordings of the radio program to community members. Thus, E-E can reach marginalized communities if it is strategically planned.

Minga makes a strong call for positioning communication at the center of social change practice. This study reveals that communication is both a powerful and critical component of development. Minga's integrated approach demonstrates how diverse development concerns such as gender equality, health, human rights, and income generation can be addressed by keeping communication processes at the center. While donor funding may be easier to obtain if the organization positions itself as a sectoral one (emphasizing only reproductive health, for instance), Minga insists on addressing development as a whole and is committed to promoting an integrated model of development in the Amazon driven by communication processes.

We see how various aspects of development such as gender equality, income generation, health and human rights can be furthered through communication processes

(see Figure 5.1).   This sentiment does not mean that communication is a sufficient

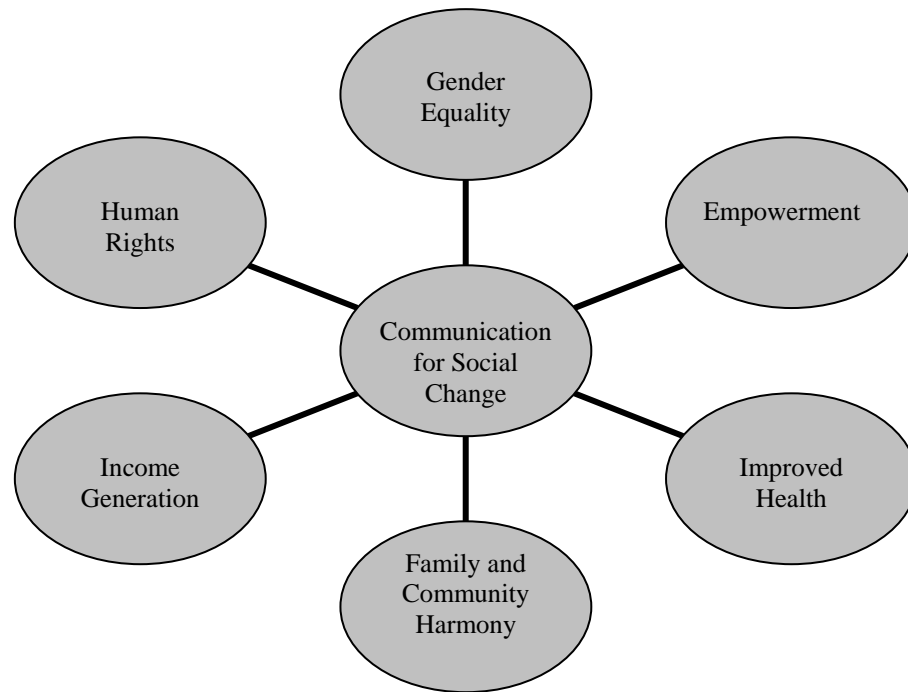condition for social change to occur; it means it is a necessary one.

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                    Gender
                    Equality

   Human                              Empowerment
   Rights
                  Communication
                    for Social
                      Change

   Income                              Improved
   Generation                          Health

                   Family and
                   Community
                    Harmony
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Figure 5.1. A communication-centered approach to social change.

         A communication for social change approach positions communication at the core

of social change, and as the diagram illustrates, through communication processes

women and communities can improve their situations by gaining access to income,

knowing about their rights, and making well informed decisions about their health and

well-being.

         In the alternative (to the dominant top-down) model, scholars emphasize that

communication is not just a "means" toward a developmental end, but that the "process"

itself is important and can be transformative (Freire, 1970; Huesca, 2002; White, 2003; Wilkins & Mody, 2001). More so the process becomes dynamic and dialogic not static or linear as previously understood (Huesca, 2002). Conversations with participants and the Minga team reiterate how the process of enactment is many times as important as the product of communication. In that sense, it is not just about how many episodes have been aired; or how many people have listened to the program; or how many training sessions were conducted last month. It is more about the rich exchanges and interactions people have with one another. For instance, my findings describe how the radio episodes and storylines come about and how they provide a platform for community members to voice their opinions, how community members feel about their lived conditions when they listen to certain episodes, and how even the production process is an opportunity for introspection and growth for Minga's program team.

Similarly, we see how community women and *promotoras* engaged with one another and the Minga team during training sessions – what they shared, experienced, felt, and learned not just in the training room but in the residential dormitories, and while bathing or washing clothes by the river. With respect to family-based violence, we heard the poignantly personal stories of how women coped with, and turned around, their domestic situations. We heard about *promotoras* balancing their multiple roles as wife, woman, community member, and peer facilitator. We heard about how they counseled other women while cooking meals so that their husbands wouldn't think they were neglecting their household responsibilities.

Ethic of Care

The shift to the human development approach in the field of social change, in contrast to the previously dominant top-down approach, has brought with it a broader understanding of development, and the importance of measures such as education, health status, and life expectancy (going beyond income as a sole measure). However, in spite of the intent and rhetoric of human development to promote a more human centered approach, development practice has often fallen short of meeting these ideals. The reality is that mainstream development is practiced in the traditional approach where development problems are implemented through detailed workplans devised by development experts and technocrats that lay out specific objectives, goals and proposed solutions, with little involvement of the people whom the projects are meant to benefit. Minga's approach is in sharp contrast to the expert led, objective, and arm-chair approach to development.

Minga practices a feminist oriented approach to development that privileges personal experiences and encourages participation and member empowerment (Campbell, 1973; Dow, 1995; Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999). By practicing a more caring work ethic, the organization does not become less effective or professional or even exclusive of men. Instead it adds a humane touch to human development by being passionate and connected, valuing people, human relationships and emotions. Such an approach is neither limited to women, nor considered an innate female trait, but instead carves out a space for a more inclusive understanding of "feminism" that includes marginalized groups who have been left out from dominant power structures and discourses as it revalues fundamental human values and behaviors (Dow, 1995; Wood 1994).

This approach of Minga is akin to what is now being acknowledged and appreciated as the feminine side of health care, as a CEO of a New Jersey based healthcare facility (Regine, n.d.) states:

Since the 50's and into the 90's, the masculine side has been in charge, a testosterone driven model that generated hierarchy and kept men at the top and in positions of leadership. It's the feminine power of health care – the sensitivity, the compassion and its expression, the care and personal relationships – that we value here. And I believe those hospitals who value the feminine side and support it will be the hospitals that succeed. (p. 6)

Within this feminine approach, cooperation, connecting with people, collaboration, empathy and sensitivity are valued. Also, individual actions aren't seen as existing in isolation but instead affect several people, triggering multiple - direct and indirect - reactions.

Minga's practices are embedded in an ethic of care. Caring for the community includes connecting with the people and reaching out to peoples' physical, social and emotional needs. Let me recount a telling instance of how Minga cares.

Towards the end of a long residential workshop, the *promotoras* expressed a desire to take something back for their husbands. The Minga team thought about this request, concluding that they too would have wanted to take a gift back to their loved ones. So they decided to brainstorm with the *promotoras* about a suitable token. Ultimately the group agreed that rubber boots would be a useful gift for the men who often had to wade through marshland and water in a region that faced high rainfall. It was an unexpected expense for Minga and one probably

difficult to justify in the project budget, but the gesture had far reaching

implications for the relationship between them and the promotoras and their

husbands; hence it was a meaningful investment. (Fieldnotes)

While development has always emphasized meeting peoples' physical/basic needs it has

less often focused on meeting their emotional needs. When development organizations

are sensitive to peoples' emotional needs, people feel cared for and that strengthens their

relationship with the organization. As Regine (n.d.) stresses "it all boils down to

relationships and developing the world of relationships gives access to non-linear

processes in complex systems…. from which come unexpected results; but it also

requires an enormous skill - both intellectually and emotionally."

The science of complexity (a way of viewing the world) may be a useful

framework to understand the working of organizations like Minga.   Complexity science

emphasizes the role of intangibles such as the quality of interpersonal relationships in

making big changes happen, and stresses that "the capacity of a human system to change

and improve is shaped by the quality of relationships among its members" (Anderson et

al., 2004). According to Henri Lipmanowicz (Singhal, 2006), a proponent of complexity

science, the manner in which people relate to one another is critical in the success or

failure of organizations. If people are able to communicate openly in a horizontal system

bereft of hierarchy they are more likely to contribute to the common goal. Traditional

organizations have promoted hierarchy and control, keeping power at the top and

"trusting people and looking after their personal and professional welfare went against

the prevailing management grain which believed in keeping employees at arms length."

However, Lipmanowicz further points out:

in a complex system such as an organization [or a social system] order arises

from the interactions between people, and the nature of that order is a function of

the quality of those interactions…therefore the quality of relationships between

actors is often more important than the quality of the actors. (p. 7)

Conversations with the Minga team, and a close observation of Minga's programs,

provides evidence that emotionality and relationships play a key role in social change

programs. Yet, emotionality is both an underestimated and undertheorized aspect of

social change. Through the professionalizing of development work and the excessive

attention given to planning and clear cut defining of objectives, goals, outcomes and

indicators, the humane and care-centered aspects of the field have been obliterated, if not

over shadowed. The Amazonian communities favorable response to Minga, poignantly

reminds development professionals that our work is not merely technical, but rather

deeply rooted in peoples' feelings and concern for one another.

Caring has been traditionally considered a female trait; considered a duty,

expectation and an innate characteristic of women. Caring is essential for human survival

and an inherent part of social beings, yet caregivers and caring remain undervalued

(Wood, 1994). Similarly, emotionality mostly associated with women is considered a

negative trait, something that needs to be curbed within organizations and detachment is

the preferred manner of working (Hochschild, 2003). However, being sensitive caring

beings and respecting the feelings of those we work with are not exclusively feminine

instincts, it is more a product of socialization and is rooted in our cultural systems that

value certain traits over others (Wood, 1994).

In addition, Minga is an illustrative case study of an organization that enacts
and embodies feminist principles. Though I began the present dissertation wanting to
look at Minga's communicative practices with the community, I was struck by Minga's
organizational beliefs and practices, particularly their internal communication practices.
As an organization that focuses on communication for social change, they in many ways
practice within their organization what they strive for outside -- with the community.
Minga's communication practices, both internal and external, stand out as being
horizontal and non-hierarchical. For instance, when Eliana saw my interview protocol the
first week and it read "interviews with Minga officials and field staff," Eliana glanced at
the document and pointed out that it would be better to say "interviews with Minga
team." This is an example, however small, of how the Minga team members are treated
with respect and care.

Ferree and Martin (1995) refer to feminist organizations as a unique type of
organization, conceived and run by feminist activists, which comprise of women working
for other women and differ from the "male-stream." Such organizations are marked by a
commitment to "collectivist decision-making, member empowerment, and a political
agenda for ending women's oppression" (p. 5). Though Minga per se does not consider
itself as a feminist activist organization, their practices and way of being are inherently
embedded in feminist ideals such as equality, cooperation, emotionality, passion and
collectivism and like most feminist organizations, their overarching organizational
objective is to create more equitable and just power relations (Buzzanell, 1994;
Campbell,1973; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Rathgeber, 1995). Teamwork and collaboration
are normative practices and the team always tries to be empathetic and understanding

toward each other. As Acker (1995) points out feminist beliefs are difficult to put into practice and often come into conflict with mainstream structures but Minga continues to strive to promote collective decision-making as is evident in their emergent programming.

Limitations of the Present Study

As with all research endeavors, this study set out to answer certain questions and in doing so it addressed only certain aspects Minga's social change efforts. In that sense, this work represents a partial and partisan view, biased by my theoretical inclinations and the specific questions that intrigued my curiosity as a scholar-practitioner. While it does provide a rich and in-depth account of the aspects I chose to explore, this is by no means a complete, or remotely complete, picture of life in the Amazon.

As a storyteller, the writer in me weaves an interpretive tale between my worldview and culture and that of the organizational group being studied. Through the writing process the researcher-writer needs to "balance, harmonize, mediate, or negotiate a tale of two cultures" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 138). As someone who is not a native South American, Perúvian or Amazonian, this tale is my interpretation of what I observed, listened, learned and experienced and although it is a result of spending time in the field, it still remains an account by an outsider.

In the field, and during the writing of this research, I reflected over several shortcomings of the study and thought about how I may have done things differently. For one, I draw on ethnographic methods while constantly being cognizant of the fact that my study falls short of being a true or traditional ethnography. To begin with my primary purpose was not to study cultural practices of the Amazonian people. My primary

purpose in seeking to understand the culture and context of Amazonia was to better

understand Minga Perú's communicative practices. Had I had more resources for my

study, I would have wanted to spend a longer time in the field. That way my experiences

could have been richer. I for one would have wanted to visit more riverine communities

than I did; but the logistics of traveling to remoter areas are often complicated. I would

have also liked to include more men and children in my research. I could only speak with

the men in the two communities I visited and my study would have gained from speaking

with more men from other riverine communities.

Another aspect I could have done differently was collaborated with the

participants while developing the research design and questions. While I did use

participatory research methods and was flexible with my research design, I did not

involve the participants in posing the research questions or suggesting appropriate

methods. I entered the field with a priori research design and I feel I may have benefited

if I had been able to enter the field with a more open mind and allowed the questions and

design to emerge from the field itself. For instance, I had set out to conduct participatory

sketches with the adolescents and the *promotoras*, but the *promotoras* expressed that they

would rather perform skits than draw, so we ended up dividing the group into three

smaller groups and they each developed and enacted a storyline that they felt reflected the

changes they had undergone since their association with Minga. After the three

performances the entire group was moved and the energy levels were perceptively high,

so we spontaneously decided to sit around in a large circle and each woman shared with

the group their individual stories of personal growth and change. This was an extremely

honest and a highly emotional exchange and made me think of how things would

have evolved had there been a more participatory and emergent research agenda.

The Amazonian people are very expressive and communicate extensively through

nonverbals, often times making me feel that not being conversant in the Spanish language

was not a major handicap. Yet, throughout this research journey I was conscious of the

fact that I was not fluent in the language and needed to rely on a translator for my

interviews. I had undergone Spanish immersion in Guatemala prior to going to the field

which enabled me to get a sense of what the participants were saying. In addition, I had a

grasp of the vocabulary specific to my research area. However, to ensure high quality and

accurate translation I utilized two translators: Vanessa, who is a Perúvian woman

studying communication at the undergraduate level and has worked and researched

extensively with Minga; and Linda, an American woman with graduate training in

Communication and Spanish, who lives and teaches in Iquitos and has traveled

extensively in the Amazon. In spite of having translators with excellent skills and

credentials, I am aware that a certain level of accuracy may have been lost in translation.

I do remain indebted to Vanessa and Linda, who went beyond the call and expectations of

translators and traveled with me, braving among other things the rain and the jungle bugs.

They were excited and involved in my research and after a few days were almost reading

my mind and asking probing questions on their own.

Finally, for the sake of parsimonious writing I refer to my research participants

and site in general terms such as indigenous people, community members or

Amazonians. I do not intend to generalize about these people or the region. I also do not

intend to treat my participants as a homogenous group, I am aware of the differences and

stratification that exists within these groups. Also, as an outsider for whom this was a

first glimpse of the Amazon region, I may have misunderstood or over simplified a rich

and complex society and way of being. This is my tale from the field and is not

representative of the region or its culture in its entirety, it is an account of a "sojourner"

crossing cultural borders (Ford & Yep, 2003) and reflects only the parts I was privileged

enough to partake.

<div align="center">Future Research Steps</div>

As I think of what I learned about the practices of Minga Perú, both from the

organization and the community's points of view, two specific questions come to mind.

The first, Minga's case is an illustrative, living, breathing example of a social change

effort that is having positive and meaningful results in the communities it works with.

However, it remains a community based, local, small scale effort. In the eyes of larger

agencies who conduct national and regional level projects, efforts such as Minga's are

considered "boutique projects" which are more conducive to participation, connection,

contextualization, and localization because of their scale. Therefore, the question that has

kept re-visiting me through my research and writing journey is how can Minga's efforts

be scaled up to a larger region and how would such an expansion affect the

organization's values and practices?

Minga began by training *promotoras* in one river basin and have now trained

three groups of women across two river basins. They are also having several exchanges

and training sessions with other groups within Perú and the Andean region of Colombia,

Chile and Argentina on communication and social change. In addition, they are also

directing their attention to issues of interculturality, conflict resolution and commercial

marketing of the products made by Amazonian women. As Minga continues to grow and expands their work, both in its scope and reach, it will be worthwhile to see the organizational changes that it undergoes.

The second question concerns the sustainability of community based organizations. Presently, the organization is less than a decade old and they have evolved in many directions through the years. However their long term vision is to enable the women to be able to carry on the work by themselves. Furthermore, the co-founders also want the organization to be able to generate their own funding and possibly run their own radio station. Over time as their vision is realized it could serve as an example of a highly participatory initiative where the organization is controlled, funded, and sustained by the community themselves.

Another useful area of study would be to look at other community based participatory projects in different regions and cultural settings and compile the lessons learned across different countries. By analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts we could glean more about the process involved in achieving sustainable endogenous models of communication for social change.

Minga Perú has established a network of correspondents who are young boys and girls in riverine communities who write to the program airing their concerns as well as other issues affecting their community. They have also been trained in conducting informal research with the community and sharing their stories with the organization. This pre-existing network is an ideal group that could be trained as community researchers. This would give them research skills and enable them to evaluate their community needs and the impact of Minga Perú's work in their community. Similarly

women could be trained in radio script writing and production so that they can be more actively involved in the radio program.

Conclusions

In conclusion, mainstream communication for social change initiatives have a lot to learn from alternative approaches such as Minga's. I end with some musings by Eliana Elías, Executive Director of Minga Perú that I believe will help scholars and practitioners re-think, re-vision, and differently enact communication for social change projects:

We work in communication and we see it as a part of social change, not something separate. We don't have one set message to be said to everybody in different languages. We are preparing communities to raise their voices and to shape their own agenda. So this is what makes Minga different. We are not asking for money for just Minga, but for the movement. When I finished studying communication at the University of Lima, I was hired as a social communicator and I felt that everybody was seeing my contribution as being the olive in the Martini.

You know – it is sexy to have a video, a manual, a glossy poster, but it is not essential to have it. People don't see the value addition of communication in social change efforts and believe nothing happens even if you don't have communication. Funding becomes difficult, for that very reason, communication is seen as an addition, maybe even something fashionable but not essential. For years I was trying to understand my contribution to development and to social change as a communicator – then I realized that communication is critical and

essential. It cuts across all the social processes. Unless you see this no change will happen.

Communication is not superficial. People do not invest in communication because they don't understand its role and nobody is explaining this well enough to funders. Hence it is under-estimated, under-studied, under-researched and under-funded. Eloy Neira [a sociologist who is now an advisor to Minga] is in many ways the thinker behind Minga, when he came to evaluate Minga for the Ford Foundation, he helped us realize that we were hiding many of our practices under the table. He encouraged us to put our practices on the table and clearly show what we are doing. Before that we knew we did communication but we were funded for other things and we had to be accountable for the things we were funded for. It doesn't mean we were not doing communication or not mentioning it, but the funders were not really interested in seeing the communication component. After that we began to put communication on the desk and show it to them, very proudly.

We also began to advocate for communication, and now we are constantly advocating for communication. Communication is considered a second level profession, it is one thing to be say a physician and another to be a social communicator, you are not a sociologist, anthropologist, psychologist – you don't fit in and nobody knows how to define your work – communicator, communicologist, social communicator! It's a lot of work to make others understand what it means to do communication and how essential it is in the social change process.

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Appendix A: IRB Aproval

OHIO
UNIVERSITY

Office of the Vice President
for Research

05X048

Office of Research
Compliance
Research and Technology
Center117
Athens OH 45701-2979

740.593.0664
740.593.9838
www.ohiou.edu/resear
ch

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional
Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This
review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as
defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

7

Project Title: Espousing an Alternative Vision of Communication for Social
Change: Minga Peru's Initiatives in the Peruvian Amazonas

Researcher(s): Ami Sengupta

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Arvind Singhal Expiration Date

Jacqueline Uegg, M.B.A., Chair
Institutional Review Board

06/30/05
Approval Date
06/29/06

Department: Communication Studies

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date,
you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your
application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an
amendment) prior to implementation.

Appendix B: Research Consent and Access Letter

MINGA

P E R U

Francisco del Castillo N° 196 San
Antonio - Miraflores Lima 18 -
Peru Telefax: (511) 242-0223
mingaperu@chavin.rcp.net.pe

July 1,2005

In reference to Ohio University's IRB Proposal 05X048, Minga Peru gives Ms. Ami
Sengupta permission to interview, observe, and use participatory tools with its
team and community members who are associated with Minga's work. This
research has been conducted with the consent, approval and support of Minga
Peru. In addition, Minga Peru has assisted Ms. Sengupta in making field visits for
the purposes of data collection as outlined in the IRB Proposal 05X048.

Minga Peru also gives permission to use the data collected for research papers
and publications. Minga Peru needs to be informed prior to publishing and
disseminating the research resulting from this field work.

Ms. Eliana Elias Valdeavellano
Executive Director

Appendix C: Data Collection Protocol

The interviews, group discussions, observations and participatory exercises focused on the following broad research questions:

What communication for social change practices does Minga employ, and how do these practices extend or enrich contemporary development theorizing?

How do community members participate in and perceive the social change process facilitated by Minga?

How do participants' stories reflect the corporeal and material realities that shape their experiences?

How can we go beyond discourse and try to understand the physical realities faced by these communities?

How is gender positioned within Minga's communication for social change efforts, and how do local gender realities influence Minga's practices?

How do Minga's efforts enable or constrain gender equality and how are gender roles, norms, hierarchies and relationships affected and altered?

In-depth Interview Guide

Guide to be used with Promotoras and the Minga team in Lima, Iquitos and Tambo.

Introductory questions

How would you describe the work Minga does?

What is the vision of Minga's outreach efforts?

What are the various elements of Minga's work?

Why did you choose to work in the Amazonia? How has the location affected

your work (budgets, other obstacles?

Please share some of the challenges you face because of the physical

conditions/location of your work?

How have these struggles been overcome?

How does Minga communicate differently? (please discuss Minga's

communication practices/vision at various levels for instance

programmatically, internally, externally with funders, with the promotoras

etc.)

What do you see as the most distinguishing aspect or aspects of Minga's vision?

Communication for social change

Could you describe the communication for social change practices that are

employed by Minga?

What are the various communicative elements?

How is communication positioned within the broader development agenda of

Minga?

Who does Minga work with? (partners such as other organizations,

community members etc.)

What do you feel is at the center of or the heart of Minga's work?

How do you decide on the issues that need to be focused on?

What is the process of designing messages for the community?

How is the community involved in the communication process?

How are local needs, realities and perspectives incorporated in Minga's work?

What are some of the local environmental or geographical challenges you face?

Integrating gender

How does Minga reach out to the community?

How does Minga reach out to specific community groups (E.g. men, women,

children, indigenous ethnic groups)?

Who are the intended (both primary and secondary) participants/beneficiaries of

Minga's programmes?

In what ways does Minga challenge/reinforce societal structures such as gender

hierarchies?

What are some unintended consequences of Minga's gender related work?

How has Minga addressed the consequences of disrupting traditional gender

norms and structures?

Discussion Guide for Focus Groups

Guide to be used with listener's groups, men's groups, promotoras, families of promotoras and other community members.

Could you please briefly describe your life and tell us about your daily routines?

Is there anything in your life that you would like to have but do not? If so what would it be?

What are some of the day to day difficulties that you face living in the Amazonas?

What would you consider to be your community's biggest strength or struggle?

Tell us about some problems you have faced in your life and how you overcame it?

Describe you environment and geography, what do you like about it? What do you dislike? Why?

What are some local realities or resource related difficulties your community faces?

What do you think about the work Minga is doing in your community?

How has Minga affected your life at the individual, family and community level?

What are some of the relationships in your life that have changed after listening to Bienvenida salud? How was it before and how is it now?

What are some issues that you think differently about after listening to Bienvenida salud? (rights, health, sexuality etc.)

Are some areas of your life more affected then others?

If so what are these?

What do you think led to this?

What is the most significant change brought about in your life through your

    association with Minga or listening to Bienvenida salud?

How did you come about to experience these changes? (E.g. Did you discuss it

    with others, did you go through a decision making process, did you follow

    other's examples, did you do it because you felt it would be better for the

    family etc.)

Are there societal factors that you feel become obstacles in your life? What are

    these and how to they enable or constrain you from doing what you want

    to? In what way does Minga address these societal norms?

Has Minga changed the power structures within society? If yes, then how has this

    change been negotiated by the men, women or the promotoras in your

    community?

How, if at all, has your understanding of how men/women should behave changed

    over the past couples of year? (e.g., shifting societal and family roles).

Do you think there are generational differences in how individuals perceive

    themselves and their gender roles? If so, please describe.

Describe a typical day for a boy/girl or a man/woman in your community? Do

    you see these roles changing?

Is there resistance from community members towards the work done by the

    promotoras or the radio program or any other activity done by Minga? If

    yes, how was it dealt with?

How does Minga expose children to its ideas? How if at all do you see the future

    generation being impacted by Minga's work?

How do you participate in Minga's work? What is your role? Do you feel you

are an important part of Minga's work? Please explain.

What do you participate in and what do you not participate in? Is there anything

else you would like to participate in?

Please share how Minga promotes social change? Please provide instances of

what information/support you received, how you responded, what you did

or did not do and how you communicated your views to others.

Were you encouraged to think of yourself/your family or the community

differently? If so how?

How have you negotiated, cooperated or interacted with others about the

information you have received from Minga?

What does health or being healthy mean to you? How if at all have your

perceptions of health changed over the past years? What do you think

accounts for these changes.

Has your understanding of what basic (human) rights are evolved over the past

years? How did you become aware of your rights? Do you see these rights

as attainable? What have you done to assert or realize some of these

rights? Do some human rights remain unattainable or utopian?

Are there somethings Minga could do differently? If yes, please explain what they

are.

Are your ideas and suggestions incorporated in Minga's work? Please explain

why or why not.

What do you like the most about Minga?

Participatory Tools

10 – 20 participants from each of the communities will be asked to sketch, graph or map how Minga has impacted their lives. Effort will be made to collect participants of varying ages, social class and of both sexes. Participants will be provided with paper, coloring pens and blank pie graphs. After these visual testimonies are collected, participants will be asked to share what they were trying to depict through these visuals and describe in their own words what the sketches, graphs or the maps reveal and conceal. Participants will be encouraged to highlight:

How they perceive their lives and consequently the changes brought about in their lives through their association with Minga?

How have your daily activities changed? Please explain how it was before and what they are now.

What have remained the same?

What does "health" mean to you?

What does "community" mean to you?

What does empowerment mean to you? And in what ways do you feel empowered/disempowered?

How has Minga influenced/impacted the various spheres of your lives?

How is your community distributed economically and socially?

How is ill-health (broadly including violence against women) perceived both symbolically and materially?

How is inequality (including social, economic, health, information etc.) manifested?