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## Minga Perú's strategy for social change in the Peruvian Amazon: A rhetorical model for participatory, intercultural practice to advance human rights

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*....When a wife sees her husband is drinking too much she feels very scared because he insults her.... Her family helps her press charges, but once she sees he's in jail, the wife defends him because she feels sorry for him. That's why the authorities don't [take these cases seriously] any longer.*

–Excerpt from a *Bienvenida Salud* listener letter

### **Introduction**

Deep in the Peruvian Amazon, when Minga Perú's radio production team receives a letter about spousal abuse, or any other burning topic, the letter is catalogued based on subject, audience relevance, and urgency. Listeners' letters serve as the basis for creating the program scripts of *Bienvenida Salud* (Welcome Health), Minga's long-running socio drama broadcast three times per week by ten jungle-reaching radio stations. In the program (See Box 1) Emira, Doñita, Peta, and Pasionaria bring social issues to life in a seriously playful and culturally-relevant manner, spurring conversation among listeners and subsequent decisions and actions. Minga has created a listener-as-producer feedback loop whereby the radio program originates with listener experiences and thrives on continuous listener interaction and feedback (See Figure 1).

Box 1: Excerpt from *Bienvenida Salud* program script

Dora: (A little sad...), Oh Pasionaria, it's been a while since our neighbor Peta's husband, Pedro, well he has been hitting her and she says she wants to press charges.

Peta: Yes, but he tells me I won't get anything out of it.

Pasionaria: Well what are you waiting for neighbor Peta, go to the community authorities and ask that he be punished for being a beater.

Peta: (Scared...), Oh no neighbor Pashuca, my poor old man, I feel sorry to see him sitting locked in the cell, plus he's the father of my children so I just have to put up with it.

In its 13th year of continuous broadcast, *Bienvenida Salud* is produced by Minga Perú, a human rights non-governmental organization (NGO) with a focus on gender equity and women's reproductive health. Minga boasts a database of over 15,000 listener letters detailing people's lived experiences, their appreciation for *Bienvenida Salud*, the trials and tribulations of the program's characters, and questions and dilemmas about health and life in the Amazon. Roughly 20 percent of letters focus on issues of family violence and HIV/AIDS prevention (Durá, Singhal, & Elías, 2010). More than half of the letters originate from women listeners, often penned on their behalf by their children or other community members. Since the only viable means of transportation in the region is via the Amazon River and its tributaries, Minga has developed and nurtured relationships with local boat operators, radio stations, schools, marketplaces, and churches to facilitate letter collection and delivery to its office in the city of Iquitos.

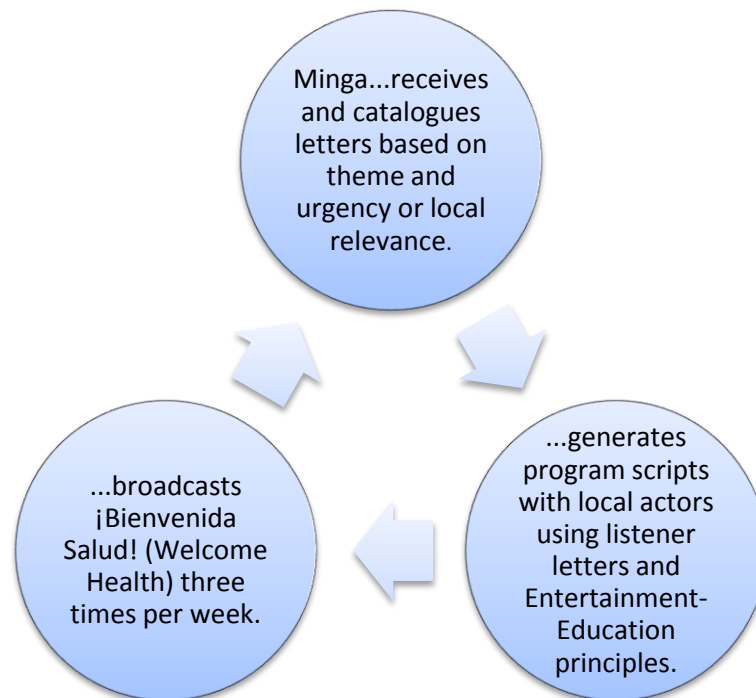


Figure 1. Minga's listener-as-producer feedback loop

At the core of Minga's programming is dialogic communication through radio, but over the years based on listener feedback and needs, Minga has added on-the-ground leadership training and income generation activities to complement its on-air programming. Until 2010, Minga's programs (communication, leadership, and income generation) had been documented separately. That is, interdependence amongst the three programmatic components was implicit (See Figure 2).

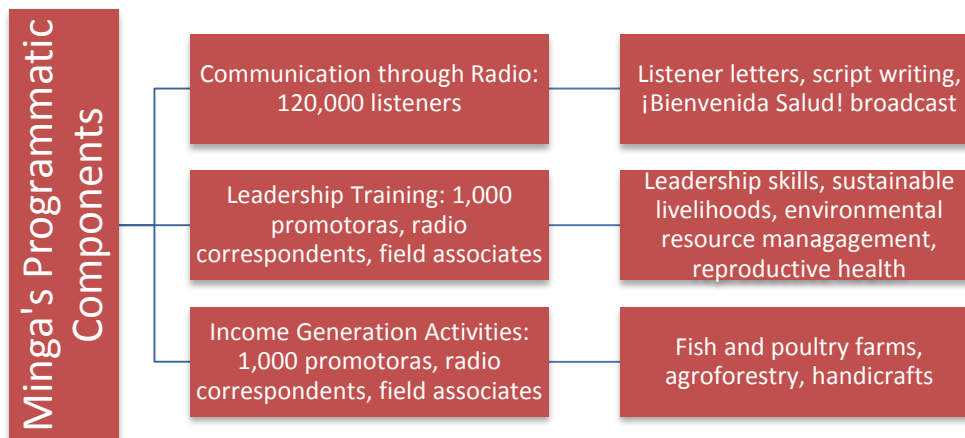


Figure 2. Minga's programmatic components (interdependence is implicit)

In 2010 and 2011, we co-lead an interdisciplinary research team, funded through Minga by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), to systematize Minga's three strategic components into a single model for social change. The purpose of the systematization (for Minga and the IAF) was to (1) assess the feasibility of a three-pronged, interdependent model and, based on that feasibility, (2) articulate Minga's three programmatic components in a single, integrated model in order to enable replication by other organizations working to advance human rights (See Figure 3). Research activities for the systematization report included

- An analysis and synthesis of more than a decade of archival documentation, including academic and popular articles, internal reports and proposals, photographs, and videos;
- Several rounds of in-depth interviews with key informants, project participants and Minga officials; and
- Two separate field-based data-collection activities where we employed focus group discussions and participatory sketching and writing with over a dozen *promotoras comunitarias* (community promoters) and several Minga associates, including spouses and neighbors of *promotoras*.



Figure 3. The Minga model after systematization (interdependence is explicit)

Our research for the systematization yielded several key insights, which prompted our analysis beyond the systematization: (1) Many documented development projects worldwide focus primarily on micro-financing and income generation as a means of achieving women's empowerment and civic participation, often overlooking communication and leadership training in their interventions. Minga's approach is unique as it considers a more complete interpretation of human rights and dignity by making the essential connection between empowering women financially and empowering women socially, intellectually, and affectively. (2) Minga has been able to sustain the effective employment of highly participatory and socially appropriate communication strategies for over a decade.

In this article, we draw upon data collected for the systematization report to analyze the participatory and intercultural practices that Minga enacts rhetorically to advance human rights and dignity in the Loreto region of the Peruvian Amazon. We contend that our analysis of Minga's effective and sustained communication intervention builds on current theories of participatory and intercultural communication and can inform practice elsewhere.

### **Development communication, entertainment-education, and community radio**

For Minga, community radio is not just a means to *spread* information, it is a participatory means for obtaining listener feedback. Its operations use conceptual frameworks from development communication, community radio, and entertainment-education, and they are grounded in theories of participatory and intercultural communication.

Development communication, now referred to by many as communication for social change, utilizes strategic communication to enable behavioral change at both individual and community

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levels. Development communication campaigns range from print to Internet, social marketing, and television, radio, and folk media programming. Historically, development communication projects have been rooted in the conceptual models of diffusion, participation, or a combination of the two (Morris, 2003). The diffusion model as conceptualized in Rogers' (1962) diffusion of innovations theory follows the KAP (knowledge influences attitudes which influence practice) paradigm and aims to persuade behavioral change by providing individuals with new ideas for adoption. The participation or participatory model, catalyzed by Paulo Freire in the 1970s, "holds that development communication is not a vertical process of information transmission from the knowledgeable to the less knowledgeable, but rather a horizontal process of information exchange and interaction" (Morris, 2003, p. 226). While diffusion and participation models have different frameworks and assumptions, they have been successfully bridged in communication-for-development campaigns and programs. Examples of this type of bridging can be seen in the field of entertainment-education (E-E).

Entertainment-education involves the purposeful design and implementation of a media message that aims to both entertain and educate (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). Such messages can be contained in media as varied as comic books, theater, television, film, music, radio, and even art installations. Although the notion of entertainment as educational has a long history rooted in ancient oral traditions, the purposeful use of E-E in the mass media is a recent phenomenon. E-E aims to not only raise awareness, but also to create favorable attitudes, influence behavior, and affect cultural norms through social modeling. E-E is often designed with social learning theory in mind (see Bandura, 1977). E-E's educational design is purposeful and aims to help people lead happier, healthier lives. Even though E-E is highly influenced by diffusion theory, its practitioners have increasingly drawn on participation theory to better understand audience members and increase engagement with their programs (Aside from Minga Perú, see the Center for Media and Health at <http://www.media-health.nl/cmh.html>, Soul City at <http://www.soulcity.org.za/>, and PCI Media Impact at <http://www.mediaimpact.org>).

In today's world and in the context of Western or Northern ideologies, we tend to see television and the Internet as dominant media in the spread of information. While some of us privilege visual media (television and Internet), others would argue that even in countries referred to as developed, the influence of radio cannot be underestimated. In the U.S., for example, radio is a dominant mode in many ways. People listen to the radio over long commutes to work and it has an undeniable influence in political discourse. In other parts of the world, radio has been and continues to be central to information exchange and community mobilization in the developing world and is of vital importance in reaching the poorest and most marginalized communities (Buckley, 2008). The history of community radio in Latin America can be traced back to the late 1940s with Bolivian tin miner's radio, which in the 1960s played a role in mobilization and organizing for protests, strikes, and resistance to the military (Huesca, 1995). Since then, community radio has spread throughout Latin America. Community radio uses local dialects and languages to create a sense of community through the airwaves. Community broadcasting has been linked by development experts, including economists, with political change surrounding democracy and the discourse of human rights, and with contributing to the voice and empowerment of the poor and marginalized (Buckley, 2008).

## **Participatory and intercultural practice in professional communication**

For two decades, scholars of rhetoric and professional communication doing community-based work have looked toward participatory and intercultural approaches and methodologies to make their work in social and organizational change, literacy studies, and risk communication more ethical, inclusive, sustainable, and culturally relevant (See for example, Sullivan & Porter, 1997; Grabill & Simmons, 1998; Dragga, 1999; Grabill, 2001 & 2007; Spinuzzi, 2005; Scott, Longo & Willis, 2006; Faber, 2007; Simmons, 2007; Flower, 2008; Salvo, 2009; Durá, 2011; Evia & Patriarca, 2011; Constantinides, Amant & Kampf, 2001; Hunsinger, 2006; Thatcher, 2009; Yu, 2012; Ding & Savage, 2013). While they articulated the theoretical, methodological, and practical limitations of this work, these scholars found participatory and intercultural work productive and enriching as it brings together etic (outsider/universal) and emic (local/insider) sensibilities (Singhal & Durá, 2009; Thatcher, 2010; Ding & Savage, 2013).

A project does not have to be participatory to be ethical, but in the context of advancing human rights, participatory design in community-based work aims at a greater ethical standard by acknowledging the social construction of knowledge (Flower, 2008) and granting stakeholders epistemological status (Simmons, 2007). For example, in inquiry-oriented action or community-based research such as Intercultural Inquiry (Flower, 2008), positive deviance action research (Durá, 2011), and participatory action research models, grassroots epistemologies are not only valued and central to each project, but the knowledge that is generated from them is publicly recognized as legitimate. For participants, this legitimacy increases perceptions of social capital and is useful at political, economic, educational, and practical levels. Such shifts in the location of epistemology increase the likelihood of local ownership, empowerment, mobilization, and sustained community participation beyond a program's life (Grabill, 2001 and 2008; Durá, 2011).

Achieving this kind of meaningful inclusion through participatory design is easier said than done. Ratios and types of co-design and co-inquiry vary from project to project. Researchers use labels such as lens, orientation, or approach to indicate some level of community participation when it is not sufficiently a methodology *per se* (see Spinuzzi, 2005). This variance can be due to the recognized limitations of participatory work when compared with traditional methods and practices. For example, participatory work can be exploratory and approximate given the room it offers for emergence based on local sensibilities. Also, in traditional terms, the empowerment and its sustained effects that participatory design can generate can be difficult to assess and measure. Further, reliance on participant collaboration can be time-intensive and often at odds with institutional constraints (Spinuzzi, 2005). Lastly, participatory work's limitations can also be due to a lapse in theory-to-practice. As Evia and Patriarca (2012) noted: "even when organizations or government agencies seek to be more inclusive, they often reveal through their actions that audience participation is not vital to the communication process" (p. 353; See also Grabill & Simmons, 1998; Scott, 2003; Bowdon, 2004; Giles, 2010).

This theory-to-practice challenge is also visible in intercultural communication. For example, rhetorical listening as "a trope for interpretive invention" whereby we practice identification (Burke) with an Other by listening for commonalities and differences before making our own assertions (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 1) is not a practice that would typically create opposition. Quite the

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contrary, rhetorical listening makes rational and emotional sense and seems accessible as an intercultural practice. However, when we look at rhetorical listening in all of its complexity, “exposing unearned privilege and...fostering cross-cultural engagement,” (Clifton, Long, & Roen, 2013), like participatory design, the practice requires overcoming the methodological and practical limitations listed above. This is evidenced by the fact that, despite decades of praxis, theories of intercultural communication have been dominated by a nation-centric view of culture (Ding & Savage, 2013). While espousing a more complex, contextual view of culture or cultures, as scholars like Appadurai and Hunsinger advocated, is appealing in theory, in practice it necessitates awareness, understanding, and shifting of ideological assumptions. It is not enough to favor inclusion if one does not *believe* in the knowledge-making abilities of participants or does not *practice* culturally-relevant knowledge-making processes or methodologies.

Ideally, intercultural communication should facilitate knowledge-generation in ways that make the most sense to participants. This is noted in the practice-informed theories of Michele Simmons (2007) in participatory risk communication, Linda Flower (2008) in Intercultural Inquiry, Jeff Grabill in community-based literacy (2008), and Carlos Evia and Ashley Patriarca (2012) in user-centered design, among others. Their methods, which involved multiple iterations in the spirit of prototyping and revising strategies, ranged from role-playing to creative writing to town hall meetings to participant drawings and animation. Understanding participatory work as “*knowledge by doing*” allows an openness to traditional as well as to tacit knowledge (Spinuzzi, 2005, p. 163). In other words, the ideological and epistemological shift discussed here is best witnessed in action by seeking to listen (Ratcliffe) and pursue knowledge generation in locally-accepted, relevant ways (See Singhal & Rattine Flaherty, Singhal & Durá, 2009, Singhal & Durá, 2008, and others).

Minga Perú has succeeded at overcoming the challenges and limitations of participatory and intercultural theory-to-practice while facing common institutional constraints, e.g., aligning funding cycles and notions of measurable outcomes, programming, and stakeholder priorities. It has instituted recursive and reflexive discursive spaces that empower its constituents to negotiate the tensions between traditional life and globalized life on their own terms. Minga holds itself accountable to following its own engagement methodology built experientially over the years, which considers constructivism, interculturality, and affective pedagogy at all organizational levels and at every programmatic and interactional step.

In order to better understand how Minga bridges theory-to-practice challenges with human rights and dignity at the forefront of its vision and actions, in this article we delve into the rhetorical aspects of Minga's participatory and intercultural practices. Our research in this article is motivated by the following two-part question:

*(1) How does Minga operationalize participatory and intercultural principles rhetorically to advance human rights and preserve the dignity of its constituents? (2) And how might this work contribute to our disciplinary understanding of participatory and intercultural communication?*

To answer this question, we draw upon data collected for the systematization of the Minga model in 2010 and 2011. We frame our analysis using Spinuzzi's (2005) methodological principles for

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participatory design: (1) quality of life; (2) collaborative development; and (3) iterative process.<sup>i</sup> Spinuzzi's framework helps us see the integrity of Minga's model from the perspective of meaningful participation. Quality of life is assessed in terms of democratic and functional empowerment, reflexivity and agreement of program goals, and user ownership. Collaborative development looks at mechanisms for regular, verifiable participation and communication. And iterative process accounts for continual participation, reflection, and revision. Our analysis is informed by a combination of postmodern and critical perspectives and the theories of participatory and intercultural communication described above. Prior to our analysis, we provide background information on the Amazonian context within which Minga works and on Minga Perú itself and its model for social change.

### **The Amazonian context**

The Peruvian Amazon occupies 60 percent of the entire Peruvian territory, yet it is the area least visited by locals and tourists. It is home to one million people—roughly 11 percent of the country's population. And it is an environmental panacea with more than 30,000 plant species—three times more than other parts of South America combined (Singhal, Durá, Mendieta, Elías, González, & Arnillas, 2012). The Northeastern region of Loreto, where Minga's activities are undertaken, is home to the largest concentration of indigenous populations in Perú, comprising 65 ethno-linguistic groups (Singhal, Durá, Mendieta, Elías, González, & Arnillas, 2012). Yet in the midst of this natural and cultural wealth exist serious environmental, economic, social, and health concerns. Relying on fishing, hunting, and agricultural production for centuries, Amazonian populations have faced and continue to face challenges to food security. Their livelihoods are under constant threat due to external commercialization of resources and an increase in currency transactions as a means for exchange.

It is not uncommon to witness international oil and lumber companies competing for extraction territories, i.e., lands sanctioned for the withdrawal of natural resources (Singhal, Durá, Mendieta, Elías, González, & Arnillas, 2012). And since it is not customary for individual community members to own land titles, rightful ownership is often contested, so rights to overriding royalty interests are either set aside indefinitely or handed over to community leaders for deliberation. Due to the constant pressure for extraction, the *Reserva Nacional Pacaya Samiria* within Loreto has been deemed a strategic area of global importance for environmental conservation. Bio-piracy, whereby indigenous knowledge about natural resources is used for profit, is a related threat.

An estimated 66 percent of Loreto residents live in poverty; of this number, 40 percent live in extreme poverty (Singhal, Durá, Mendieta, Elías, González, & Arnillas, 2012). Most communities lack access to electricity and potable water. Further, with the political and economic climate changing within the context of globalization, people in riverine communities with limited social protection and financial assets are left vulnerable not only to market, climate, and catastrophic conditions but also to illness, accidents, and death. Thus, these communities often exhaust precautionary savings to seek employment outside their communities (Arnillas, 2010). In addition to lack of financial resources, in this case, poverty can also imply a lack of access to claiming rights and living with dignity.<sup>ii</sup>

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Insufficient access to health services is another serious concern. Loreto has the highest number of live births per woman and the largest percentage of teenage mothers in the country. It also has the second largest number of reported HIV/AIDS cases. Geographic isolation exacerbates health challenges and access to information about health. Because of the lack of developed roads, the Amazon River and its tributaries are the only viable means of transportation. For residents, this means that reaching a medical outpost can require several days of travel by canoe, motorboat, or ferry. In the wake of medical emergencies including pregnancy complications, such isolation can be catastrophic.

### **Minga's model for social change**

Over the last 13 years, Minga has garnered 120,000 regular listeners (mostly women, followed by teens, children, and men) through its health-focused entertainment-education radio program *Bienvenida Salud*. It has also received 21,700 listener letters. Thus, dialogic communication through radio is at the core of the Minga model. But Minga extends its dialogic practice to its on-the-ground activities, expanding its reach through networks of informed participants. Minga has trained over 1,000 *promotoras* and hundreds of radio correspondents, teachers, and field associates. *Promotoras* serve as opinion leaders and community mobilizers, working on-the-ground around issues featured in the *Bienvenida Salud* program and beyond, i.e., human rights, civic leadership. As a Minga associate explained, *promotoras* “bring in new ideas to improve our community, coordinate Minga-sponsored income generating projects, serve as resource persons and advocates, and connect our community with the outside.” They work with radio correspondents and field associates to promote *Bienvenida Salud* and to encourage letter writing. *Promotoras* participate regularly in Minga's capacity-building activities and often invite others or point out potential associates or correspondents to training meetings.

Minga's on-the-ground capacity-building activities are conducted in 43 riverine communities, at the Minga Tambo (the organization's headquarters located a 20-minute motorboat ride from the port of Nauta), and occasionally at Minga's Iquitos office or in schools (Singhal, Durá, Mendieta, Elías, González, & Arnillas, 2012). Capacity-building activities comprise leadership development and income-generation through locally relevant and time-tested techniques for sustainable livelihoods, environmental resource management, and economic enterprise. Specifically, Minga organizes trainings in reproductive health, medicinal plant farming, agroforestry, poultry raising, fish farming, and traditional handicraft design, production, and distribution.

*Minga* in Quechua means collaborative work, and the principles of a traditional *minga* are at the core of the Minga's model for social change. Co-founders, Eliana Elías and Luis González started Minga Perú in 1998 in response to a need for locally relevant, entertaining and educational health messages. Throughout their involvement in development work in the Amazon in the early 1990s, and even after founding Minga, a series of transformative experiences shaped their understanding of the people of the Amazon and their most pressing needs. Among those experiences was a conversation with an old village woman who said, “In the Amazonian jungle everything talks to us, you just have to know how to listen.” Listening became the cornerstone of

Minga's praxis-derived "engagement methodology" comprising interculturality, constructivism, and affective pedagogy. This engagement methodology undergirds the programmatic components in the Minga model: communication, leadership, and income generation.

Over time, Minga has developed its own understanding of interculturality as "a dynamic and creative process through which different actors contribute from their own cultural contexts to the creation of contents [sic] and meanings that give way to a new social discourse" (Durá, Singhal, & Elías, 2010, p. 1). An intercultural ethic based on listening (listener-as-producer) paves the way for participatory action. In Minga's case participatory action is informed by constructivism and affective pedagogy. Constructivism is premised on the notion that knowledge and meaning are products of the interaction of ideas and lived experiences. A constructivist stance assumes that learning is active and social. Further, the responsibility for learning and the knowledge product that is retained lies within the learner. An affective pedagogy assumes that emotion-based and sensorial elements impact learning. Although Minga's day-to-day operations can take many forms, in the sub-section that follows, we offer an example of Minga's programming and engagement methodology in action.

### A Day in the work of Minga Perú: The Minga model in action

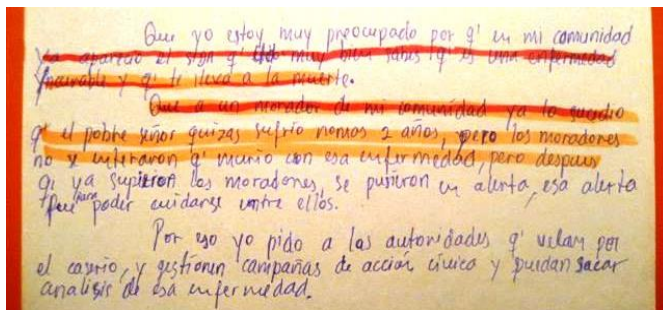


Figure 4. Excerpt from a *Bienvenida Salud* listener letter

On any given day, a listener letter such as the one pictured above arrives by boat, first passing through the city of Nauta and then delivered to Minga's radio production office in the city of Iquitos. The production team extracts listener inputs and codes them by theme. In this case, a male listener tells the story of a person in his community who suffered with HIV/AIDS for two years in secret until his death. When the cause of death was revealed to community members, they became concerned about taking precautions for their own health. The listener requests information about HIV/AIDS.

Based on urgency to discuss a certain topic, usually gauged by patterns or recurrence in listener letters, the Minga production team writes its program scripts (in Spanish and other native languages) targeting listener concerns. The following script excerpt is translated from an actual program retrieved from the Minga website ([www.mingaperu.org](http://www.mingaperu.org) - See Programs/Communication/Sample Programs):

[Program hosts set the scene by describing a workshop for teenage students in the Belén community on STDs and HIV/AIDS through a partnership with the Pan American Health Organization.]

[Two male students in casual conversation after class.]

Student 1: Hey, what'd you think of the things we talked about in that class. Some people pretended not to listen!

Student 2: You know, I was unsure about some things having to do with that HIV/AIDS, but now, they make more sense.

Student 1: That's good that things are clearer because since school started, I've noticed your eyes popping out of your head for Maruja!

Student 2: No kidding, as if it were that easy. She plays hard to get, and I even dream of her at night.

Student 1: Yes, I can imagine you at night, talking to your pillow, Marujita, Marujita, don't be a witch and give me a kiss!

[...two female students approach and ask them if they are up to no good, joking about them being so cozy chatting together like lovers]

Student 2: Naahh, we were just talking about what the teacher talked about in class today.

Student 3: I thought that was a curse. My neighbor's son died of HIV and his mom and other women took him to a healer to get rid of the curse. [...]

Student 4: You're talking about that neighbor in Antucan, how could that be a curse if that guy was with one girl and then another and another?! And without using any kind of protection!!

Student 3: Yes, but that's what I thought at first. And we didn't know what he really had until he was almost dying.

Student 2: He probably didn't want anyone to know. If people found out, imagine how they would have looked at him.

Student 1: That's why we can't be *shishirabos* [local dialect word for a guy who sleeps around]...that's how guys are, they don't use protection.

Student 2: Hey, it's not only guys!

Student 4: Right, now we all have to be careful. That's why I'm going to tell all my girl cousins.

This script excerpt illustrates the intersections between Minga's radio programming and its on-the-ground programming. Listener concerns expressed via letter have been written into scripts *and* incorporated into training workshops, in this case students, although Minga has also conducted HIV/AIDS workshops with *promotoras* and radio correspondents. This particular program integrates issues of gender, stigma, sexuality. HIV/AIDS is also discussed in the context of local vs. outside medicinal practices, a conversation that can be taken further in later workshops or radio programming.

This short excerpt (especially when listened to on [www.mingaperu.org](http://www.mingaperu.org) as opposed to read in transcript form) makes visible Minga's engagement methodology. The program immediately connects with listeners with a familiar tone and dialect. Characters use common indigenous

terms (see *shishirabos* above). For Minga, an emotional climate that makes conversations and constructivist learning possible uses local metaphors, common indigenous terms and dialects, tone, and other discursive techniques. We delve into these intersections further through examples from our data collection in the sections that follow.

### **Minga's impact on quality of life**

Based on Spinuzzi's (2005) criterion for quality of life, community participants should be able to obtain both democratic (e.g., work organization, tools, processes) and functional empowerment (e.g., ability to perform tasks with ease). The design of Minga's work in principle, through its engagement methodology, and in practice, through its programmatic activities reflects this criterion. In this section, we describe Minga's impact on quality of life based on participant perspectives.

*How do we measure the value of a night without violence?  
By how happy our children are....*

*A promotora comunitaria and listener of Bienvenida Salud*

How do we measure the value of a night without violence? To understand the potential impact of Minga's work, our systematization team asked participants to form small groups to sketch and then narrate their responses to the following question: *how do we measure the value of a night without violence?* We conducted three rounds of participatory sketching, adapting this question in each round to focus on the individual, the family, and the community.<sup>iii</sup>

We collected the data presented in this section in December of 2010, triangulating our findings and cross-checking emerging themes with participating *promotoras*, community members, Minga associates and staff, and all members of the interdisciplinary research team. While we can only expect that our participants provided honest feedback, we acknowledge that *our own stated interpretations* in this section are based more on inferences and probabilities than certainty.



Figure 5. Sketch and narration: *Una mujer sin violencia* (A woman without violence). Translated narration:

*This is the portrait of a woman who does not suffer violence. She has a high self-esteem. Because her self-esteem is high, she is not afraid of people making fun of her. She wears the accessories she wants, and in her purse she has her makeup so that she always looks good. She is always positive, always talking. She is not quiet like a woman who suffers from violence and is at a loss for words. She is always ready to talk. She also has money in her purse. She is not a millionaire, but she has her coins to buy a few things she might want.*

Participants explained that at the family level, a night without violence means having time to sleep, think, and plan together as well as to share meals and divide chores. The *minga* spirit that is present at the familial level also extends to the community level. As participants explained, in a community without violence inhabitants work together even when they are involved in separate tasks. In essence, they claimed benefit from some sort of shared order or organization of joint activities as well as shared community spaces and structures. As with the sketch of the individual after a night without violence, the images of a family and a community living without violence were described as a reality by some participants and an ideal by others. One participant summarized: "It's not easy to cut out violence from one moment to the next. There is a process. But to be able to have a family in peace is valuable."

In a second data-collection activity we asked *promotoras* to reflect and write about the ways their lives had changed since their involvement with Minga at the individual, family, and community level. They wrote their reflections on half sheets of paper. Then, in three groups of six to eight divided by individual impact, familial impact, and community impact, participants used large bed linens and markers to pool their reflections (see Figure 6) and note recurring themes and the interconnections they perceived between these themes and the three strategic components of the Minga model. Their reflections of change are summarized in Table 1.



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Figure 6. One of three *promotora*-generated tables depicting the connections they see among the three components of the Minga model

Table 1

*Summary of Interconnections amongst the Minga Model's Three Strategic Components<sup>iv</sup>*

<b>Life Before Minga</b>	<b>Life After Minga</b>	<b>Interconnections with Dialogic Radio</b>	<b>Interconnections with Community Mobilization and Leadership Development</b>	<b>Interconnections with Income Generation and Environmental Resource Management</b>
Men did not value our roles and capacity.	Men value the role and capacity of their wives.	Men are less <i>machista</i> thanks to listening to <i>Bienvenida Salud</i> .	We have more skills because we are trained.	Men go to the fish farms and we are now able to raise chickens.
Men and women did not work together in productive enterprises.	Now both men and women work together.	<i>Bienvenida Salud</i> constantly encourages to live in harmony with men, and to work together.	As community promoters we have to show that we can work together with our husbands. Men are part of our resource network now.	We make <i>mingas</i> (organize groups) to clear the land for planting and for our income generating projects. Now we too can own <i>piscigranjas</i> (fish farms).
<b>We didn't know we had any rights.</b>	We know about our rights and about our children's rights.	We first heard the word "rights" through listening to the <i>Bienvenida Salud</i> radio program. We learned more as we listened.	We have learned how to uphold our dignity and defend ourselves and others. I give talks. I feel confident to ask my partner how much he was paid.	Our partners used to not tell us how much money they had. Now we ask them. We treat our children well by selling chicken and our handicrafts.
<b>We did not talk about a lot of important things.</b>	We dialogue with our children and husbands about the value of education, family planning, use of condoms, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.	We learned from listeners' letters to <i>Bienvenida Salud</i> about the right age to have children. Through the radio program we learned about different things.	We protect our children from abuse. We now know a lot more about how to make them successful.	As parents we now do not give our children cash. We give them clothes and other things they need for school. We are more careful about its right utilization.
<b>We didn't know we were not happy.</b>	We are happy.	We speak our minds at meetings. My family and I value the topics discussed in <i>Bienvenida Salud</i> .	I have a lot of conversations with the local authorities. I can now take on any leadership position in my community.	I have a way to contribute to the sustenance of my home. I feel I am contributing to the community.

Results from this participatory data-gathering and synthesis activity brought to the fore the importance of human rights and living with dignity for the *promotoras* as the following recurring themes emerged: rights, self-esteem, family planning, and dialogue with children, family members, and neighbors. Participants noted their increased capacity to generate income and manage environmental resources. Importantly, participants credited these advances to their dialogic relationships with Minga's communication-based strategies: the *Bienvenida Salud* radio program and leadership training as *promotoras*. They explained that they could not see one being sustained without the other.

Based on this participatory impact data and our interpretations using Spinuzzi's criterion for quality of life, participants have a sense of their own democratic and functional empowerment. Minga's livelihood and income generating activities are localized and respond to participant interests and requests. They are boosted by the social capital that is acquired through listening to dialogic radio and undergoing leadership training. Income-generating activities are small scale, e.g., they are mechanisms for food security and micro-insurance. Some women and families have larger enterprises than others, and some are more successful than others. No matter the size of the income stream, income provides women the decision-making power to purchase medicine, school supplies for their children, and household supplies or clothing without depending on a male partner.

For Spinuzzi (2005) participatory work involved participants working closely with facilitators through focus groups, workshops, prototyping, and other meeting sessions to assess their progress and to ensure their values, goals, and ends are reflected in the project. Our analysis of Minga's archival materials reveals reflexivity and codetermination in as much as dialogic radio, workshops, training activities, and other group gatherings are part of Minga's day to day operations and shape Minga's program design. This constant communication is what makes collaborative development, Spinuzzi's second criterion, possible.

### **Creating the conditions for collaborative development and iterative process**

Collaborative development (Spinuzzi, 2005) allows participants to be co-designers and co-researchers. It emphasizes mechanisms for adequate participation and involvement. Minga enacts collaborative development rhetorically in its engagement methodology: interculturality, listening to understand; constructivism, facilitating knowledge-making by connecting lived experiences with new knowledge; and affective pedagogy, harnessing emotional and sensorial elements. This triad enables a common language whereby participants are "able to interact with researchers in a neutral 'language' understood by both sides" (Spinuzzi, 2005, p. 170). The discursive and material practices we describe in this section are Minga's theory-to-practice (ultimately praxis) bridge. We learned of these practices through interviews with Minga Perú officials as key informants during systematization data collection activities.

### **Valuing unconventional literacies and mirroring assets**

Initially people were very afraid of writing, of making spelling and mechanical mistakes. Minga approached this fear openly during *Bienvenida Salud* broadcasts and provided encouragement. While most letters are hand-printed with pencil or pen on paper, it is not uncommon for some letters to be written with natural tinctures on tree bark. Through this practice, Minga invites the exploration of “the tacit knowledge and invisible practices that might otherwise have been lost, and simultaneously encourages workers to participate in their own empowerment” (Spinuzzi, 2005, p. 170). Minga’s ability to collect thousands of letters on difficult subjects is no small feat. Not only has Minga broken through literacy barriers and cultural taboos, it has encouraged a productive writing culture where people can express concerns openly. We see this in the listener-as-producer feedback loop that we illustrated in the introduction to this article.

When Minga receives listener letters with a deficit-focused message, i.e. the image of an illiterate indigenous woman or a woman who has endured violence at home, the production team works to mirror back an asset-focused message on-the-air through *Bienvenida Salud*, i.e. a strong and beautiful woman of cultural, ethnic, and experiential wealth.

Another way Minga mirrors assets is by using regional dialects and accents in its programming. In Perú, as in most countries, certain accents and dialects are associated with prestige. The accent from Lima, the country’s capital, is generally seen as superior; therefore, many *selva* broadcasters acquire a Lima accent. This contributes to people feeling a sense of shame regarding the way they speak. Minga’s public use of local accents and dialects in all programming is primarily a deliberate statement of equity rather than an effort to secure understanding through the use of prestige dialects.

### **Communicating an accessible ethos through tone and framing**

Elías noted in a 2010 interview: “There is a way to communicate hierarchy through tone; there is also a way to flatten hierarchy through tone.” In its radio scripts and in the way the Minga team interacts, Minga eliminates commonly used titles denoting a hierarchical difference: Sir, Ma’am, *Don* and *Doña*. Someone who comes from a rural working background and someone with a doctoral degree is addressed by his or her first name with respect and affection. Minga also communicates an accessible ethos by using “we” instead of “I” or “you” to denote the subject in a sentence. Embodying a community spirit, Minga finds, generates less resistance to messages and reinforces identity, identification, and sense of ownership. *Promotoras* agreed during data collection activities described in the previous section that these small but important practices act as micro-affirmations that make people *feel Bienvenida Salud is their program*.

### **Use of local metaphors to link local and outside knowledge**

Minga uses locally relevant nature-based images to engender familiarity and trust with listeners. In a 2008 data-collection activity a respondent noted why she was proud of her culture: “*Como el río Marañon, somos generosas y resistentes, fuertes*. Like the Marañon river, we are generous and resilient, strong.”<sup>v</sup> It is common for Minga to use such metaphors in *Bienvenida Salud* or during capacity-building activities. To expand the potential of existing assets and wisdom, Minga introduces new words and technical knowledge into its on-air and on-the-ground programming.



By introducing new ways of knowing, Minga facilitates communication with government and institutional officials. Expanding participants' capabilities and their relationships helps women help themselves, their families, and their communities. Through this practice Minga illustrates that there is room for outside expertise in participatory work. This addresses one of the major trepidations of the theory-to-practice gap: letting go of expertise or control. Expertise here is a matter of re-framing. The traditional expert becomes an expert mediator, affirming local sensibilities and creating a space where outside sensibilities are understood in a meaningful way.

### **Entertainment-education and iterative process**

Entertainment-education plays a key role in the execution of the above-mentioned strategies through *Bienvenida Salud*, Minga's cornerstone programmatic activity. A rhetorical strategy in and of itself, it brings together unconventional literacies, mirroring, tone, framing, metaphors, and expert knowledge. Entertainment-education radio is Minga's voice; it is also Minga's programmatic ear, driving the design of its other two strategic components. These face-to-face activities further strengthen community ties and networks. In this way, Minga is able to sustain continual participation and reflexive practice.

### **Conclusions and implications for participatory and intercultural practice, research, and pedagogy**

Survival in the Amazon has been bound historically to managing isolation, natural resources, and livelihoods. Amazonian populations have for generations adapted to a changing natural environment. Minga is an example of an effective and sustained rhetorical intervention to advance human rights.

Our first purpose in this article has been to show how Minga Perú operationalizes participatory and intercultural principles rhetorically to advance human rights and preserve the dignity of its constituents in the Amazon. We have achieved this purpose through our analysis of Minga's social change model, including its operational practices and philosophical principles, and their combined impact on participants. We have also analyzed everyday rhetorical practices that make collaborative and iterative participation possible. Here, we respond to the second part of our research question, setting forth contributions and implications of Minga's work.

Minga's operational components, engagement methodology, and specific rhetorical strategies can inform the participatory and intercultural communication theory-to-practice gap, research, and pedagogy. We take the following key insights from Minga's work:

- In a context of extreme poverty, Minga embodies a spirit of positive deviance (See [www.positivedeviance.org](http://www.positivedeviance.org)), foregrounding assets and local wisdom that works and is easily accessible to everyone. Rather than attempting to address systemic issues or root causes, Minga's response is to facilitate spaces and programs so that people can act in spite of those issues.
- Participatory design and intercultural communication go hand in hand. In fact, it is difficult to see them as mutually exclusive, although they are distinct areas. We contend from Minga's example that accepting and valuing grassroots epistemologies in practice

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opens the door to intercultural practices such as rhetorical listening. And vice versa, rhetorical listening paves the way for a more informed participatory practice. The key is in recognizing whether the gap in the dynamic is principle- or practice-based.

- Researchers and organizations can replicate the Minga model or parts of it, including everyday rhetorical practices such as mirroring, accessible tone, and inclusive framing in their local settings. The use of metaphors, non-mainstream literacies and dialects, and entertainment-education can be explored in greater depth in projects that incorporate literacy studies, translingualism, and participatory risk communication, among other areas.
- The relationship between empowerment and epistemology also deserves deeper exploration. Minga participants, in the spirit of constructivism, take responsibility for their own learning. They learn about themselves through their own practice, through the characters and discussions on *Bienvenida Salud*, and through their peers or communities of practice. This dynamic of social proof engenders a change in participants' perceptions of reality—of what they think is possible. Perhaps one of Minga's most profound contributions then is the expansion of participants' perceptions of their realities.

The contributions and implications noted here present opportunities for further study while serving as a reminder that the present study is limited in scope. Minga's work in the Amazon can be analyzed using myriad analytical frameworks. We chose Spinuzzi's (2005) framework because it helped us to see the integrity of Minga's model as a participatory project. But postmodern and critical theories, among others, can be applied to this content in subsequent studies to deepen understanding of the epistemological and ideological dynamics at work in participatory and intercultural approaches and their implications for notions of empowerment.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that while Spinuzzi refers to “user” participation, given his framework is situated in human-computer interaction and user-centered design, we find that it translates well to a community-based context.

<sup>3</sup> Through their letters to *Bienvenida Salud* and in their interactions during training gatherings, women have communicated that often the barriers to their survival are psychosocial: diminished sense of capabilities and self-esteem.

<sup>4</sup> We considered it important for us to design our activities in a manner congruent with Minga’s methodology.

<sup>5</sup> Table 1 is a compilation of the data collected from the participatory group exercise in which promotoras populated intersections between the three components of the Minga model using large white sheets, cardstock, and markers. The language in this table is a direct translation from Spanish to English. Shifts from first-person to third-person occurred naturally during the activity; they do not reflect any input by the researchers after the fact.

<sup>6</sup> We conducted this data collection activity as part of a program evaluation for Minga in 2008 for a UNIFEM funded project. The project involved the utilization of Minga's radio program as a springboard for conversations around violence and HIV/AIDS and leadership training.