

## Maximizing media's role for rural development

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1989

Nilo M. (1989). Maximizing media's role for rural development. In Seminar on Developments and Trends in the Rural Mass Media in Asia : Singapore, 16-18 January, 1989. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/86460>

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**By**

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## INTRODUCTION

Access to information plays a significant role in the democratization efforts of the present administration as it strives to touch the lives of the marginal people especially those in the countryside, wherein there is the problem of trying to awaken the rural folk to new ideas and to the potentials of new approaches and technology without producing psychological frustration and anxieties. There is also the need to provide them with more learning resources and opportunities so that they can comprehend their problems and act upon them.

Media infrastructure today cannot yet meet the information requirements of the people because of inadequate reach and unequal distribution. Media infrastructure is concentrated in urban areas and access to it favors the high and average income groups and those with better education opportunities. So much information has been transmitted to the urban community but very little of this information has trickled down to the rural poor. To reduce these blatant disparities, there is a need for other media to which the rural folk can have easy access, channels through which they can receive and impart vital information to improve their lives. Indeed, community media are a potent force in mobilizing the countryside. This investigative study seeks to cover the following aspects:

1. To present the existing causes of the media's inadequacy as an effective nexus in information dissemination.
2. To determine how the socio-economic and political situation affects the role of media in rural development.
3. To outline the various strategies of the government in order to give the people in the rural areas access to information.

## OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIA SITUATION IN THE PAST AND PRESENT GOVERNMENT

The following general assessment may be made on past government communication programs since 1953:

1. Information needs on the people required by them to participate meaningfully in the democratic process and to improve their quality of life were not met.
2. Information was not flowing as much nor as fast as it should have because of policy and organizational barriers.
3. Although the people's right to information on matters of public concern was recognized in the 1973 Constitution, it was not supported by law, policy, or program.
4. Basic information policy then focused on the molding of public opinion toward the unquestioning acceptance of government thinking. The flow of communication was predominantly one-way from government to the people.
5. There existed a mutual distrust between the government and the people.
6. The manipulative nature of government information led to a deterioration of its credibility even of its public information officers concerned with the development - oriented information.
7. Relationship between the government and the media did not foster the observance of the highest professional and ethical standards.

The present public information system of the Philippines is presently spearheaded by:

1. The Office of the Press Secretary (OPS) which is the spokesman and media relations arm of the President;
2. The Philippine Information Agency (PIA) a communication support agency;
3. A network of information units in the various line ministries

and agencies of the government, which provides day-to-day information and public relations services and meets communication support needs of specific programs and projects.

The government's television network, which operates three broadcast stations, is administered by the People's Television 4 under the OPS.

The government radio network is composed of 23 radio stations with an aggregate power of 184 kilowatts.

The government's printing capability consists of the printing facilities of the PIA, the APO-NEDA Printing Office, the Bureau of Printing and printing presses owned and operated by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health. In all, these facilities are capable of fully servicing the printing requirements of the government. The government also has film, audio-visual and special media capabilities.



## RURAL MEDIA SITUATIONER

While the importance of communication in rural development has been recognized by decision-makers, it tends to be neglected in favor of more tangible infrastructures like the delivery of social services and the building of physical infrastructures. These are undeniably essential to rural development; however, they do not, by themselves, result in development.

Communication of some sort does exist in all development projects. However, what is desirable is the systematic application of available communication resources. As there is at present minimal utilization of communication in rural development, existing communication policies must be reviewed. Programs have to be evaluated and redesigned. Development programs have tended to concentrate around urban areas and power centers. Because resource allotments have favored these areas, development of rural areas have lagged behind.

What are the resources which give us opportunities to become catalysts for community action? In the rural areas, there are farmers' and fishermens' organizations, "samahang nayons", and social and religious organizations which can be strengthened to become channels for community action and bottom up communications. In the urban areas, there are consumer and environmental organizations and other social groups which have been organized for the purpose of problem solving on important issues affecting the society today. A community center in a local village could become a focal point for community activities where each member grows in awareness of social and political developments through information sharing, but it could hardly be adequate to meet all the information needs of the people.

In the rural areas mechanisms that promote a socially-conscious media user are existing but not quite enough.

A. The Broadcast Media: Number and Reach

The Philippines has a total of 308 radio stations. Of these, 236 are AM stations while the rest (72) are FM stations. Eighty-five percent (263) of these stations are operated as commercial concerns, 7 percent (20) are either educational or religious stations, and 8 percent (26) are operated by the government. Radio stations are highly urbanized. Forty percent of all media stations are located in the country's key cities and towns. Metro Manila alone has 47 radio stations with 28 on the AM band and 19 on the FM band. Luzon accounts for the greatest number of radio stations with 108 followed by Mindanao with 79, and Visayas with 74.

There are currently 45 operating television stations. Twenty-four of these are capable of originating programs while 21 are only relay stations. These stations belong to five television networks all originating from Metro Manila.

Radio and television stations can broadcast to all corners of the country but ownership of radio and TV sets is highly urbanized. In the rural areas, three out of five households own radio sets and three out of five own TV sets. In Metro Manila alone, 78 percent of households are TV set owners. While urban households constitute only 38 percent of the national total, they own 67 percent of TV sets. Inversely, rural households (62 percent of total) own only 24 percent of TV sets. Radio is more pervasive since 73 percent of households in the Philippines have at least one radio set. (See Table 1-4)

At any TV viewing time and place, viewers in rural areas are more than those in urban areas. This is especially true in areas



Table 1. TELEVISION SET OWNERSHIP - RURAL PHILIPPINES

|                           | HOUSEHOLDS     | HOUSEHOLDS WITH TV |           |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
|                           | 000            | 000                | %         |
| RURAL PHILIPPINES<br>1987 | <u>6.344.6</u> | <u>1.506.1</u>     | <u>24</u> |
| METRO MANILA              |                |                    |           |
| LUZON                     | 2.959.2        | 828.6              | 28        |
| VISAYAS                   | 1.668.5        | 317.0              | 19        |
| MINDANAO                  | 1.716.9        | 360.5              | 21        |

Table 2. TELEVISION SET OWNERSHIP - URBAN PHILIPPINES

|                           | HOUSEHOLDS     | HOUSEHOLDS WITH TV |           |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
|                           | 000            | 000                | %         |
| URBAN PHILIPPINES<br>1987 | <u>3.940.4</u> | <u>2.643.2</u>     | <u>67</u> |
| METRO MANILA              | 1.387.5        | 1.207.1            | 87        |
| LUZON                     | 1.336.4        | 873.2              | 65        |
| VISAYAS                   | 640.9          | 307.2              | 48        |
| MINDANAO                  | 575.6          | 255.7              | 44        |

Table 3. RADIO SET OWNERSHIP - RURAL PHILIPPINES

|                   | <u>HOUSEHOLDS</u> | <u>HOUSEHOLDS WITH RADIO</u> |           |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
|                   | 000               | 000                          | %         |
| RURAL PHILIPPINES |                   |                              |           |
| 1987              | <u>6.344.6</u>    | <u>4.653.6</u>               | <u>73</u> |
| METRO MANILA      |                   |                              |           |
| LUZON             | 2.959.2           | 2.249.0                      | 76        |
| VISAYAS           | 1.668.5           | 1.151.3                      | 69        |
| MINDANAO          | 1.716.9           | 1.253.3                      | 73        |

Table 4. RADIO SET OWNERSHIP - URBAN PHILIPPINES

|                   | <u>HOUSEHOLDS</u> | <u>HOUSEHOLDS WITH RADIO</u> |           |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
|                   | 000               | 000                          | %         |
| URBAN PHILIPPINES |                   |                              |           |
| 1987              | <u>3.940.4</u>    | <u>3.339.3</u>               | <u>85</u> |
| METRO MANILA      | 1.387.5           | 1.262.6                      | 91        |
| LUZON             | 1.336.4           | 1.098.1                      | 82        |
| VISAYAS           | 640.9             | 507.6                        | 79        |
| MINDANAO          | 575.6             | 471.0                        | 82        |

Source: PSRC Survey as of 1987

where power supply facilities have recently been installed and only very few have acquired TV sets. However, TV viewing in rural areas is limited not only by the lack of sets but also by schedules of electricity supply (usually nighttime only, from 5 pm to 12 midnight), and distance from main or relay stations. In several, non-acquisition of a TV set even by AB households is attributed to the difficulty of getting good screen images due to distance from TV stations or to geographical barriers like high mountains that offset good transmission. Acquiring a new TV set under those conditions is encouraged only by the video cassette revolution.

#### B. The Print Media: Reach and Circulation

"Democratic space" and "newspaper boom" best describe the Philippine newspaper industry today. After more than two decades of suppression and government control, it is now on its way to regain its title as the "freest in Asia." The restoration of press freedom upon the assumption to power of the Aquino administration signaled the start of feverish developments in the media industry. This is most dramatically seen in the sudden increase in number of major dailies and magazines, most of which are revivals of pre-martial law publications. Despite the relatively large number of national dailies, readership remains low. Of the potential 33 million readers (i.e., 15 years old and above) only half are regular readers whose reading fare averages only three to four days a week. As expected, those with high regular readership and reading frequency are those who belong to the higher income group. About thirty percent of the total circulation of major newspapers are sold in Metro Manila, the rest are distributed to the other regions of the country where 88 percent of the people reside. The urban-bias in the circulation of national newspapers can be attributed to various factors:

1. National dailies can reach the regions only through efficient transportation facilities. Unfortunately, this condition does not exist. Many places in the country are physically isolated. Provincial

copies of the national dailies are distributed thorough Philippine Airlines (PAL) flights. In most cases, newspapers arrive in the capital only by mid-morning. Smaller towns receive their copy, if there are any, by late afternoon. In some cases, newspapers are one to two days late.

2. The readers from the provinces have to bear the brunt of the transportation cost. The average price of broadsheet newspaper in Metro Manila is ₱2.00 on a weekday and ₱5.00 on a Sunday (with magazine supplement). If a reader is from Davao City, the farthest that could be reached daily by a PAL flight, he has to spend as high as ₱8.00, with the additional cost for transportation and delivery fee. Considering that 80 percent of the people in the rural areas live below the poverty line, the ₱8.00 daily he will spend for a newspaper is not only prohibitive but also "luxurious." Even in Metro Manila, a year's subscription of a newspaper already costs ₱720 which is almost the monthly wage of an unskilled laborer or equivalent to 15 working days of a minimum-waged earner.

3. 23.5 percent of the people in the rural areas are illiterate compared to only 7.5 percent in the urban areas. The mostly English-language newspapers do not mean anything to them. Radio is their only source of news.

4. Technological constraints have immense impact as well. Any delay in the production process would mean forfeiting its distribution in the provinces, particularly in the Visayas and Mindanao. Likewise, Malaya has been renting four different presses that are located far apart from each other.



## SUMMARY

The analysis has shown the inadequacy of communication inputs in the planning process in linking various agencies, and in communicating the Plan to the people. There is also a lack of public participation because of the lack of adequate interactive mechanisms which would encourage the articulation of needs and aspirations.

The study also has shown that while there was available technical information for agriculture and non-farm industries, the information transfer in these areas could be further improved particularly in making information more relevant and better understood by the users.

The study suggests that present development requires committed planners and communicators who are able to translate national goals to local needs, help people express their needs within the context of the resources and constraints of their environment, link individuals and institutions involved in similar goals and develop mechanisms for people to realize their full potentials as partners in development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the country's mass media infrastructure is concentrated in key cities and urban centers, the study recommends that government policies be aimed at the dispersal of media facilities to the countryside. A review to rationalize the broadcast industry has been recommended. Further policy studies along the development of media infrastructure in identified information poor areas is strongly suggested. Specifically, efforts must address the following:

1. study of present communication policies/plans pertinent to media infrastructure development;
2. review and re-evaluation of existing media infrastructures and their implications for policy formulation, manpower development and communication technology;



3. identification of international communication issues related to media infrastructure development to suggest policies for protection of national interests;

4. establishment of mechanism for inter-agency cooperation;

5. establishment of a municipal data bank to facilitate the collection, retrieval and dissemination of accurate data to all agencies and planners;

6. encouragement of people's participation in local policy making and planning so that planning does not become myopic and urbanized;

7. conduction of a continuing education program on cooperatives to inculcate pride in collective efforts. The "Samahang Nayan" meetings could be used as forums for study groups;

8. establishment of a community resource center. Among other things, the center could show that farm technology could be simplified and show how the community could be mobilized through study groups like radio listening;

9. manpower development for information and communication; training areas include management and organization skills, planning and program development, agribusiness, marketing, integrated development and development perspectives;

10. research and information utilization to enable personnel to identify research needs and research institutions.