Media practitioners as change agents

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MEDIA PRACTITIONERS AS CHANGE AGENTS

by Guy de Fontgalland

> "A series of costly and avoidable failures has shown the planner that
> even well-drawn projects of modernisation fail to register with the
> people and to produce the desired results unless they are supported
> by an imaginative, adequate and effective communication program".
>
> Professor S.C. Dube

At the entrance to the Journalism Department of the University of Missouri in the United States, there used to be (and perhaps there still is) a bronze plate bearing the University's credo for journalists. In the typical American tradition of justice and liberty, the credo provides a singular study of what the American journalist was, and to a large measure is, expected to be: god-fearing, profoundly patriotic, respectful of humanity, unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power, independent, constructive, tolerant and indignant at injustice.

To a significant extent, journalism in most of the westen countries has evolved and developed into a major 'power' - institutionalising itself in the process with functions that eventually made journalists trustees of the public. The 'trusteeship' differs from one country to another only in degree - conditioned by the nature of a country's laws.

As trustees of the public, they are responsible for informing the public of what happened both within the nation and in the outside world as well as being watchdogs, safeguarding the public interest in community and national affairs.

These functions also carry with them a sense of power, mission and glamour and have shaped the character of the profession as well as its scope and dimensions. Journalists dig out vital information, assess, interpret and process it for a public who constantly demand detailed, accurate and objective information.

It has almost become a tradition that a journalist of today lives from one deadline to another. His preoccupation - for which he is almost daily praised or pulled up - is on speed, accuracy, details and objectivity. The stories which he is assigned to cover may well be fraught with obstacles. He could spend hours merely chasing a crooked shadow; he could be sold a dummy by a source attempting to mislead him; he could come up against another who has all the information but refuses to talk; he could by chance pick up some useful information and spend sleepless nights wondering what to do with it. He has to beware of libel suits, check and cross-check every bit of information, whethe it be the name of a person or details of statistics. And, of course, he has to live with a critical public.

From the very first day he walked into the newsroom, he has lived under pressure, but often he has also derived a sense of satisfaction from his vocation. The journalist also has to contend with the tyranny of sensationalism. Newspapers running on their own steam must be able to sell in order to survive in business and one of the biggest and most effective ploys is to publish stories highlighting human oddity and pandering to sensationalism. Newspapers sometimes prefer to describe in detail a suicide attempt than report about paddy fields destroyed by pests or the invasion of rats in a grain warehouse. The journalist is sometimes expected to or even called upon to sustain the viability of his newspaper by writing stories that will boost the circulation which in turn will attract advertisers.

A Historical Perspective

Historically, the evolution of journalism in a competitive business world has given the profession certain characteristics that have time and again come in for serious questioning. And since mass media practice and theories have come from the more affluent and industrialised West and continue to be influenced by them to a large extent, the role of the media practitioner, whether it be in the developed West or in the Third World, has remained more or less similar.

It is also a matter of fact that for a long time, media practitioners in the developing ocuntries have looked up to their counterparts in the West not only for basic technological infrastructure and production skills but also for the style and format as well as basic principles on the scope and functions of mass media organisations.

The power and influence mass media organisations in the West weilded in their own territories has become one of the important hallmarks of major mass media organisations in the developing countries to such an extent that bigger ones with greater power look down on the small country organisations and practitioners as lesser ones. This has brought with it a certain value system and a style of operation. The prestige and power and importance of a media organisation was often judged by its ability to make and unmake governments. But as history would show and to the extent one is prepared to admit, mass media organisations in most developing countries have been made to exercise certain constraints and conform to certain prescribed standards of practice which, no doubt, now make them very different from their counterparts in the West.

Initially the restraints on mass media functions brought feelings of uneasiness, but interestingly enough there has been and there continues to be a new, refreshing thinking on the theory and practice of mass media in developing countries. The new thinking attempts to give new definitions to an old practice that would provide greater validity within its area of operation. A valid point made by many mass media practitioners in the Asian region, is that, for long, mass media had not seriously paid heed to national aspirations, problems, needs and priorities and consequently have wasted so much of human and material resources. In many instances, they have been instrumental in creating what is now often referred to as a revolution of rising frustrations.

From a historical perspective, media organisations in the region are definitely going through a period of transition that may eventually give these organisations and the practitioners newer and more meaningful and perhaps wider dimensions and hopefully, facilities of operation.

It is in this context and against this backdrop that one could discuss the concept of media practitioners as change agents - a function that extends the area of operation from watchdogs, information gatekeepers, leaders of opinion, influencers of attitudes to catalysts, motivators, persuaders and change agents.

The Concept of Change Agency

The concept of change agency when applied to the overall mass media practice is not only new, but to a large extent debatable. Some would regard it as a deviation of the role of the hitherto accepted mass media practice while others would look at it as an extension of the practice that would not only expand the scope and functions of media organisations but strengthen their existence and facilitate their operation in their respective areas of activity. Although media practitioners in the West as well as in the developing countries witnessed great changes occasioned by the mass media, they have rarely taken the credit or the responsibility for them. Such changes were, in their view, the snowball effects rather than direct cause and effects. Furthermore, mass media practitioners were clearly governed both by a tradition and ethics of their practice which did not warrant them to act or appear as change agents in any situation.

The only field of mass media activity that was almost totally dedicated to 'changing' the audience has been advertising. Once advertisers had their market research reports about the habit or need of a certain people, they devised ways and means of motivating them, persuading them and making them accept a certain product. From the very appearance of an advertising copy to film commercials and public relations and even sky-writing, there is close coordination - all with the intent to motivate, persuade and change. In fact, advertising that started with billboards has today become a complex art that banks heavily on in-depth researches on attitudinal changes and human behaviour. The final test of an advertising campaign is how well the product sells. There is no profession that constantly keeps the humans more in mind, day in and day out, than advertising.

A Practical Necessity?

The discussion and the debate on whether mass media practitioners in the developing world could rightfully adopt the role of change agents may not come to an end very soon but what concerns us here is that the application of the change agent role to mass media practitioners is indeed a practical necessity - being born out of the exigencies of the Third World where mass communication channels have to be geared towards development efforts. Hence, the need for a theoretical model for development communication and as one of its important ingredients, the need to accept in principle that mass

media practitioners could adopt the role of change agents aside from their useful and important functions of informers and educators.

As we have seen earlier during the Seminar, many of the concepts we have been referring to - like development, development communication, and change agents - have been thrust into sharp focus by researchers, planners and administrators in the developing world although such concepts are not the monopoly of developing countries. And often, the initiatives towards discussion of such concepts and their practice in actual life have come from concerned governments and aid agencies rather than from private organisations.

The Origin of 'Change Agents'

The change agents' origin could be traced back to the agricultural extension worker who is perhaps the only man in the bottom rung of government agricultural developmens faced with the task of increasing productivity. There are new and better methods of farming, improved fertiliser, better varieties of seed, better system of alternating crops, diversification of crops, credit facilities to farmers, farmers' clubs, discussion groups, information network through radio and interpersonal communication, that have been designed to initiate and sustain the momentum for greater productivity. There is a vast and unlimited area of activity but the one important link with the farmer, the man who sees and reports the problem at the field level, who is at hand to give the farmer the needed advice and assistance is the extension worker.

Inasmuch as he could translate government policies and programmes and technical know-how meaningfully to the farmer, inasmuch as he could establish rapport with the farmer, inform him, motivate him, and persuade him to either change his style of farming, adopt different technical know-how, better varieties of seed, fertiliser or make use of available credit facilities, the extension worker becomes a change agent - perhaps the most important link in the chain of developmental activities.

From here, the concept of change agent and his role in development has expanded and is being studied today with great care and detail. Family planning is one area of activity where the change agent has been found to be most effective and in many instances, indispensable. He is both an agent of implementation as well as much needed feedback system. He is no longer regarded as simply a carrier agent, the last point in the delivery mechanism, but as a well-informed, trained and skilled contributor in the elaborate system of development activity. He is called upon, more and more today, to be able to speak the dual language of the administrator as well as that of the man in the street. He is like a bridge connecting the planning board and the multitude waiting to receive the benefits of research and innovations.

The concept of change agent is interpreted differently and his role is constantly being enlarged and extolled. Some consider him an ideal contact man who knows the behaviour of the people he is dealing with, while others, like the men working with organsations such as the Asian Cultural Forum on Development, view him as a committed agent of change.

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Whatever the view, one point has been firmly established: that he has the best reach at grassroots level and, therefore, is an important link in the chain of development activity. His effectiveness is because of this 'reach'.

Viewing the newspapers, the radio and the television as channels and agents that have an excellent reach among the people, one may conclude that mass media could, in theory and practice, play a very important role as change agents. Although at the personal level, the change agent will be far more effective, he can never hope to beat the mass media in the proven extensiveness of their 'reach'.

The concept of change agency applied to mass media practitioners opens entirely new and wide dimensions of activity. It means that media systems no longer operate from a castle of their own but establish direct links with their audience – the people. It also means that certain value systems both in the content and style of print and broadcast journalism have to be changed to meet the more urgent demands of development and nation-building.

It requires the media practitioners to innovate and establish guidelines for an effective practice of communication designed to create a suitable climate for development. It also implies that the media practitioners endeavour to formulate a flexible practice of development communication in consultation and coordination with all the major agencies involved in development so that what the media practitioners communicate becomes relevant, meaningful, comprehensive and forms an integral part of the overall approach.

Given this new role, it is extremely important to find out at the same time what are the factors inhibiting effectiveness of communicators in the developing countries -- more specifically in Asia. These can be viewed from three major angles:

1. **from the viewpoint of communication infrastructure;**
2. **from the viewpoint of the audience; and**
3. **from the viewpoint of the communicator and his message.**

1.   COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

There is a gap between what modern communication technology can offer and what in fact are the possibilities in Asia to absorb such technology. Satellite communication has brought about 'instant globalism' in which what takes place in one corner of the world could be instantly seen by millions throughout the world.

As Hidetoshi Kato of Japan has put it, the earth has suddenly been given "electronic coating". By the year 2000, communication technology will have advanced to such an unbelievable extent that even major conferences could be held via two-way television with delegates sitting and discussing issues in two or more cities of the world 'together' at the same time.

Despite such advanced technology, realistic forecast for Asia is that communication networks in this region will be surprisingly inadequate and will not even reach the fringe of the large mass of rural population.

Right now, mass media in Asia are limited chiefly to the 'elite', and most media are elite-oriented. Rural communication networks, like the rural press, have not proved to be expansive in their reach. They have been found to be financially non-viable and have been edged out, in most instances, by the more powerful urban-based media.

Although the initial stages of the evolution of media in Asia were rural-based, the process of media-urbanisation has been swift, and it has evolved and continued to exist in an "urban climate" with different value systems and functions which, of necessity, had a limited audience.

In contrast to the print medium, radio in Asia has a deeper penetration. The invention of transistor and the low prices of transistor sets have made it possible for radio to have a reach wider than that of the print medium. Television, however, still remains a national symbol, an ostentatious mark of modernity and reaches only a very limited category of people who can afford to buy TV sets. Although major efforts are made by some Asian countries to make radio and television available to the villages by providing community listening/viewing sets, the number of people who can take advantage of them, of necessity, are very small.

Governments that realise the importance of building an adequate media structure are thinking in terms of sophisticated technology rather than in terms of intermediate technology which are inexpensive and could have a wider use. Thus, one finds that Asian countries that have some limited resources for the development of communication infrastructure 'squandering' them on sophisticated hardware.

Traditional Networks

In contrast to the poorly developed modern media of communication in Asia, one finds the existence of a very strong traditional communication network; the priest and the politician, the market vendor and the taxi driver who have access to the towns, the folk artiste, the town crier and the story-teller. BUT, the traditional communication channels have to be clearly identified and studied. For example, although one speaks of the existence of opinion leaders, there is yet not enough scientific information about their nature and influence, the interaction between them and the community, the credibility they have as opinion leaders, etc.

Another major problem in communicating with the rural masses is the high rate of illiteracy, difference in dialects and languages which preclude the wide utilisation of books, magazines, and newspapers as instruments of communication. The problem of illiteracy, despite major national and international efforts to combat it, seems to be getting worse. The rural illiteracy in Asia, on average, is still a formidable 46.8 per cent

compared to Europe's and USSR's average of 3.6 per cent and North America's 1.5 per cent. Of Asia's 53.2 per cent literates, perhaps less than 50 per cent (working on a fair surmise) could be exposed to the print medium in some meaningful way. Statistically, that leaves about 75 per cent of Asia's population out of print media's reach.

One of the most neglected areas of communication infrastructure is communication research. Communication research by itself is a rather young discipline, perhaps about 20 years old and it is all too often confined to academic institutions. Whatever research has been carried out is often found to exist in "impressive" volumes and shrouded in technical jargon unintelligible to most media practitioners as well as to policy makers, planners and administrators. Perhaps, governments and other agencies that believe in the potential of communication need to get down to more action-oriented research that could provide an insight into the heart-beat of the people rather than embark on elaborate communication strategies based on hunches and whimsical guesses. A clear knowledge of the people's media habits, selectivity in exposure and perception, mass media penetration, etc., must precede any communication strategy attempting to change the attitude of the people.

2.   AUDIENCE

Establishing links with the people in developing countries presents a fascinating and at the same time a challenging problem to the communicator. Unlike his counterparts in the West, Asian communicator is bedevilled by problems that have changing shapes and shades, magnitude and intensity. Amidst innumerable problems of cultural and language differences, altogether different scales of exposure and selectivity, conflicting political and national interests, communicators in developing countries often grope for a model to guide them.

It is an established fact that in developing countries, a very large part of development communication flows between a leadership bent upon modernising and a reluctant, if not resistant mass. Perhaps, on a cause and effect analysis, the policy makers and planners may have to take the blame. When policies and plans are discussed and drawn up, there is very little discussion outside the boardrooms and people are often handed development programmes in surprise packages.

People often fail to understand the short and long term meaning behind growth targets and development programmes. They tend to accept only those that offer immediate relief or reward in their personal lives and disregard the rest that may not touch the fringe of their immediate lives. And when policy makers, planners and administrators (the modernising elite) attempt to communicate, they meet with a very reluctant and sometimes resistant mass.

There are yawning gaps in the cultural ethos between the rural elite and the rural mass in contrast to the chasms between the urban elite and the rural elite. The value systems among these groups are not often the same and sometimes are in conflicting contrast.   Depending on the extent of exposure to the community in which they live,

the community outside and the world at large, the value systems of these three groups of elite differ. A programme of industrialisation, for example, could be viewed as a sign of modernity and a short cut to attaining a higher Gross National Product by the modernising elite and providing employment opportunities and having multiplier effects by the urban elite. But the rural elite do not necessarily share these views. Thus, where there is a conflict of value systems, implementation of the industrialisation programme will be affected.

Furthermore, what one sees as mass is in fact masses, with relatively little commonality among them. If communicators unquestioningly assume that their audience is a homogeneous group with the same pattern of exposure, interests and motivation, they will soon find themselves talking to a blank wall. Even if one works on the premise that the unifying factors - the common characteristics - of an audience is a good enough link for communication to be effective, one needs to be aware of the divisive factors in order to avoid beaming messages which may bring such factors to the surface.

Inhibiting Factors

In communicating with the rural mass, media practitioners could find peculiar problems - factors that inhibit the flow of information. One of them is the existence of an established 'bureaucracy' that seeps down to the village level. The 'bureaucratic' links established through the extension officers, village headmen, the tax collector, etc., often tend to convey messages that are either conflicting, diluted or lacking in any meaningful motivation whereas people may consider such information reliable.

Such "encroachment" of the bureaucratic network has often edged the communication media out to the fringe of rural life. The grim result: communication media are not being effectively utilised to build a climate for change or to inculcate in the individuals a will to work and change attitudes.

Another serious problem is the lack of any proper feedback system that could give communicators a feel of the audience's pulse. It is often a one-way, top-to-bottom communication. Whether it is the urban or rural newspaper, radio or television, communicators have always talked to an audience and rarely with them. Even when the audience reacted adversely to certain messages, communicators have turned a deaf ear. Case studies in certain Asian countries have shown that the absence of a feedback system and media's insistence on transmitting messages may lead to resentment and opposition.

Mass media in developing countries need somehow to get down to making their link with the people more meaningful -- to becoming responsible for the snowball effects of communication. It is indeed a clear-cut social responsibility. Daniel Lerner's theory that the revolution of rising expectations brought about by the media leads to a revolution of rising frustrations seems more and more valid in the developing countries where the Want:Get ratio is ever widening. Media have exposed the people to the good things of life and they need now to help people get what they want. It is now part of the conconvulsive history of developing countries that the people get, from time to time, spas-

modic dreams of easy victories in the socio-economic spheres on account of 'utopian pledges' by emotion charged politicians. History is witness to the euphoria before every general elections and the psychological depression afterwards.

How could the media help douse such dreams and sober excessive enthusiasm? The strange and unpalatable truth is that communicators themselves have been equally responsible for creating such wild dreams of cornucopia.

In an effort to make the link with the people valid, viable and meaningful, not only should the media have a clear perception of the audience -- their nature, needs and susceptibilities -- but also the audience needs to have an understanding of the media -- their role, attitudes and working relationship with the community at large. Often, the audience's perception of the media is vague, shrouded by misunderstandings and sometimes, distrust.

3.   COMMUNICATOR AND HIS MESSAGE

This brings us to some of the most vital points -- the problems concerning communicators and their messages.

When one talks about communication strategy, one must realise that there is no communication strategy without people. It is theopeople, their social, economic and psychological behaviour that provide the bases of communication strategies. What then is the degree of the communicator's awareness of the nature, needs and exigencies of his audience -- the PEOPLE?

Traditionally, media practitioners have, perhaps rightfully, regarded themselves as mere conveyor belts of information, sometimes interpreting information from pre-conceived standards and conceptions. Such a role did not warrant any serious involvement with the audience, but in the light of the new role of MOBILISING the people and PERSUADING them towards development and nation building, the communicator needs not merely to transmit relevant information but devise messages that will arouse or make salient a felt need, a sense of practical benefit and stimulate willing cooperation. It is indeed arduous and must take into consideration all factors -- economic, socio-cultural and psychological sensitivies of the people. There are the problems, on the other hand, of entrenched customs, beliefs, traditions, the mores, and the cultural ethos of the people which, as has been established through empirical evidence, tend to resist messages of innovation and change. The men behind Sri Lanka's campaign to introduce condom (named PREETHI) found that in most instances, retailers fought shy of stocking them and consumers were embarrassed to be seen buying them in public!

There is a great amount of theory and experiment that is available in planning and engineering change: factors relating to credibility, selective behaviour of people, cognitive dissonance, etc., but how much of such knowledge is used in developing countries so that a great amount of time could be saved? Sometimes we may delude our-

selves into thinking that we are innovative when in fact these have been practised long ago in other parts of the world in the same or similar situation.

Communicators also need to be aware of the factors that negate communication efforts and their influences. A well-planned communication strategy by one medium can be negated by another medium or media, resulting in a complete waste of manpower and material. Take for example, a documentary film produced by the Indonesian Ministry of Information to encourage urban residents to move to the sparsely populated countryside, set up their homes and start food production and animal husbandry. Such a film could be part of an overall media strategy to help the Indonesian government's Transmigration Programme. The film may glorify the adventures of a young man and his family moving into the wide open countryside and setting up his farm, with hopes of prosperity and better living. No doubt, such a documentary could have a clear, potent and inviting message.

What happens if, while such a film is shown to Jakarta residents, a commercially released film glorifying the adventures of a rural youth seeking his fortune in the cities is released in the silver screens of Jakarta?

One medium effectively negates the other.

In the media scene of developing countries, there is no dearth of such examples. Within the pages of a single newspaper, within the various publications of one organisation, between the various media, there are far too many conflicting messages, negating one another.

Such conflicts are not confined to the media alone. There are such conflicts between the media and other public and private organisations involved not only in communication but in planning and administration. How does one remove such conflicts? What are the guidelines for coordinating communication networks within themselves and with other agencies involved in development? What is the communicator's stand vis-a-vis national goals and growth targets which are decided by the political leadership and which ultimately govern the nature of development communication?

Communication Policies

This brings us to the question of communication policy: what roles to assign the public and private sectors respectively; how much freedom to allow or how much diversity to permit or at how high a level to pitch media output? Perhaps, only the last question can be answered by the media themselves.

It is a fact that even the concept of communication policies and planning is very new to developing regions. A glance at the evolution of mass media in the developing countries shows a great deal of isolated growths, independent activities and conflicting interests. Now it has dawned on interested governments in Asia that there needs to be a

well-coordinated communication policy and planning that can govern media activities and help channel their resources more meaningfully towards development.

Whatever exists is more in the nature of projects and programmes than communication policies. They are all too often unsystematic, designed to serve a specific need in a specific situation, often without proper follow-up and evaluation. Since governments are slow in realising the need for 'corporate' thinking and action in the field of communication and since media practitioners are largely left to themselves with certain superimposed guidelines, instructions and strictures, the potential of communicaton knowledge and activity could not be fully tapped. Even now, there is little scientific knowledge of the situation in which communication is tried and its workings are not entirely understood in developing countries. And a body of specialists who can innovatively handle communication media in order to realise the full communication potential in development and nation-building have yet to emerge.

In the overall effort to link the media practitioners and their audience in regional regional, national or community efforts, another problem has appeared: the question of credibility. But viewing the problem more hard-headedly, something funny seems to have happened on the way to "reaching" the people. Perhaps the media lack clear-cut principles, defined roles and are inconsistent in their approach. Perhaps governments move in far too swiftly to curb media's excessive 'dabbling in politics' – a legacy from the days when media campaigned against the colonial powers. Whatever the reasons, the effects on the audience have been disastrous in many countries of Asia where media have abdicated their role as trustees of the public interests.

One last but large problem for media practitioners taking on the role of change agents: how does one synthesise modernity and tradition and steer clear of extremes of 'cultural imperialism' on the one hand and 'ethnocentricism' on the other? One often hears lengthy debates on the structure and goals of development programmes. There are policy makers and planners who swear by the patterns of development in the industrialised West and are keen to transplant the same structures in developing countries regardless of the needs of the people. There are, at the same time, policy makers and planners who, perhaps on account of their struggle against colonialism, tend to disregard what the industrialised West has to offer by way of modernity and continue to preach a native brand of nationalism that borders on chauvinism while large masses of people totter on poverty line.

Where does the synthesis exist? Is synthesis of tradition and modernity the real answer? Or are there other scopes, dimensions and priorities that make up the development dynamics of the Third World?

The above problems have been enumerated in a skeleton structure so that they could provoke some thought among media practitioners involved in development communication in order that they may individually and collectively seek solutions and make the practice of communication more effective. They are NOT meant to be factors to discourage. There IS, despite differences and varied problems, a great deal of unity,

commonness in the needs, wants, moods and aspirations of the people in developing countries and there IS, however feeble, a national consensus on the goals of development and nation-building.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Discussion leaders: Guy de Fontgalland
P.R.R. Sinha

In the context of the more urgent priorities and the need to channel every available resource towards bettering the standard of living in developing countries, participants felt that the question of media practitioners' involvement in development and nation-building is no longer a point for debate. The question however remained as to how and with what effectiveness media practitioners could take on the role of change agents.

It was felt that the role of change agents could bring them, in certain instances, in direct confrontation with the governments that decide what are the goals of development and what changes are good or bad for a people. One of the frequently expressed views was that although ideally media practitioners should be involved at the decision making level, in practice, governments decide matters themselves and later routinely use media to carry development messages. Furthermore, media in Asia are under certain governmental guidelines and strictures and are not free to operate as they wish.

A question was asked what happens when a newspaper reports in detail the opening ceremony of a new bridge and finds weeks later that the bridge had collapsed. It was mentioned that under certain circumstances, it may be difficult for a particular newspaper to report the collapse of the bridge without being directly or indirectly penalised for it. Such problems did exist in few Asian countries, but it is still possible to make constructive criticism in almost all Asian countries as long as the media have established their bona fides with the governments. It is the mistrust that exists between the media and the governments that actually makes governments sit up nervously and watch the doings of the media. An active involvement by the media in the development of the country could perhaps bridge the serious credibility gap that now exists not only between the media and the government but also between the media and the people.

Who decides what is good for a people will always remain a debate, but media practitioners need at the same time to take an unbiased view of the overall development plans and goals of a nation, admitting however, that development communication is not "government-says-so" communication. Questions were also raised regarding the role of the media in ensuring political stability, which participants felt was fundamental to

economic growth and stability. It was felt that mass media need to be socially responsible in transmitting information that could directly or indirectly affect a nation's stability.

Aside from the constraints under which media have to operate, participants felt that there is a need for media practitioners in the region to adjust themselves to the demands of the times. There needs to be a greater professional commitment on the part of the practitioners to understand their audiences and devise ways and means of making them involved in the development process. So far, the media have been, to a large extent, content with giving the audience what they **wanted** to know instead of what they **needed** to know. There has been, perhaps, an undue accent on sex, violence and human oddities in certain media and this has resulted in distorting audience's interest, lessening or nullifying the interest on developmental news and information.

The freedom of journalists to write what they think is best for the people and journalists' need to adhere to the regulations of media management were also discussed. Some felt that there needs to be a restructuring of the media ownership. Although most Asian media are no longer foreign-owned, they are still controlled, to a great extent, by small groups of local entrepreneurs.

Participants also felt that though development communication is a valid concept in the context of the developing countries, it is still vague among most practitioners. There needs to be a planned programme to discuss the concept in greater depth so as to bring about a fuller understanding of its implications and its workings need to be tried and tested. Right now, no one has seriously gone into the nuts and bolts of development communication, nor are therer any set patterns to follow.

There were suggestions that media devote a certain portion of their content solely to try out the development communication idea -- focusing on the problems and potential of certain development programmes. A stretegy adopted by a particular Filipino weekly to focus attention on food and agricultural problems and prospects in the Philippines was cited as a step in the right direction.

It was noted however that in the overall efforts of development and nation-building, mass media have a limited, though important, role to play. They form an important link in a long chain of agents who contribute towards development, but mass media could fulfil their role as change agents only if they extend their operation from being mere conveyor belts of information to motivators and persuaders.