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Communication For Rural Development

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COMMUNICATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT
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Communication is often confused with publicity. At its best, publicity is a device to "scatter widely for public viewing". It is an act of giving. Communication, on the other hand, is an attempt at establishing commonness of experience. It is a process through which cumulative sensory responses of an individual or a group of human-beings are shared with another individual or group of persons. It is a process of interaction: an act of giving as well as taking.

How does one share experience or establish commonness of experience? All human experiences are codified into symbols-words, signs or gestures. In an attempt to share ones' experience what one does is to transmit these symbols on a channel to another individual who on receipt of these symbols decodifies these in the light of his own experience for understanding and absorption. It is an activity that goes on ceaselessly in the life of an individual as well as in society.

Important elements in the process of establishing commonness of experience are (a) similarity of environment in which the experience has occurred (b) similarity of experience and (c) similarity of code. (A code is a set of symbols agreed upon by two or more people. It is standardised sign, seen or heard, which stands for an object, event or an idea as agreed among senders and recipients of messages).

If there is dissimilarity in the environment of the communicator and the communicatee or in their depth and levels of experience or dissimilarity in code used, communication will not be established. The success of a communicator therefore, lies in his ability to devise symbols, that encompass the circle of experience of the communicatee enabling him to perceive the message inherent in the symbol.

Communication did not present much problem in the early stages of civilisation because the life and living patterns were totally similar. Human-beings lives in small communities in known environment and their experiences were common. This was so all the world over. It was also comparatively easy to establish commonness of experience in a face-to-face situation by modifying, explaining or changing symbols in the process of give and take.

Emergence of technology however, introduced new elements in communication process. The printed word, radio, films and T.V. have opened up possibilities that were unimaginable before. A manuscript, which could only be passed from one hand to the other could be multiplied into millions of copies to reach as many hands in as many countries. A voice which could reach only a few yards now echoes all through the globe with the help of radio signals. The picture tube and its precursor the films have enabled man to re-enact to any human situation any time. Electronic revolution has transformed the communication process totally making it possible to reach, the unknown, anonymous and heterogeneous mass of mankind. It is primarily for this reason that the electronic based media of communication are called mass media. But while serving as boon, technological devices have also complicated the process of communication.

The printed word, radio, T.V. and films have come today to mediate human experience. They have also depersonalised and have disembodied messages. These have also robbed it of its basic strength i.e. interaction. It is only giving, there is no taking. The role of mass media in human communication process, therefore, is being accepted as a subject of special study in countries where mass media have achieved total reach.

What is the place of mass communication in rural development programme in India ?

Rural Development has been defined in various ways; but in its essentials it is an attempt to make human-beings living in the countryside (a) work (b) think and (c) live differently.

In other words, it is an attempt to make them share a different human experience. Let us look at the problem a little closer.

Indian has embarked upon the goal of rural development. Who has taken the decision and whom does this decision involve? The decision was taken only by a handful few who comprise the political and the administrative elite of the country. Numerically they are a small minority. Though born and brought up in India this minority is qualitatively different from the rest of the country on account of their education, impulses and psychic make up. Academic training and influences from abroad have oriented this group differently. They know the power of science and technology and are aware of the boons that these forces confer on mankind in the wake of development. Inspired by the highest of ideals and deep love for their countrymen, this minority group has undertaken to change the face of the country. They want them to share a different experience.

But the millions whom they want to share the experience are differently oriented scattered all over the land. They live in village communities, as shadows of their fore-fathers. Most of them are born in a village and spend their entire life-span within a radius of five to ten miles. Their visions are narrow: their wants are few and aspirations low. The concept of development and change is alien to their way of life.

How does one then communicate the depth of experience of development with this group?

The communication gap between these two groups - the group that has planned the change and the group that is intended to be changed - is as deep as sea. How to bridge the gap is the biggest task facing the country. This calls for immediate action on the part of communication strategists. Mass media may seem to offer a solution with their capability as channel to reach the largest number simultaneously.

But before working out any strategy for the utilisation of mass media as channel of communication for rural development, it is necessary to delineate the relationship which mass media in India have with the rural India.

This relationship was measured a little before the 1971 general election by the operations Research Group, Baroda. They tried to assess the extent of readership for different publications, and of the exposure to radio and cinema among adults aged 15 and over in the country. In all a random sample of 56,000 were interviewed in 261 towns and 722 villages representing all the States in India. The study revealed staggering picture of the relationship of mass media with the rural India.

Of India's total population of 547.4 millions (1971) the adults aged 15 and over were about 325 millions or 59.5% of the total population. Among them the exposure pattern to the three basic mass media were:

<u>Media</u>	<u>Exposure percentage</u>
Press	13.2
Cinema	20.4
Radio (Vividh Bharati)	12.0
Radio Ceylon	9.9

It was evident from this that only a maximum of about 20% of the adults could be reached through any single medium. However, considering the overlap between Press and Cinema, about 25% could be reached through these two media put together. Thus, the remaining 75% of the adults in the country were out of reach for the mass media.

THE RURAL URBAN GAP:

Similarly, the gap between urban and rural adults in their exposure to the three mass media was quite significant reminding the glaring urban-rural difference in the country.

<u>Media</u>	<u>Percentage exposed</u>	
	<u>URBAN</u>	<u>RURAL</u>
Press	37.2	7.1
Cinema	48.0	13.4
Radio (Vividh Bharati)	30.4	7.2
Radio Ceylon	24.0	6.2

READERSHIP BREAK UP:

Out of the 13.2% who were exposed to Press only 3.6% were exposed to English Press as against 12.6% to Indian languages Press. Daily newspapers in the country however, had a readership of only 11.1%. A meagre 2.2% only read English newspapers in the country. There were about 1.2% adults in the country who were exposed both to English and Indian language dailies. The Indian language dailies had the highest readership. They were being read by about 10.1% adults in the country. This however, went down significantly in the case of weeklies and other periodicals. The English weeklies had the lowest readership in the country. Press readership was the highest for dailies, followed by weeklies and for nightlies/monthlies.

PRESS AND RADIO:

It was mostly those who read that listened to the radio and saw films, and vice versa. 53.7% of those who regularly listened to Vividh Bharati were also exposed to one or more periodicals; whereas 7.8% listeners only read any of the periodicals. Only 6.4% of 88.1% adults in the country who rarely or never listen to Vividh Bharati read a daily newspapers.

PRESS AND FILM:

Almost half of those who went for a movie regularly, read one or more periodicals in one language or other; whereas only a 5.9% of those who never go to a film read some periodical or another. Only 5% of 79.6% adults in the country who never or rarely went for a movie read daily papers.

From the survey it could be said that whatever limited mass media were available in the country, they were concentrated among a minority of the population. The fortunate ones were those who lived in the bigger towns, belonged to the upper income group, and were educated. And the exposure was mostly concentrated among men. The bulk of the illiterate masses living in the far flung corner of India and belonging to the lower income groups were still not within the orbit of any of the three basic mass media available in the country.

It is a despairing picture indeed!

Yet mass media with whatever limited reach at present cannot be ignored. They are there and will inevitably expand further. It is necessary, therefore, to utilise their potential to the maximum. But before making any further allocation of resources on development of mass media for rural development, it is necessary to work out an integrated research project covering every facet of the communication dynamics. The parameters of that reach will be to find out:

<u>Who</u>	(Study of communicating agencies)
Says <u>What</u>	(Study of the intelligibility and comprehensibility of the contents and formats)
To <u>Whom</u>	(Study of characteristics and socio-psychological make up of audience along with their communication needs)
On <u>which channel</u>	(Study of relevance of each mass media in relation to information needs) and
With <u>what effect</u>	(Study of what has been accomplished by communication process - to find out existing gaps for the benefit of communicating agencies)

Equally important is the attempt to delineate the possibility of utilising the existing non-mass media channels of communication that might have served effectively in the past and could be utilised in the present context. The possibility of their mix with mass media channels could also be studied.