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APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION PLANNING

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I am grateful to the sponsors of this Regional Conference on "Approaches to Communication Planning" i.e. the Ministry of Information, Govt. of Indonesia, the Indonesian Journalists' Association, AMIC and East-West Communication Institute for giving me the opportunity to participate at this very important Conference. AMIC and EWCI being two pioneer research organisations have very rightly chosen "Communication Planning" for a study and examination. Communication policies and organisations have so long been discussed, but very little has been done to examine communication planning nationally, regionally or internationally.

For quite some time, we have been debating the concept of New International Information Order to correct the imbalance in flow of information between the developing and the developed countries, to establish a more just and more balanced world information and communication order. UNESCO has taken the leadership and the member countries endorsed the Mass Media Declaration at Paris Conference last year. The member countries of this Region further endorsed the Declaration at the Kuala Lumpur Regional Conference in February, 1979. A follow-up Inter-governmental Conference was just held at Kuala Lumpur on 24-26 October, 1979.

All these deliberations hopefully are guiding the World Communities, given the goodwill and spirit of mutual understanding, towards a realisation of the existing imbalance and the need for correction. But realisation of the fact of imbalance is one thing, and the reality of the present-day world situation is completely a different matter.

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The new and fast-developing communication technologies in the developed world is creating a wider imbalance in the capability of transmission of information between the developing and the developed world. Communication through the geo-stationary satellites and the Space Platforms during the 80's will only make the traditional communication technologies of the poorer countries obsolete and out-of-date. I know of no endeavour to formulate a Technology Plan at the global level to ensure application of advanced technologies or development of appropriate technologies for the developing countries. Nor do I know if such an international planning is possible.

I come from a developing country Bangladesh, which is technologically far behind in the field of communication. I will try to present the status of communication planning in the context of developing countries, particularly, Bangladesh, keeping the world situation in view.

Domestically also, it has to be admitted that there is an imbalance in the flow of information between the urban and the rural areas. It is true that all the communication media, the Press, Radio, Television, Films and Publications, have been trying to increase their bias towards the rural masses, but the net impact is far from what is hoped for.

There is also a poor appreciation at the Planners' level of the role of communication in economic, social and cultural development. Investment in communication facilities and infrastructure is considered non-developmental, not realising that motivation of the people for participation in economic activities, to make present sacrifices for long-term growth and understanding the national problems in their proper perspective is equally an input for development. It is hard to make non-communicators understand that the question of communication is as important as economic development and that appropriate communication can be an instrument of development.

It is because of such lack of understanding that while the Document on "Thoughts on Perspective Plan, 1980-2000 of Bangladesh" discusses the very long-term policies on Agricultural Development, Rural Development, Population Planning, Education, Health, Decentralisation of Administration and People's participation, and all the rest, it does not include even a paragraph on communication. This becomes very frustrating indeed for the practitioners in communication.

Bangladesh is geographically a small country occupying only 55,000 sq. miles, but has a population of more than 80 m. Hence it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The main base of its economy is agriculture. About 90% of the population are rural, 85% are engaged in agriculture and agriculture contributes 65% to GDP. The per capita income is around \$ 100.00. Population grows at the rate of 2.5 - 2.8% per annum. Rate of literacy is about 25%.

Even in such a dismal situation, the potentialities are tremendous. Per acre yield in agriculture being one of the lowest in the world can be significantly raised to increase total production. In fact, over the last two decades agricultural productions has been increasing due to use of HYV seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, irrigation and better culture. The area irrigated is only 20% of the potentially irrigable area. With provision of additional irrigation facilities through lift pumps, shallow and deep tube-wells, cross dams and embankments, an additional crop over a vast area is possible. In recent years, irrigated area has been increasing, but it has not extended as fast. Population control measures have been adopted which has reduced the growth rate from 3% per year to 2.5 - 2.8% , but more extensive delivery system is needed. The land-man rates being weak, cooperative action in pooling resources for greater economy is being attempted, and more is both possible and desirable.

Under such circumstances, the National Development Policies

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of Bangladesh have rightly been the following :-

- (a) Doubling of food production in 5 years,
- (b) Population control & health facilities,
- (c) Mass education, with emphasis on agriculture and vocational training,
- (d) Rural industries and rural electrification,
- (e) Far organisations, and
- (f) Exploitation of natural resources.

The achievement of these national objectives calls for awareness of the problems and the possibilities on the part of our people for taking to innovative methods for development in various sectors, changing their traditional practices and habits, checking population growth, and the others. The National Plan and the various policies that go with it have to be made known i.e. communicated to the people. The mass communication media come in here to further the national objectives and goals.

Though we do not have any codified communication policy, we can say that the communication policies of the Government is to keep the people fully informed about the national objectives and socio-economic needs as well as the Govt. efforts to realise those objectives. Free flow of information to the people for their education and motivation through both modern and traditional communication media is the core of the communication policy of the Govt. The country being predominantly rural, the main target of the media is the rural listeners, viewers and the readers. The objective is to prevent any communication gap.

The communication media are the tools and inputs for carrying the messages to the people. All information is presented internally through the mass media like the press, radio, television, films and publications, and the traditional inter-personal communications and the change-agents in the rural areas.

The press plays a significant role in carrying the messages

to the people and moulding public opinion in my country as anywhere else in the world. The Government believes in the freedom of press and follows a very liberal press policy. There are about 336 newspapers and journals including 34 dailies and 135 weeklies in the country. Press in Bangladesh belongs to the private sector. Although in the special circumstances after Independence 4 daily and 3 weekly newspapers came under Government management, they enjoy full editorial independence including the privilege of criticisms of the Government.

The newspapers in Bangladesh have come through a stage of healthy and normal development and growth which invests them with a good measure of competence to deal properly with the business of news dissemination with credibility. The present Government has taken certain steps to aid the development of the press and healthy journalism. The Press Consultative Committee, the Press Council and Press Institute help in maintaining a relationship of mutual trust and cordiality and cooperation between the Govt. and the press.

The Government believes that people have a right to information and the press has got every access to the source of news. There is hardly any constraint in disseminating information by the press to the people objectively and in correct perspectives. Apart from news coverage by the newspapers, the news agencies, the Press Information Department and the PR organisations of the autonomous corporations present their information in interpretative and in indepth manner for "better understanding of a situation, a subject, or an issue".

But the press has got resource constraints, which hamper their smooth functioning and news-gathering. High cost of sophisticated printing machinery and other hardware hamper their operation and growth on modern lines. The presentation of news and information by the press could have been vastly improved if resources would not prove a limiting factor.

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There are two national news agencies, namely, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha(BSS) and Eastern News Agency(ENA) which have got their news exchange arrangements with Reuter, AP, UPI, AFP TASS and other news agencies of different countries. In dissemination of information internally, these two news agencies offer their wire services to the newspaper-subscribers. But unfortunately all the newspapers cannot subscribe them due to paucity of funds. Apart from distributing news received from the major worlds news agencies, they have their fleet of reporters for gathering local news of varied interests and disseminating them to newspapers, Radio, T.V. and banks and other commercial clients. Against a reasonably satisfactory position for dissemination of information inside the country, they are hard put to presenting their stories abroad. Even the major national news agency, BSS, has no transmitter to beam out its news externally except a teleprinter link with Press Trust of India through which it sends news regularly to India and also receive foreign news including news from Non-aligned News Pool. BSS publishes a weekly news bulletin highlighting the weekly events and the bulletins are sent to 20 foreign country by mail. The news agencies in Bangladesh have their tie-ups with national news agencies of Asian and European countries, but these are of no help in the matter of external distribution of news for want of transmission facilities. Both capital resources and hardware resources are essential for our news agencies to effectively operate externally.

The radio is the most effective medium of communication in view of the low rate of literacy in my country. The Government has been taking positive steps for expansion of radio by installing transmitters at regional stations and setting up more relay stations in different areas of the country. This will help in broadcasting information internally to the people more intensively. Radio Bangladesh broadcasts 14 news bulletins a day in its home services and 9 in the external services. External Services

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Programmes are broadcast in 6 (six) languages with a duration of 5½ hours a day spread over 9 transmissions projecting literature, culture and traditions of Bangladesh to outside world. These programmes are beamed to Middle East, Nepal, Europe, India and Pakistan in Bengali, English, Arabic, Nepalese, Urdu and Hindi. Radio Bangladesh broadcasts news, talks, music and other entertainment programmes about 80 hours daily in its home service from Dacca, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Sylhet and Khulna stations. A daily 20-minutes programme on family planning is regularly broadcast by Radio Bangladesh in national hook-up. For increasing food production through modern farming and for building a self-reliant economy, a development support programme is broadcast every day in the national hook-up for half an hour to motivate the farmers to adopt mechanised cultivation, switch over to HYW crops, fertilizer and irrigation and to utilise available credit facilities.

Although internal radio transmitting facilities have improved to a great extent, a very limited number of rural families have a radio set. It is estimated that about 3 million radio sets are in use within the country of a population of eighty million. The situation is frustrating. It is essential to make more radio sets cheaply available in the country to make this medium more effective in Bangladesh. International help in this regard would be most welcome. The Government distributed about 55 thousand radio sets at a cheap rate to facilitate dissemination of information to the rural areas. A scheme for distribution of 1,00,000 cheap radio sets among the rural people has been formulated by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Radio Bangladesh has agreements with national broadcasting organisations of other countries for exchange of programmes. This is helpful in presenting out information, culture and views externally.

Television transmission now covers almost 75% of the

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country's area. The television network is gradually expanding. Besides Dacca station, 5 regional relay stations of television are working in the country. The transmission hour at present is about 6 hours a day from afternoon through night. Television is switching over to a second channel very soon for telecasting programme on agriculture, self-reliance, family planning and health matters. Through the earth satellite at Chittagong, Bangladesh Television may receive from abroad as well as transmit any significant programme from Bangladesh to outside world in the international hook-up.

Despite its popularity and efficacy as a medium of presenting information and entertainment programme, only a limited number of families can afford a set in the rural areas. The Government has a programme of distributing 5,000 T.V. sets for community viewing in the rural areas by 1980.

Films and Cinema, Books and Publications are also big carriers of information to the people, although these belong primarily to the private sector. Bangladesh produces about 40 films every year in the private sector. Bangladesh Film Development Corporation of the Government renders studio facilities to the producers. The Department of Films and Publications of the Govt. produces weekly and literary journals, news reels and documentaries depicting development in various fields.

District Public Relations Officers and Sub-divisional Public Relations Officers, the Song Publicity Organisation of the Dept^t. of Mass Communication also work as communicators of information in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The change agents like Agricultural Assistant, Family Planning Workers and Social Workers also carry on inter-personal communication to the rural people.

From this account of the status of the various mass communication media in Bangladesh, we may proceed to the determination of the priorities and alternatives for a balanced development

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of the communication infrastructure. We may attempt a communication planning.

The prime need is a study in greater depth and details on the present status of the various media - the press, radio, television, film and publications and the inter-personal field publicity organisation. For proper planning, this is necessary.

The Planning machinery of the country has to appreciate that communication is an important ingredient for development and needs support. Communication technology is developing so fast that a country must either apply the developed technology or evolve an appropriate technology or make a mix of the two. A very long-range view has to be taken of communication technology.

In the immediate short-run, the press requires modernisation in printing facilities, delivery system and also news gathering. Not that Bangladesh press has to jump into computerisation straight-way, but it is just not known what extent of modernisation is possible. Long-term credit facilities to the newspaper industry might be a help, and an international support may also be necessary.

Development of facilities of the Bangladesh News Agencies is all the more important, since they lack transmission facilities abroad. If we are talking of reduction, if not elimination, of the news flow imbalance, transmission facilities are a pre-requisite. Both international and regional support will go a long way in attaining the ultimate goal that we are striving for.

Radio Bangladesh that started operating in 1939 and has been extended over the last 40 years needs development in many areas, considering its effectiveness in a developing country. The following seem to be priority areas :-

- (a) Balancing and moderisation of the existing studio and transmission facilities.
- (b) Organisational reform for production of effective programmes.
- (c) Expansion of the net-work either through setting up of

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a large number of Low Power Transmitters(LPT) in order to avoid outside interference, or by augmenting the transmission power of the existing transmitters coupled with additional but fewer number of High Power Transmitters(HPT). A technological assessment of the best combination may be required.

(d) Training of broadcasters,engineers and the newscasters both at home and abroad. We are setting up a National Broadcasting Academy and AIBD is offering facilities. More pre-service and in-service training is needed.

(e) A much larger number of receiving sets in the country side.

(f) A National Broadcasting House in place of the remnants of a small, ill-equipped regional station.

Bangladesh Television similarly needs expansion and development in the following areas :-

(a) Provision of alternative transmitters at the Central Television Station.

(b) Covering the entire country by additional relay stations and lately-developed transposers.

(c) A Nation-wide Second Channel for giving out programmes on Agricultural and Rural Development.

(d) Provision of modern news-gathering and programme-making equipments to increase programme -production capacity. Progressive reduction in dependence on imported programmes.

(e) Training of the producers and the engineering staff.

(f) Provision of large number of TV sets.

(g) An appropriate organisational structure.

(h) Eventual change-over to colour transmission.

I can similarly talk about facilities for film-making and publications. What I am trying to make out is that all the communication media in Bangladesh need attention. The priority areas have to be determined jointly by the Planners and the operators of the communication media. Herein lies the imperativeness

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of communication planning. For over-all socio-economic development, development of communication facilities must go hand in hand. This can be forgotten and by-passed only at the expense of long-term development of a country's economy. We have only to look towards the developed world to see how the communication technology is engulfing all sectors of their development activities.

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