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Broadcasting And Health Promotion In Pakistan

By

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(PBC)

BROADCASTING AND HEALTH PROMOTION IN PAKISTAN

PAPER PRESENTED BY
MR. K.G. MURTaza, DIRECTOR-GENERAL, PBC AT THE ROUND TABLE ON MASS MEDIA AND PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND NUTRITION

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BROADCASTING HOUSE, CONSTITUTION AVENUE, ISLAMABAD
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This Round Table bringing together media and public health decision-makers is a very timely and pertinent exercise to examine the feasibility of using the expertise of the mass media to promote health for all by the year 2000 in South Asian countries. No doubt, it is a noble objective which promises solace and succour to millions of population in these countries. We highly appreciate the initiative taken by WHO, UNESCO, IPDC and the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre in organising this assembly. The aim is to heighten awareness in the institutions of the mass media and to stimulate a more specific involvement of the media in efforts to provide public information and education for health. How effective mass media can be is evident from a quotation from the Macbride Report:

"Communication can be an instrument of power, a revolutionary weapon, a commercial product or a means of education."

After having underlined the effectiveness of Communication the Macbride Report describes it a major
development resource. The report says:

"Development strategies should incorporate communication policies as an integral part in diagnosis of needs and in the design and implementation of selected priorities. In this respect communication should be considered a major development resource and an instrument for creating awareness of national priorities."

Please allow me to again quote the same report where it consuls:

"Communication be no longer regarded merely as an incidental service and its development left to chance. Recognition of its potential warrants the formulation by all nations, and particularly developing countries, of comprehensive communication policies linked to overall social, cultural, economic and political goals. Such policies should be based on inter-ministerial and inter-disciplinary consultations with broad public participation."

To my mind, following points emerge from these three quotations:

- Communication – potential as an instrument of power;
- Communication – a major development resource;
- Communication – warrants comprehensive policies linked to goals.
This I think should serve as a useful background pointers for exchange of views and experience for strengthening institutional relationship between decision-makers in media and public health.

I now turn to the role of Radio & Television as a medium of communication. In most of the developing countries like Pakistan where literacy level is low, radio & television network is and will be for a long time the most important and effective means of communication. For many people in such countries radio is perhaps the only source of information. In Pakistan the medium-wave coverage population-wise is 95%. Coverage area-wise is 75%. Coverage on shortwave is 100%. It is estimated that in cities three out of every four households have a radio set while in the rural areas two out of every three households have a radio set.

Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation is playing a pivotal role in the promotion of awareness about health in Pakistan. Eighty percent of our population living in villages are of special concern to the PBC and it is particularly here that Radio Pakistan plays its role as an instrument of change, education and information. Here the Radio becomes a guide and a dependable friend of the rural listeners. The entire spectrum of their needs and problems is taken notice of while planning our programmes directed
towards the rural areas. Some programmes are also planned from the point of view of community listening. These are broadcast in regional languages and are presented by two or three stock-characters whose relaxed, simple manner and typical rural wit tampered with points of wisdom here & there, are attractive and effective in dissemination of information and educating the rural listeners. These programmes are broadcast in early hours of the evening because that is the time of peak listening for villagers. Generally, contents are basic health hints, disease prevention, improvement of farming, weather report, market report, news, adult education, hints for rural uplift and information of use to villagers.

The focus of our programmes on promotion of public health is educational and preventive. Disease prevention and nutrition problems are presented and discussed in a manner which is totally relevant to condition in which our working people and the less affluent sections of population live. Our programmes encourage the listeners to analyse the health hazards and change the situations and conditions that surround them. Side by side our programmes try to bring about a change in the attitudes and behaviour which are identified as causes of poor health and bad nutrition.
The percentage of literacy among our women folk is low indeed and even lower in villages. Radio programmes highlight their problems and motivate them to make their full contribution to the advancement of society. Programmes in regional languages for rural housewives are broadcast from all stations every week. These consist of talks, features, skits, discussions and music. The themes covered in these programmes are those which primarily concern the rural female population of the country. The underlying idea of these programmes is to make them better mother and wives, to increase their level of awareness with regard to domestic economy, handicrafts, child-care, general health hints, nutrition, basic hygiene and cleanliness, importance of female education.

In programmes related to population welfare and public health issues, we are endeavouring to highlight the need for maintaining an equilibrium between population and resources. Communication support through radio programmes is provided to the various issues and accomplishment in public health sector in all formats which are familiar to our listeners viz. dramas, features, songs, talks, radio reports, news, discussions, popular serial programmes and so forth.
We are aware of the limitations that the norms of our societies place on us in discussing such matters as birth control and family planning. The demands of our social philosophy which has conditioned our attitude and responses require that these matters be approached in an indirect manner and with discretion and caution. Our efforts, therefore, is to create an awareness of population-welfare issues and problems and to convince our listeners that a healthy and well-cared family is a happy family. We encourage the listeners to identify themselves and their family which lives simply but has enough to feed the children, pay their school fees and provide them with basic necessities of life. The objective is that the listeners may identify themselves with their aspirations rather than with their condition.

Now I would like to briefly identify those areas in public health and nutrition that are engaging our attention and for which we are providing the necessary communication support.

CHILD IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMME

In Pakistan an ambitious public health project is in progress to immunize children against tetanus, diptheria, measles, whopping cough and T.B. Communication support
provided to this project is a story of success and great achievement. The resistance to take the infant to the "needle" has now disappeared.

A documentary jointly produced by Deutsche Welle and Radio Pakistan on this programme was broadcast by some of the foreign networks.

USE OF ORAL REHYDRATION SALT AND PREVENTION OF DIARRHEAL DISEASES AMONG CHILDREN

Special programme in the form of jingles, spots, plays and compering are broadcast in easy to understand language and completely in harmony with the local idiom. We are carrying out a sustained effort to popularise the use of ORS and prevention of diarrheal diseases.

BREAST FEEDING AND NUTRITIOUS WEANING FOOD FOR BABIES

This subject has been highlighted in programmes for rural and urban housewives. The idea was to encourage the use of nutritious weaning foods for growing babies and to promote breast feeding.

CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION ARRANGEMENT IN WATER STORAGE AREAS

The fact that use of drinking clean water and to store it in hygienic conditions can prevent diseases is
highlighted in programmes from different stations. We, however, restrain from suggesting solutions which are not practical like boiling of water. Such suggestions are counter productive in the case of rural communities.

**ELEMENTARY HYGIENE, DISEASE PREVENTION AND DISPOSAL OF SEWERAGE**

Various issues are discussed in all categories of programmes and in all formats. Our programmes in this area are educational. Information is provided in easy to understand language. Practical solutions are suggested having relevance to the community.

**BLOOD DONATION AND COMMUNITY HEALTH PROMOTION ACTIVITIES**

We provide communication support (free of cost) to agencies and departments which are actually offering health services in this field. Motivational programmes are also broadcast. In emergencies calls for blood donation are also carried.

**SMOKING AND DRUG ABUSE**

These public health problems are receiving highest priority. Varied programmes to fight the menace are being broadcast to save the people especially the younger generation from these hazards to health.
POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

The listeners are being made aware that a pollution free, clean surroundings are a guarantee for good health and that they have to make a positive effort for keeping their environment pollution free and preserve natural conditions of their surroundings.

These in brief are some main topics on which programmes are broadcast to educate the people. As communicators, we have to evolve new strategies for bringing about increased awareness on public health and to improve the quality of life. We hope that as a result of deliberations at this Round Table more positive relationship will emerge between media and public health for the good of our peoples.

THANK YOU

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