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Roles Of Communication In Child & Family Welfare
(A Country Report)

By

Titie Said

Paper No.13
The problems of welfare differ from one country to another and the roles of communication in the implementation of the country's welfare program will differ subsequently. The welfare status in a country is determined by many factors, which can be physical or psychological.

This report will be started with a short account, which may have some relation with the welfare, especially with that of children and family. The high growth rate of the population and insufficient educational facilities and employment services are recognised to be a national problem. Indonesia present population is estimated to be 140 million, 60% of which are below the ages of 15 years, which mean that they are still unproductive. Beside the growth rate of approx. 2% per year, there is an unevenly distribution of the population. These will have the consequence, that population in one area may be more welfary than are the population in other areas.

I'll now speak about the women's education. According to the population census in 1971, approx. 50% of the illiterates are women and a figure substantiated in the 1976 Inter Census Population Survey is reported that as high as 49.6% of women had never attended school. Illiteracy rate in both rural and urban areas is twice as high for women as for men. As the percentage of the working population with no formal education or drops out from the elementary school, the records of 1976 are indicating a far higher figure in women than in men.

All women's organisation have one or other education programmes, formal
as well as non-formal to help this. We have also the "learning group" on illiteracy.

With regard to the population problems, since 1970 the government has launched programmes on family planning and on population education. It is a fact that problems of population will affect much the social, economic and the cultural aspects of the country. There will be certainly impacts on employment, education, and health. The people realise that the Family Planning Program is to improve the welfare and happy family.

Let us now look at a universal phenomenon and see that women are now playing more and more important roles in every branch of life activities in the world all over, with no exception Indonesia. In the struggle for independence, women were taking part in the fight, some were active soldiers. The same are now being done by the women in the sense that women are taking part in the development of the country together with the men. However, the existence of illiteracy among the women, being insufficient trained in basic skills, being uneducated and other socio-cultural constrains make women left behind their male counterparts. Even in the family life a woman with no education is not having the ability to perform her roles as a mother or as a wife as properly as it should be. Most probably the most constraining factor is the traditional view that the social roles of women are less important than those of men, the tasks of women should be limited to looking after the children and the family. The mass media and other means of mass communications are expected to play the roles in changing these traditional way of thinking.

Summing up the problems of women, the following are the main points.

1. The high illiteracy and low educational level of women.
2. Inadequate knowledge, including the knowledge on health, nutrition and sanitation cause high death rate among babies and children.
3. Low family income.
4. Limited knowledge and skills among women and poor environmental condition in general.
5. Socio-cultural condition not conducive for women's status in society.

It is to be realised that women's problems in Indonesia are ones of a very big size, since 50% of the population consist of women. The programmes on its welfare will be materially very high. Women will play roles as individuals or as members of the family or as member of the society and the women's organisations in the society. In Indonesia, now we have the Associate Minister for the Role of Woman.

In the region of Asia and the Pacific, Indonesia is the only country consisting of thousands of islands. There are approximately 13,677 islands and islets. The 140 million population comprises 300 ethnic groups, speaking almost as many languages and each with its own characteristics. There is a necessity of an integrated, efficient, effective mass communication system to strengthen the unity of the people and support the development, especially to enhance the family welfare. The task of communication is to maintain a continuous two-way traffic system. This could make use of traditional as well as modern devices, and also face to face communication. Semi-government and non-governmental communication machineries play a role of considerable importance in supporting and implementing programmes related to development. Examples of the latter are: Kowani (=Indonesian Women Congress), Dharma Pertiwi (=Organisation of wives of members of the armed forces), Dharma Wanita, The National Commission on the status of women (= KNKWI), The Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association, the National Council on Social Welfare, The National Federation of Trade Union, The National Farmers Association, etc.

The roles of mass media is very important to inform the people about the strategies of the development of the country. The people are made to understand and consequently to cooperate in the Five Years National Development Plans.
In this connection, the journalists are obligated to follow courses held by the government together with the Indonesian Journalists Association, so that their skill and capacity as journalists are enhanced and they will be more familiar with the State Philosophy and the Government's Programmes and also with the guidelines of the state policy. A good understanding in these matters will enable the journalist giving the people better information and controlling the information.

Eighty percent of the population of Indonesia live in the rural areas and the majority of the newspapers are circulating in Jakarta or capitals of provinces. Contrary to newspapers, the radio broadcasting system can penetrate to nearly every part of the country and the people are consequently more familiar with the Radio. People in the village are forming the so-called "listener group". Compared to newspapers and magazines, radio communication is a far more effective device for giving information. TV = 4.9%, Radio = 90%, and magazines/newspapers 7.6%.

It is perhaps worthwhile to mention that there is an increasing interest to women's and family magazines. In the capital city, women readers are specially catered for by more than a dozen women's and family magazines.

Every other newspaper or pop magazine reserves pages for women or family interests. Though there are women's pages in every daily or weekly, still the women's and family magazine are considered the most responsible ones to deal with the welfare of children and family, including their health, etc. Almost all of the family magazines have doctors or lawyers to deal with their respective specialities. It is to be intended that these experts will have a double in the communication, they become a writer - doctor or doctor - journalist. Most of the woman's magazine open to their readers a face to face communication concerning their family welfare, for example in connection with their health, beauty care, welfare, legal, fashion even with their astrological consultation.
Since last year the government sponsored the so-called "newspaper for the village". This is aimed to re-direct more information to the rural areas.

The government, in this respect, is subsidising a number of local newspapers. There are 30 publishers of newspapers in 13 province which have to reserve special pages for information or publish a special edition for that same purpose. The 13 provinces are, North and West Sumatra, Lampung, West Java, etc. The publishers are free to choose the language being used as far as it is more effective.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will now speak about the role of religion on the welfare of the people, because to my opinion religion plays an important role in the mental welfare. Probably in other country the same phenomenon may be encountered. Probably the extent of religious influence the welfare state of a nation can be more or less measured by the amount of tranquilizers used or the number of mental hospital beds occupied or the annual figures of suicide attempts.

The majority of the Indonesian people, or to be exact 87.5% of them are Moslems. The religion of Islam deals with the welfare problem of human being since their embryonal life until they die or even after that. How far the roles of communication in mental welfare are being played in Indonesia, a few samples will be presented. The Indonesian television and the radio are contributing its part by very regular prayer or azan, which is broadcast everyday at sundown. Another program held very regularly is weekly religious forums, which are reserved for all religious existing in the country concerning the roles of newspapers in the mental welfare, specific editorial staff members are still to be appointed to manage the pages on religion.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the past, women played the roles of mother of the children, the wife-comrade-and-loved-one man.
Men being the head of the family and women used to stay at home. But in the passage of time, gradual changes occur in the family life structure. More and more women are taking over the roles of men, for instance, earning money to assist the family economy. The functional changes the structure of family life. Children will not be enjoying the mother's care anymore to an extent of 100%. Part of the mental development will be in the hand of nurses or even illiterate servants. This will have a great impact on the children. The mass media can do many things in this respects, for instance providing articles on the growth of the children as well as to their mothers.

In other words the articles are of educational in nature.

Ladies and gentlemen, in Indonesia the journalist are expected to support the government. That they should become a free but responsible journalist. The attention of the government is very great, but still they are very free to make their own way. The mass media itself is doing their utmost to give the best things to the readers.

A special kind of activity the Indonesia mass media can do is collecting money for special purpose, for instance for victim of national disasters, buying a pace-maker for a patient with heart disease, supporting the medical cost of special patients.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have given only a small report of the roles of the mass communication, but I hope that this may give the audience a little bit picture on the roles of communication, especially on child and family welfare.

The Indonesian guidelines of state policy stipulates that Indonesia develop a health, free and responsible mass media which would enable it on one hand to give information as much as possible and as objective as possible to the people and on the other hand the mass media communicates public opinion which are constructive. The guidelines of the state policy also states that the mass media as an institution function for the progress and the prosperity of the people.

Thank you very much.