<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>The role of communication in development from the perspective of ethnic and cultural minorities in Cambodia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Dareth, Pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>URL</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1382">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1382</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rights</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SPEECH

Consultation on
Communication and Preservation
of National Identity
Perspective from Indochina

The Role of Communication in Development
From the Perspective of Ethnic and
Cultural Minorities in Cambodia

by

Pen Dareth, Ph.D.

Senior Research Fellow
Vice President
Director of the Legal and Political Development Program
and of Cambodia Demographic and Ethnic Studies
and Director of the International Relations Program

The Center for Advanced Study
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

28 - 30 November 1996
Ho Chi Minh City - Vietnam
The Role of Communication in Development
From the Perspective of Ethnic and Cultural Minorities in Cambodia

by

Pen Dareth, Ph.D.
Senior Research Fellow
Vice President
Director of the Legal and Political Development Program
and of Cambodia Demographic and Ethnic Studies
and Director of the International Relations Program

The Center for Advanced Study
Phnom Penh - Cambodia

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind introduction.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants of this consultative gathering, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to visit Vietnam, for the first time, and to be able to speak to such a distinguished audience today. Please allow me to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Jose M. Carlos, Head of Seminars and the Institutional Development Programme of the Asian Media Information and Communication Center (AMIC) for providing me, on behalf of the Center for Advanced Study, with this opportunity to talk with you about what I consider to be a very important topic for Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) namely the "Communication and Preservation of National Identity: Perspectives from Indochina."

But, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, before my presentation on the Role of Communication in Development from the Perspective of Ethnic and Cultural Minorities in Cambodia, " may I be permitted to give you a brief history of the Center for Advanced Study (CAS).

After two decades of conflict in the Killing Fields, the Center for Advanced Study is, compared to the Asian Media Information and Communication Center in Singapore, or the Center of Consultancy-Information-Training on Economic and Business Management here in Ho Chi Minh City, a young Cambodian Research Institution.
The Center for Advanced Study (CAS) was founded in March this year (1996), as the successor to the Preah Sihanouk Raj Academy, as an independent Cambodian academic institution devoted to research and public debate on issues affecting the development of Cambodian society. As a non-political, problem-oriented academic institution, the Center for Advanced Study aims to promote the quality of life of the Cambodian people. Using an integrative, problem-oriented approach, it seeks to encourage and support scholars and experts to conduct programs of research to uncover knowledge which will help clarify and shape public policy, education and development projects. Recognizing the inter-relatedness of the world, the scope of its work is at once local, regional and global.

The Center for Advanced Study is one of the first think-tanks in the Kingdom of Cambodia. As a think-tank, the CAS can and will provide the Cambodian people, and especially those in positions of power, the most accurate, unbiased knowledge possible. The Center for Advanced Study is also committed to graduate education. The link between think-tanks and graduate school is based upon solid research and development concepts: (1) research into the short- and long-range problems which affect Cambodian society, and (2) the discovery, development and dissemination of new, relevant knowledge about these problems. In addition, (3) a group of young academics, scholars and intellectuals will be trained, providing the human resources to use this knowledge and help Cambodia develop as a nation.

The Center for Advanced Study would like to take this opportunity to express our very best wishes to the Asian Media Information and Communication Center in Singapore, and the Center of Consultancy-Information-Training on Economic and Business Management here in Ho Chi Minh City, our hope for great success in the deliberations of this consultation, and to say that we look forward to building closer relationships and cooperation between our institutions.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, as I just mentioned to you, I wish to address the “Role of Communication in Development from the Perspective of Ethnic and Cultural Minorities in Cambodia” as suggested by the organizer of this gathering.

To begin, I will brief you on Cambodia’s recent history. I will then, inform you about the situation of ethnic minority groups in Cambodia at present. Finally, I will look at the ethnic minorities policy as part of the sustainable development policy of the Kingdom, and at the role of communication from the perspective of ethnic and cultural minorities in Cambodia.

The views that I express today are mine alone, though I feel that the following explanations are important components of our common perspective from Indochina on Communication and Preservation of National Cultural Identity.
Recent History of Cambodia

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the last 20 years international attention has necessarily focused on Cambodia's war, genocide, occupation, interference by external powers, refugees and famines, and on its enduring political personalities. Cambodia has come to be known to the world community first of all for the self-inflicted genocidal suffering which Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge perpetrated against their own people and as a theater of war in which more powerful countries fought each other on Cambodian soil.

Following five years of negotiations between the warring Cambodian factions and neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN states along with Vietnam and Laos) and the permanent members of the UN Security Council - and as you are aware - the United Nations dispatched over 20,000 peace-keepers to Cambodia in an operation, known as UNTAC (the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia) at a cost of more than two billion dollars. This UN mission to Cambodia, which has been widely regarded as the most successful UN peace-keeping operation of the post-cold war era, was not entirely successful, because one of the four Cambodian political factions, Democratic Kampuchea (Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge), withdrew from the peace process and did not participate in the UN-sponsored elections.

Despite limitations and problems, the UNTAC mission culminated in a UN-conducted election in May 1993 that led to the formation of the present Cambodian Government. This Government is a coalition of the three factions (the National United Front for an Independent, Peaceful, Neutral and Cooperative Cambodia - FUNCINPEC -, the State of Cambodia - SOC - and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front - KPNLF), that remained within the UN peace process, and the more recently founded MOULINAKA Party. The Kingdom of Cambodia, with a constitutional monarchy, was then re-established in September 1993.

From the end of September 1993, for the first time since March 18, 1970, Cambodia has had a Government that is supported and recognized - rather than being fought over - by the people of Cambodia and by neighboring states and other nations of the world. An 18 year-long (1975-1993) economic and political embargo against Cambodia has ended. Cambodia has opened its doors to the world, and is now the beneficiary of aid, trade and investment from international financial institutions and the growth economies of Southeast Asia and the world.

However, over two decades of war has left Cambodia with a ruined infrastructure, poor communications, reduced agricultural production, millions of land mines and a large number of displaced persons. The reborn "second" Kingdom of Cambodia is making the transition from the Killing Fields and totalitarianism into liberal democracy with political pluralism and a free market economy.

May 1996 marked the third anniversary of the UN-sponsored elections held in Cambodia. Recently, about five weeks ago, on October 23, 1996, Cambodia commemorated the Fifth Anniversary of the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political
Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict - also known as the Paris Peace Agreements - which were signed by Cambodia and 17 other nations at the final meeting of the second session of the Paris Conference on Cambodia, held from 21, 22 and 23 October 1993 in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General. The Kingdom of Cambodia is now slowly returning to normal. Although in several areas people’s lives have visibly improved, in many other respects the population continues to struggle to meet its daily needs such as food, water, education and health care services. Cambodia is neither an “Asian Tiger” nor an object of international concern. Unfortunately, as one of world’s poorest countries, Cambodia still faces great struggles to find the resources to feed a people grown increasingly weary after decades of conflict, turmoil and hardship.

Despite these hardships, the Royal Government of Cambodia has achieved, after three years, some remarkable results in the areas of the economy, commerce, industry, tourism, education, communications infrastructure, the development of social security, and also in strengthening its national security and defense and the maintenance of political stability.

The positive results of these endeavors to put right the wrongs of the past two decades will only begin to emerge in the coming years. However, in order to sustain the process of rehabilitation of Cambodia, there are some issues to which the Royal Government needs to pay more attention, and in other areas give a higher priority, such as: developing an environmental and legal framework for the development of an open and free market economy, promoting political and financial transparency, upgrading educational standards, protecting the environment (e.g. preventing deforestation), reconstructing the communications infrastructure, and promoting the process of democratization in Cambodia, especially in the field of human rights. The Royal Government needs also to find new and better ways of responding to its minority communities and immigrants.

**Cambodia and its Ethnic Minority Groups**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, as mentioned above, the organizer of this gathering suggested that I should explore the *Role of Communication in Development, from the Perspective of Ethnic and Cultural Minorities in Cambodia*. Therefore, please allow me to give you a brief lay-down on the background and situations of ethnic minority groups in Cambodia at present.

The first Kingdom of Cambodia (1941-1955) and the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era (1955-1970), under the leadership of King Norodom Sihanouk, suggested that the Cambodian people coexisted in a spirit of tolerance, mutual understanding and mutual assistance. After two decades of war and destruction, genocide, interference by external powers, floods of refugees and famines, the situation of Cambodia’s ethnic minority groups is not well known. The Kingdom lacks reliable information on their demographic, socio-economic and cultural situation. Approximately 90 percent of Cambodia’s population of 10 to 11 million people are ethnic Khmer. About 40
different ethnic minority groups constitute approximately 10 percent of the population of Cambodia.

In the past, official statistics on the number of ethnic minorities in Cambodia have been misleading. According to the National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning of the former People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), there were 264,604 people belonging to ethnic minority groups living in Cambodia in 1981 - around four percent of the total population of 6,565,518. The Chams, also called the “Cham-Muslims” and/or “Khmer-Islam,” were the second largest ethnic community in Cambodia after the Khmer majority. The Chinese community, with a population of 34,488 was the third largest, and surprisingly, the hill-tribes of “Phnong”, also called “Mnong,” were the fourth largest ethnic group. The Vietnamese community was classified as the seventh largest community, with a population of 8,197. In contrast to later statistics from 1992, the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese were in 1981 classified as ethnic groups in Cambodia, along with the indigenous minorities and the Cham community.

In 1992, the Department of Ethnic Minorities of the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated that there were over 309,000 people in Cambodia belonging to ethnic minority groups—around 3.5 percent of the total population of 8,900,000. These figures are unreliable because a large proportion of the ethnic minority population—such as the Lao, Thai, Malay, Burmese, Chinese and Vietnamese—was regarded as "foreign residents" rather than ethnic minorities of Cambodia.
Table 1: Ethnic Groups in Cambodia according to the Department of Ethnic Minorities of the Ministry for Religious Affairs (1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chams</td>
<td>195,215</td>
<td>65.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>21,649</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnong</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kui</td>
<td>15,771</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampuan</td>
<td>13,556</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>9,368</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov</td>
<td>5,286</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>3,976</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stieng</td>
<td>3,571</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kraveth</td>
<td>3,012</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kraai</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mil</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachac</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorai</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lun</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loemoun</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poang</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaning</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arach</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachrouk</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saoch</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kola</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmer Khe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anang</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chong</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachaing</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayong</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nong</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhade</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samre</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sispre</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thnal</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300,271</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total percentage by calculation less than 100.00% because of rounding
na = not available

A similar finding was obtained in a survey by the Administration Department of the Ministry of the Interior in 1995, which found a minority population of almost 443,000 in a total of over 9,672,000 (the minority comprising therefore 3.8% of the total).
Table 2: Ethnic Groups in Cambodia according to the Administration Department of the Ministry of the Interior (1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chams</td>
<td>203,881</td>
<td>46.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>95,597</td>
<td>21.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>47,180</td>
<td>10.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>19,819</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampuan</td>
<td>15,861</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kui</td>
<td>14,186</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorai</td>
<td>11,549</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>7,854</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnong</td>
<td>5,323</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kraveth</td>
<td>3,585</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiang</td>
<td>3,234</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov</td>
<td>2,585</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>2,454</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kraol</td>
<td>1,962</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robel</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thmaum</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loemoun</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saoch</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachac</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,708</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>442,699</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total percentage by calculation less than 100.00% because of rounding.

The situation of the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese illustrates the shortcomings of these official statistics.

In fact, ethnic Chinese were a significant minority group before the Khmer Rouge era, and Chinese migration to Cambodia dates back as far as the Angkor period. The current population of ethnic population is officially estimated at a little over 200,000, more than half of whom reside in Phnom Penh. Independent observers suggest an actual total of at least 300,000. As far as the ethnic Vietnamese are concerned, the Khmer Rouge claimed there were four million in Cambodia, while the State of Cambodia put their number at 200,000. Independent observers have given estimates of between 500,000 and one million.

**Mass - Communication in Cambodia and the Preservation of National Identity**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, like many other nations in the world, the Kingdom of Cambodia is preparing to enter into the 21st century and is facing the challenge of finding new and better ways of communicating with its multiracial population while establishing a multicultural society in which every individual has the opportunity to participate on an equal footing, irrespective of race, ethnic origin,
religion, ethical beliefs, culture etc., and at the same time preserving the cultural identities of its multicultural population.

With the introduction of a free market economy, the Royal Government of Cambodia is absorbing and encouraging both national and international investors to invest in the Kingdom, with for example more than 2,000 million US dollars of capital investment in 1995. Industrial factories now employ more than 10,000 workers. In term of tourism, Cambodia has attracted up to 220,000 national and foreign tourists in 1995. This is 25 percent more than in 1994. Cambodia has made significant strides in the past three years. The economy is now growing steadily and the GDP is due to double in seven years. One of the fastest growing industries in this developing Cambodia is the media - industry.

With this free and open market economy, Cambodia and its population have free access to the electronic media and other means of communication. With about 10.5 million inhabitants, and after three years of an elected Government, the Kingdom of Cambodia has now become acquainted with five (5) television broadcasting stations, of which four are private enterprises. The further expansion of radio and television broadcasting stations is to be expected in the near future. Besides these national channels and programmes, Cambodia also has access to the international broadcasting stations through satellite, such as CNN, BBC, music and sport channels, and all other programmes from neighboring countries, including Australia, the People's Republic of China, India, Hong Kong and Vietnam. All kinds of video-tapes, whether decadent or not (including soft and hardcore pornography) are freely available to all, including children, at a price of just two or three of US dollars. The free access to all kinds of media has radically changed the social and cultural life of all people in Cambodia, and I assume also in other nations in the region. After more than two decades of all sorts of hardships, Cambodia is now booming with all kinds of up-to-date electronic telecommunications, radio, television and other audio-visual equipment. Because the lack of facilities and very poor infrastructure of Post and Tele-communication, Cambodia is probably the only country in the world that uses proportionally more mobile phones than the so-called house telephone.

The Role of Communication in Development: From the Perspective of Ethnic and Cultural Minorities in Cambodia

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have now come to the heart of the topic upon which I was asked to make my presentation. It has taken a while to get here and yet all of the foregoing is a necessary preface to what I am going to say as we take a cultural and educational perspective on the role of communication in development from the perspective of ethnic and cultural minorities.

Nevertheless, in order to define the role of communication in development from the perspective of ethnic and cultural minorities, it is necessary to understand the situation of those ethnic minority groups. But to understand the situation of ethnic groups or minorities in any pluralist and multicultural society, it is also essential to look back
into history in general, and in particular into the majority’s perception of the society in which those minorities are living. In the past, like other nations in the region, Cambodia had chosen to ignore its minorities. The lack of pluralistic consciousness relates not only to ethnic minority groups, but also to tolerance of dissent and the expression of diverse thinking and opinions. For example, the recent history of Cambodia, like the anti-Vietnamese pogroms and discrimination under the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol (1970-1975) and Pol Pot Khmer Rouge (1975-1978) regime, demonstrates the idea that perceptions of history can lead to all kind of destruction. However, if we are simply asserting, for example minority rights as a categorical policy which is not based on a comprehensive policy for ethnic minorities as a whole, we offer no solution to those questions unless there is a system or process of peaceful group conflict resolution on the one hand, and a process as well as policy of mutual-understanding on the other.

With this in mind, and to present the final report and the results of a one-year study on the Interdisciplinary Research on Ethnic Groups in Cambodia, which has been conducted under my direction, the Center for Advanced Study (CAS) held a National Symposium on Ethnic Groups in Cambodia and National Multicultural Awareness Day in July this Year. This historic event aimed to draw attention to the situation of the different ethnic minority groups living in the Kingdom and to develop policies and procedures to ensure the just integration of all ethnic groups into Cambodian society. Many of the nation’s leading thinkers and policy-makers who took part in the workshop deliberations contributed to the formulation of specific policy recommendations to future tolerance, ethnic harmony and national reconciliation. One of the most important recommendations is that Cambodia immediately needs a comprehensive national ethnic minorities policy appropriate for the Cambodian context in order to protect the communities, cultures and environment in general, and in particular a specific policy on the development of disadvantaged areas in the highlands of the northeastern region of the Kingdom.

The purpose of an ethnic minorities policy should generally be focused on the realization of a society where all ethnic minority groups are placed on an equal footing and have a full opportunities for development along with the rest of the population. This principal goal is mostly divided in three components, namely: (1) the reduction of social and economic disadvantage, (2) the anticipation of and fight against discrimination, as well as improving the legal status of ethnic minorities, and (3) the creation of conditions by which the ethnic minorities can freely take part in the social and cultural life of the majority.

As mentioned above, about 40 different ethnic minority groups constitute approximately 10 percent of the total population of Cambodia. The lack of reliable demographic, socio-economic, and cultural information on this segment of Cambodia’s population may contribute to lack of racial harmony. The second Kingdom of Cambodia should not ignore 10 percent of its population, and it now has an opportunity to accommodate the needs and wishes of the minority communities.
Ever since its formation in 1993, the Royal Government of Cambodia has pursued a policy aimed at the integration of the ethnic minorities. The Royal Government is actively trying to improve the quality of life of ethnic minorities and to create conditions where the ethnic minorities can freely take part in the social and cultural life of society. Therefore, the Royal Government is committed to and has recognized the strength of multicultural society, and is taking whatever measures necessary to ensure that commitment. Helping diverse ethnic communities to coexist on an amicable basis today, and enabling them to interact for the benefit of the entire society, is the first and most important step towards creating internal peace.

In some specific areas of this policy, like the so-called “policy on disadvantaged areas,” it aims also to improve the position of ethnic minority groups in such social sectors as education, employment, housing, social welfare and healthcare. However, in order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary to adapt provisions and regulations so that members of ethnic minority groups can compete with the majority of the society. In the context of a “policy on disadvantaged areas,” all authorities concerned and their policy-makers strive as much as possible for an equal treatment for minorities within society. In the interests of society as a whole, the economic and social well-being of the people in those disadvantaged areas should be brought up to the level of the rest of society. This means also that a better legal status/position for all minorities should be created, abolishing as far as possible the differences in rules and laws between ethnic minority groups and the majority, and combating discrimination and prejudice. The so-called “emancipation, participation and cultural life policy” aims to create the conditions in which members of ethnic minority groups can experience, preserve and promote their own cultural heritage and identity.

A national and comprehensive policy on the ethnic minorities should be based on the situation of all ethnic categories in Cambodia. HRH Samdech Norodom Ranariddh, the first prime minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia, stated at the opening of the Seminar on Sustainable Development in Northeast Cambodia on 26 February 1996 that: “The Cambodian nation is composed of diversity of people and cultures. That is one of its strengths. A wise government will recognize this strength in diversity, and take whatever measures it reasonably can to protect it.” This means that, in order to avoid misunderstandings in society and to adopt an appropriate form of policy implementation for greatest effectiveness, it is necessary to consider that there are important distinctions of needs behind this diversity.

For example, the Khmer Loeu (highland peoples) are of course united in that they are all highlanders who traditionally depend on a delicate relationship with the hills and forests of the Kingdom for their livelihood, but at the same time they include many different tribes, cultures, languages, beliefs and socio-economic conditions among them. In order to achieve an equitable integration of the highland peoples in the sustainable development of the northeastern region, it is essential that policy formulation should pay careful consideration to this sensitivity and complexity.

The Vietnamese are likewise often mistakenly considered as a single ethnic group (of foreigners). In fact, some ethnic Vietnamese villagers and fisherfolk have lived in
Cambodia for generations, with their ancestors buried here. Others, of course, have come into Cambodia recently, and these often consider themselves Vietnamese citizens and plan to return to their homeland. The social unrest of the last 25 years forced many long-time Vietnamese residents of Cambodia to flee across the border to relative safety in Vietnam; many Khmers had to do the same. But the result is that now some have lost the documentation verifying their former place of residence.

The Khmer Islam are, like the Khmer Loeu, in one sense a united group of Cambodian Muslims. Yet within the Khmer Islam there are important differences between the Jahed (a highly traditionalist group which preserves ancient Cham culture), the Cham (who acknowledge their Cham heritage but who practise a more modern and orthodox form of Islam), and the Chvea (who speak Khmer rather than Cham, and who acknowledge a strong Malay influence on their culture and heritage).

It should be evident that if we do not consider the definition of a minority in the Cambodian context or take account of the complex distinctions within ethnic groups in Cambodia, in our deliberations on nationality, immigration and development policies, we may unfairly fail to appeal to all Cambodians to join in national development and the creation of an atmosphere of peace and social justice.

The complex situation of all the ethnic minorities of Cambodia requires careful analysis of their social and cultural status in order to develop appropriate policies and mechanisms of protection for these minorities. Therefore, a national and comprehensive policy on ethnic minorities, based on this complex situation and the needs of all ethnic groups in Cambodia, must be developed with appropriate implementing mechanisms. Masscommunication will play an important role in the process of development of this comprehensive policy.

The mass-media

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, one of the important components of communication in development, especially for the implementation of ethnic minorities policy, is the media. As an indirect medium of communication, the mass-media play an important role in the life of minorities. It is also important that they should reflect the fact that a nation like Cambodia, with about 40 different ethnic groups, is a multicultural society accommodating people from a range of background. The mass-media can explicitly acknowledge the presence of members of minorities by broadcasting programs concerned with their background, cultures or countries of origin. Using the media to portray ethnic minorities predominantly as people with problems and in disadvantaged and undeveloped situations fails to do justice to the complexities of real life. Broadcasters should realize that the mass-media’s treatment of the news affects the image of members of the minorities in the public mind.

As a matter of the anti-discrimination policy, and because of the important role and responsibility of mass-media within society, broadcasting authorities/organizations should establish programs and personnel policies to achieve equitable representation by members of minority communities within their organizational broadcasting
structures. Moreover, the broadcasting authorities/organizations should also sign the General Declaration against Racial Discrimination, thus committing themselves to combatting prejudice and discrimination within their sphere of influence.

Regarding the role of communication in the policy of information provision in relation to integration, the government should use the media in encourage members of the ethnic minorities to use their capacity and attainments to help them participate actively in society. The government should also take the facilities the mass-media offers to educate the indigenous population and ethnic communities about the implications of multicultural society and, by so doing, encourage acceptance of that society.

The role of communication in the policy of information provision directed at members of the ethnic minorities needs to take account of the significant differences between and within the various categories of ethnic minorities, but at the same time to focus on creation of an active awareness of the rights and responsibilities connected with membership of Cambodian society. Where necessary, government policy can be directed at increasing knowledge amongst the minority communities with regard to the background to and structures of Cambodian society and the social requirements for participation in it.

To be continued

Please check against delivery