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A Strategy for Reaching Out: The RACOs

By

Teresa H Stuart
A STRATEGY FOR REACHING OUT: THE RACOs*

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INTRODUCTION

Information is useless unless communicated, and received by the human mind. Only then is it transformed into knowledge. Man is then free to apply this knowledge in his thinking, feeling and doing.

Applied communication is premised on the recognition that research information per se is useless unless communicated to and applied by those who need it for their development. The urgency to have science and technology (S and T) focused on lifting the horizon of the small farmer/entrepreneur has made applied communication an important facet in the "D" or development mandate of the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development or PCARRD; or, for that matter, in the "D" of the other four sectoral councils of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

Considerable although still inadequate funds have been poured into research in the Philippines. In turn, research has produced a significant number of useful technologies. If adopted, these technologies could make a tremendous impact on the lives of the intended users, and eventually on the economic development of the country.

PCARRD is fully cognizant of the need to make every centavo invested in research count. Accordingly, it has tasked its Applied Communication Division (ACD) to provide the communication dynamics for facilitating technology transfer and utilization.

WHAT IS APPLIED COMMUNICATION?

Applied communication is a special type of communication aimed at effecting the internalization and utilization of research information and indigenous knowledge and technology so that such information and technology are imbibed in the development process. It is communication for the application of science (ACD Brochure, 1981).

The ultimate audience of applied communication as far as PCARRD is concerned is the small farmer-producer and his family whose livelihood is in agriculture and agroforestry, and others in agriculture-related industries. Other audiences are the extensionists, researchers, administrators, policy makers and the media.

Research information and technology generated by research institutions, inventors and successful producers comprise the bulk of messages in applied communication.

Applied communication is the responsibility of communication specialists trained in development communication, communication arts, mass communication, agricultural extension, or related fields. Their main responsibility in the work place is usually to plan, implement and evaluate appropriate communication strategies for different clientele, and to popularize, package, produce and disseminate research information.

CREDO

The credo of applied communication is:

"To reach, to touch, to instruct, to serve"

To reach the intended audience wherever they are and whenever they need information. The principle here is that research information and technology are public commodities. Applied communicators must ease and direct the flow of information to where it is most needed.

Applied communicators must touch their intended audiences’ sensitivities and motivations with information the latter need principally for their livelihood.

The messages should instruct and enlighten the audience, enrich and broaden their options.

Finally, applied communicators should be committed to public service. Their profession, talents, and dedication should be focused on the singular purpose of increasing the productivity, income and welfare of their audience (ACD Brochure).
MISSION

The mission of applied communication is technology transfer or effective research dissemination and utilization. The goal is to promote the widespread adoption of useful research-based technology among the greater number of small farmer-producers so that they may benefit from the national investment in science and technology.

PCARRD implements its AC thrusts through the ACD. To facilitate dissemination and utilization of research information, ACD specifically aims to:

1) Bring about effective exchange and interaction on research-related information and appropriate indigenous knowledge among farmer-producers, researchers, political leaders, policy makers, administrators, and extensionists so that they may actively participate in priority setting, in the formulation of the national research framework, and in the process of socialization and popularization of research findings and technology.

2) Reach farmer-producers, extensionists, administrators, policy makers, and industry leaders with research information and technology through a variety of appropriate communication channels, modern communication technology, and inter-institutional arrangements and strategies to enable them to actively participate in research diffusion and utilization.

PCARRD’s Regional Applied Communication Program

The applied communication thrust of PCARRD hinges on the intent of the R and D sectors to make a beneficial impact on the lives of the ultimate users of agriculture, forestry, and natural resources technology. To operationalize this thrust, PCARRD established a subnetwork for applied communication in all 13 regions of the country called the Regional Applied Communication Office (RACO). At present, there are 15 RACOs which are working components of the national and regional research consortia and centers which PCARRD coordinates.

The National Agriculture and Resources Research and Development Network (NARRDN), established and coordinated by PCARRD, is located in the 13 regions of the country. At present there are 14 consortia and one center within the network. PCARRD’s consortium scheme forges the necessary interagency linkages among research centers, institutions and state colleges and universities and extension systems toward maximized research resources and technology utilization.
THE RACO TASK FORCE

The RACO Task Force is a working component of a regional research center/consortium. It consists of communication specialists and information officers from the member agencies who mostly head the applied communication unit (ACU) or information office of their respective agencies. Where many of the RACO members are heads of their respective ACUs, the RACO task force is a potent network with a strategic task of strengthening and institutionalizing communication responsibility in the region.

RACO Coordinator

The RACO is headed by a coordinator who is usually the chief communication person of the consortium's base agency or R and D center. He/She heads in the planning and implementation of AC activities. He/She corresponds with the RACO national network coordinator at the ACD PCARRD and initiates and maintains linkages with cooperating agencies in addition to consortium member agencies to further strengthen technology transfer.

The RACO Coordinator is a regular member of the Regional Technical Working Group (RTWG) of the consortium and is responsible for coordinating with the Consortium Coordinator in identifying mature technologies for packaging and dissemination. It is therefore incumbent on the RACO coordinator (and members) to participate in annual agency in-house reviews and regional symposia on R and D highlights where mature technologies are identified. These fora are their major sources of the technological information on agriculture and natural resources in the region which serve as inputs to their yearly action plan.

The RACO coordinator is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the six activities of the RACO. In order to monitor these activities, he/she convenes regular monthly or bimonthly meetings held in a rotational fashion among member agencies.

The RACO Members

RACO members are permanent representatives from their respective agencies. Ad hoc assignment of agency representatives in the RACO is discouraged in order to lend a sense of permanence to the RACO structure and continuity and sustainability to its programs. Consistent agency representation will hopefully lead to the institutionalization of the applied communication program in the region.

The RACO task force is not limited to consortium communication officers. Cooperating member agencies such as the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), Foundation of Rural Broadcasters (FRB), other media organizations, NGOs, regional and provincial agricultural and fishery councils (RAFC, PAFC) and
farmers associations and others are enjoined to participate in RACO activities as long as they subscribe to the PCARRD mission for applied communication.

THE RACO COORDINATORS IN THE REGIONS

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| Ilocos Agriculture & Resources Research Consortium (ILARRC) Reg. 1 | Dr. Mary Ebitha Y. Dy  
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Training Specialist  
National Training Center  
DA/ATI  
Benguet State University  
La Trinidad, Benguet |
| Cagayan Valley Agriculture & Resources Research and Development (CVARRD) Reg. 2 | Prof. Ruby S. Hechanova  
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Echague, Isabela |
| Central Luzon Agriculture and Resources Research and Development Consortium (CLARRDEC) Reg. 3 | Dr. Rosita L. Rose  
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Munoz, Nueva Ecija |
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Professor, Palawan National Agricultural College  
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University of Southern Mindanao
Kabacan, Cotabato

RACO TASKS

The RACOs have the following tasks:

1. To provide communication support to the research activities of the regional research centers/consortia.

2. To pool the scant communication resources of consortium member and cooperating agencies.
3. To foster interagency cooperation by providing the venue for cooperative communication work.

4. To develop and upgrade regional communication capability.

5. To translate technologies into low-cost acceptable and useful communication materials.

**RACO ACTIVITIES**

There are six general activities that RACOs undertake. These activities are:

1. **Publications preparation and production.** The RACO takes charge of planning, preparing and editing publications ranging from integrated center/consortium annual reports and newsletters to factsheets, leaflets and brochures on practicable technologies.

   The RACO is also responsible in developing briefing materials for the consortium not only in the form of print, but also slide-tape packages (STP) and audio-visual (AV) media.

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3. **Scientific literature service.** The RACO is mandated to strengthen the consortium’s scientific literature service. Besides the traditional service to researchers and students done mainly by informing them of available literature and procuring photocopies of requested materials from PCARRD, the regional SLS retrieves research reports from the researchers and students who have done their research. This activity is coordinated with PCARRD’s national research information retrieval and documentation program.

   The establishment of an SLS in the Consortium provides researchers from member-agencies with the opportunity to avail of references and relevant literature that are necessary in the planning and conduct of their research.
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   The establishment of an SLS in the Consortium provides researchers from member-agencies with the opportunity to avail of references and relevant literature that are necessary in the planning and conduct of their research.
4. **Mass media linkages.** Most RACOs are utilizing radio broadcasts for technology dissemination by translating technical materials into radio scripts for different radio formats. The DA, a member agency in all consortia, utilizes RACO-produced software for the Department’s on-going radio programs.

Among the radio formats that the RACOs have developed are schools-on-the-air, developmental radio plugs, radio dramas, radio programs featuring consortium R and D activities, technology breakthroughs and farmer testimonials.

Part of the RACOs’ audio visual strategies is the revival of appropriate indigenous or folk media in the transfer of technology. Some forms of these are poetry contests, folk singing, theatre, puppet shows, etc.

The RACO is also responsible for putting-up Consortium exhibits highlighting R and D activities of the member-agencies. It also coordinates media-relations activities for the promotion and recognition of the consortium’s R and D activities and outputs in the form of news and feature releases for print, radio and TV.

5. **Communication and social action research projects.** The RACOs are also being strengthened through project development. Communication research is a vital activity of the RACOs as a mechanism for a continuous bottom-up information flow involving the extension system. By using community media in the grassroots level, RACOs arouse people’s participation in the planning of communication content and approaches. Action-oriented types of communication research are built into their programs. It enables the RACOs to determine people’s needs, preferences and talents so that these become the paramount considerations in planning for communication.

Evaluation research, although not yet vigorously pursued, will be conducted to provide a feedback mechanism for planning and improving strategies toward institutionalization. The RACOs are encouraged to develop and implement applied communication strategies in order to backstop the activities of existing action research projects in the region/consortium.

One example of an action research project that is now supported with applied communication strategies is the Barangay Integrated Development Approach for Nutrition Improvement or BIDANI at CLARRDEC in Region III. Some examples of action-research projects which the RACO backstops are the corn research and outreach program in southern Philippines based at CEMARRDEC in Region XII and
the verification and standardization of fish processing technology project of PCAMRD that are implemented in Regions I, V, and VIII of ILARRC, BICARRD and VICARP respectively.

6. Training. Most RACOs continue to organize trainings and workshops to develop communication skills and technical communication capability of RACO members and ACU staff of consortium member-agencies. This is strengthened with the implementation of the DA/ATI-PCARRD National Integrated Applied Communication Program in the regions. A number of information/communication officers of member agencies have been trained in instructional materials production and the basics of communication materials preparation such as technical and popular writing, editing and photography.

Responsibilities of RACO to the Consortium

1. Planning with the RTWG communication strategies for research dissemination and utilization.
2. Providing communication support
3. Assisting centers/stations in the management of conferences, seminars, workshops and meetings.
4. Developing and testing communication prototypes
5. Providing scientific literature
6. Projecting the work of the research center within its service area.

ROLE OF ACD-PCARRD IN THE RACP

The ACD provides leadership, coordination, supervision, training and project development support to the different RACOs. Since PCARRD is a member of all consortia, ACD is a member of all RACOs and should be represented in all RACO meetings and activities.

The ACD, mandated to work toward the institutionalization of the RACOs, takes the lead in the following activities:

1. Assistance in the interagency organization of the RACOs
2. Operational planning
3. Coordination of inter-RACO programs and activities
4. Monitoring and evaluation  
5. Communication training  
6. Project development and fund generation  
7. Project coordination and budgeting  

On its 11th year, the Regional Applied Communication Program has rapidly expanded coverage. But while some RACOs have increased their capability, hence, visibility in specific regions, many RACOs are far from mature and require much needed resources to operationalize its plans. The ACD initiates project development with a view toward institutionalization through national or local government or foreign funding. The ACD takes note of the surge of interest among donor agencies in supporting development communication.

Among the projects already implemented or developed are the following:

1. The RRDP/USAID Technology Transfer Activity in Region 06 (1987).

The RRDP Technology Transfer Collaboration Project in Region 6 is a component of the USAID-funded Rainfed Resources Development Project (RRDP-Philippines) which aimed to improve production and increase the income of farmers through effective information delivery systems or communication strategies and development of practical and usable communication materials.

PCARRD’s experience in this technology transfer activity shows the complementation between existing agricultural research technology with internal and external resource systems. A task force composed of researchers, subject matter specialists, information-communication officers and extension workers from various agencies and farmers was forged so that research results in agriculture and natural resources vis-a-vis problems and needs of the farmers may be made known to all parties concerned.

Consequently, as the task force members listened to the needs and aspirations of the farmers, the farmers cooperated and exchanged traditional methods of farming with modern methods. This was evident in the Magdungao Agroforestry Pilot Project of the Bureau of Forest Development, where the farmers adopted the recommended technologies on hilly farming upon seeing in the demonstration area the actual contour farming and its corresponding beneficial effects.

The actual demonstration farms were made possible through inter-agency linkages which involved farmer participation, dialogues, technology mixes, resource back up, staff and farmers’ trainings, income-generating
opportunities, developing and evaluating communication strategies and materials, and an intermediate organization that served as a "pooling" mechanism where the R and D workers and farmers pool themselves together to discuss and arrive at decisions (Bautista, 1988).

2. **RRDP/USAID Strengthening Regional Applied Communication as a Tool for Agriculture and Natural Resources Resources Technology Transfer Program (1988 - 1991).**

   This ACD coordinated program is being implemented with the objective of strengthening the RACOs in the regions. Initially, it is being implemented in six Regions namely: Regions I, III, V, VIII, X and XII. Each project has five studies/action researches. The following studies are:
   
   A. Utilization of Print as a Tool for Agriculture and Natural Resources Technology Transfer program;
   
   B. Utilization of Radio as a Tool for Agriculture and Natural Resources Technology Transfer program;
   
   C. Utilization of AV as a Tool for Agriculture and Natural Resources Technology Transfer program;
   
   D. Utilization of Indigenous Media as a Tool for Agriculture and Natural Resources Technology Transfer;
   
   E. Strengthening the SLS as a Tool for Agriculture and Natural Resources Technology Transfer.

   This program started in July 1988 and will end in June 1991. Hopefully, the RACOs will then be institutionalized in each of the six regions. The second phase of the program is envisioned to be implemented in the other RACOs by 1991.

3. **DA/ATI–PCARRD National Integrated Applied Communication Program (NIACP).**

   ACD through the RACP has linked with the ATI/DA in strengthening regional applied communication. Now on its third year of implementation, the DA/ATI–PCARRD National Integrated Applied Communication Program (NIACP) manifests positive signs of a successful Research and Extension interfacing. PCARRD and DA/ATI have formed 13 Task Forces in various regions of the country through its enabling mechanisms: the Regional Applied Communication Offices (RACOs) of the PCARRD R and D Network, the 13 Regional Information Officers (RIOs) and the managers of the Regional Integrated Agricultural Research System (RIARS) of the DA.
Together, they have explored possible areas of further cooperation between research and extension. These are in such areas as trainings – to hone the talents of people in the field; meetings, seminars and workshops – to establish inter-agency linkages and foster a collaborative, complementary relationship between and among researchers, extensionists and farmers.

A major output of this collaboration is the production of communication prototypes. The regions identify their technologies vis-a-vis needs, develop, design the prototypes and submit it to ACD, PCARRD for fine-tuning. After fine-tuning these are then endorsed to ATI for printing and dissemination.

Three proposals meant to involve more RACOs in R and D programs are being negotiated:

A. Regional Marketing Information Packaging (RMIP) Project.

The RMIP Project is to be implemented for two years. The project aims to design, package, implement and evaluate communication strategies in order to provide farmer-producers with timely marketing information that will guide them in making wise production and marketing decisions and practices. Funding of this project comes from the USAID-Accelerated Agricultural Production Program (AAPP) through the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) of DA. To date, the project proposal is still being reviewed and evaluated by the USAID and AAPP-PMO group, with an expected start date in August 1989.

B. UNDP-FAO Development Support Communication for Selected Agricultural Technology Transfer Projects in the Regions to involve the RACOs.

A 3-month preparatory assistance shall be conducted from August to October 1989 prior to the full implementation of the UNDP-GOP funded project. During the preparatory assistance phase, a national and an international consultant will conduct field visitations to review and evaluate the capability and need of each region in terms of Development Communication and techno-transfer. Based on the results of this 3-month preparatory assistance phase, four RACOs will then be identified to implement the 3-year project.

This proposal has been developed to evaluate the whole continuum of the farmer-extension-research interface within the context of the NIACP as spearheaded by PCARRD and DA, and operationalized by the RACOs. It also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of extension communication strategies, linkages, networking and management mechanisms in the process of technology transfer and utilization. IDRC has considered this proposal for funding in mid-1990.

###

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