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Report

By

P R R Sinha
The preamble

Communication and development go hand in hand. They are dovetailed to each other in a chicken and egg situation. Despite the pending debate as to which is cause and which is effect, they continue to depend on each other for their mutual growth and development. Nevertheless, adequate attention is not being paid to the potential of communication in furthering the cause of growth, development and modernisation of a developing society. The situation is quite alarming on the rural front where bulk of the population reside.

It is, however, incumbent on the communication planners and administrators, practitioners and scholars to ensure that communication plays its expected role towards desirable socio-economic changes in the life and living of the people. It is being increasingly realised that the rural people, in spite of their socio-economic differences, do need information in order to be able to improve their quality of life. It has been said and rightly so, that there is 'information glut' in the rural areas, but most of the available information are not utilised by the people for a variety of reasons. The rural people are quite receptive to new ideas and information despite the obvious handicaps of illiteracy and low socio-economic status.

The problem is further accentuated because of the apathy of the communicators, specially mass media towards rural life. This is reflected in the poor or scanty coverage of the activities of the rural life. Again, different communication media seem to be running parallel to each other without meeting at any point, in the process of transmission of information to the same audience(s). This is evidenced from the complete lack of coordination among various communication sources such as government information personnel, mass media practitioners, extension workers, and so on.

As the salvation of the most of the Asian Countries lies in the uplift and betterment of the rural people, it is high time to give serious thought to the means and methods of effective communication for all intents and purposes.

The present seminar was, therefore, organised with this in view in Hyderabad from December 18-20, 1977. The seminar jointly organised by the Osmania University and AMIC was attended by 40 participants. All but one participant came from different parts of India.

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It may be appropriate to mention that the main purpose of the seminar was exploratory and not prescriptive. An attempt was made this seminar to discuss some of the important types of rural communication with a view to getting a clearer picture of its various dimensions.

The seminar was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister of Information and Public Relations, Government of Andhra Pradesh. The Minister stressed the importance of Radio and Television in accelerating the pace of rural development. The print media had a limited utility due to high rate of illiteracy, observed the minister.
The main theme of the seminar was divided into four sub-themes for purposes of better discussion and consensus. The four main topics comprised concepts and problems of rural communication, print media and rural communication; electronic media and rural communication; and traditional, visual and other media and rural communication. The reports of the working groups are as under:

GROUP I

Concepts and Problems of Rural Communication

Rural communication can be conceived as the process of transferring useful technology and information from the research centers to the rural system and transmitting the problems of the latter to the former; both done through the linking system, with view to improving the living conditions of the rural people.

Some of the problems inherent in the rural system are:-

1) low per capita income,
2) low nutritional levels,
3) low transportation and communication facilities,
4) few health and medical facilities,
5) low per capita productivity,
6) unemployment and underemployment,
7) illiteracy,
8) wide disparities in socio-economic conditions,
9) exploitation of weaker sections,
10) social evils such as early marriages, dowry, untouchability, social distance, and
11) inadequate educational facilities,

To tackle the above problems, effective rural communication is must. At present rural communication is ineffective because of following communication problems, categorized below:

I. Audience problems... such as:
1) inadequate access to all media of communication - mass, interpersonal, and traditional;
2) inadequate support services to implement the messages;
3) lack of aspiration, motivation, resulting from the audiences' outlook, and lack of awareness of their rights;
4) inability to formulate and/or articulate felt needs and grievances;
5) problems resulting from high levels of illiteracy;
6) vested interests opposing change and progress.

II. Media problems, resulting from:
1) inadequacy of existing media and inadequate use of existing media;
2) costliness of modern communication media, especially electronic media;
3) lack of coordination among different media;
4) untimely messages;

III. Message problems for example:
1) messages not oriented to needs of the rural people, especially weaker sections of the society;
2) message not in the language/dialect/idiom of the audience;
3) messages incompatible with the value systems and traditions of the people;
4) overloading of messages leading to confusion;
1) confusion resulting from contradictory messages; and
2) poor treatment of messages.

IV. Communication problems, such as:

a) low credibility
b) low awareness of rural area
c) lack of adequate communication tools and knowledge of their effective handling
1) lack of motivation
2) lack of adequate mobility
3) lack of adequate horizontals and upward communication among communication
4) two large a clientile for a single extension agent to handle
5) more concentration on the upper strata to the neglect of the weaker sections,
i) inadequate attention to feedback.

V. General problems

a) awareness of national communication policy
b) absence of an integrated communication strategy
c) lack of an umbrella organization to coordinate communication activities at different units,
d) apathy on the part of policy makers.
i) inadequate facilities to train rural communicators.

GROUP W II PRINT MEDIA AND RURAL COMMUNICATION

Recommendations

1. Efforts should be made to start and encourage rural newspapers at the District level at least, if not at the Taluk level.

More specific suggestions in this regard are listed below in the belief that the print media can be a potent force for rural communication.

An attempt should be made to arrive at a basic vocabulary of between 1000-2000 words in every regional language, depending on the needs of each language so that the print media in rural areas will be made more effective by confining messages to these.

Government help should be offered to finance rural newspapers either through nationalized banks or through a separate agency set up for the purpose.

Government and Public sector advertisements, e.g. tender notices, charging local relevance and applicability, must be given to the rural publications in preference to the large metropolitan papers.

Government should augment the circulation of rural newspapers encouraging or influencing the agencies under its control to subscribe to rural publications.

The Directorate of Industries at the State Government level will include rural newspapers under their various small entrepreneurs' incentive schemes, where such schemes exist, or create suitable schemes for this purpose.

A cell should be set up both at the Central and State Government level to syndicate material for use in printed rural communication. Such cells could act as feature banks and illustration banks for rural publications.

Training on a regular and systematic basis must be offered to personnel on rural newspapers.

Reading rooms should be started in every village to spread the reading habit.

In terms of content of rural newspapers at least 40% of editorial coverage should be devoted to agriculture, rural development, and to vocational/occupational needs of the local populace.
In terms of format, there should be greater stress on pictorial content. As a starting point, a fortnightly wall newspaper could be printed at the state level and displayed at central places in every village.

Maximum use should be made of various print media, such as leaflets and brochures to supplement rural newspapers.

Larger type faces and page size could be, in addition to pictorial material.

While posters can be an effective medium in rural areas, they should be simple and direct. The artist should not be the sole editor of the design and content of the poster, which must be adequately pre-tested.

**SUP: III**

**ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR RURAL COMMUNICATION**

**Recommendations:**

Communication, electronic and otherwise, should be considered much of an investment or tool for rural development as electricity, irrigation etc. and equal or comparable amounts of money should be located for communication purposes;

The electronic media should be one unit of the total rural development programme since it cannot operate in isolation and must be compatible with other media;

The possibilities of electronic media other than radio, TV and mass, eg. audio/video cassette recorders for mass, group or individual use, should be explored. For instance, "Talking book libraries" i.e. taped information, can be supplied to community centres for repeated use;

The need-based content of communication should ultimately be determined by the receiver;

The contract between the target audience and originators of message should exist at all stages of planning, producing and evaluating each of programmes;

The radio should be exploited further in the following ways:

- Localised production. Local broadcasting stations and rate channels for rural broadcasts should be provided to cover the subjects which rural TV now deals with;
- More field reporters;
- More broadcasting time to programmes with content based on extension work;
- The maintenance of receiver sets should be organised at the village level. Training for this be given to individuals (village youth) to undertake part-time radio and TV maintenance work;

In order to improve the quality of communication production, of radio and TV, which is inadequate at the moment, should be initiation should be involved in the planning, production and evaluation of each other's communication efforts.
Recommendations

1. A "National Academy" of Folk Arts should be set up for the preservation of the traditional art forms of the country and its revival, research, documentation, training and utilisation for the purpose of Rural Communication.

2. This Academy could have its counterparts in all the states of the country.

3. Utmost care is to be taken to see that any new message of development communication does not harm the form or content of the original traditional art.

4. Talented individual artists should be encouraged and have the facilities to improve their skill in folk arts used for rural communication.

5. Pre-media field studies should be undertaken before producing any communication programme.

6. In planning, production and execution, an integrated approach is recommended.

7. There has not been any objective evaluation so far on traditional media as communicating agents. It is recommended that on an experimental basis, the evaluation studies may be undertaken in one or more areas.

8. For effective communication in the field of agriculture and allied subjects, intensive extension system like Ramad system should be applied all over the rural areas to intensify the training.

9. Key communicators in the rural areas should be given intensive training in the process of rural communication.