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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Hermano, Terry</td>
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The New Thrust: Group Media & Non-Formal Education

By

Terry Hermano
I. THE EARLY BEGINNINGS

The Communication Foundation for Asia, then known as the SCC Development and Research Foundation, was founded in 1968. It was given its present name in 1975. Historically, it grew out of the work and experience of the Social Communications Center which was established in 1965.

From its inception, the Social Communications Center viewed development communication, for which it was established, as a form of informal education for contemporary decision-makers who are out of school, as distinct from formal education for contemporary youths in schools. The words today's decision makers include parents and young adults from all walks of life since their decisions affected family size, nutrition, participation or non-participation in cooperatives, land reform, community development, etc. Furthermore, it was a fact that their behavior profoundly influenced their children who will make similar decisions in the future.

These decision makers, millions of them at least, were then and still are beyond the research of the formal
educational system either because they have already have left it (the average Filipino, statistically speaking, is only a grade 5 dropout) or never attended it at all. In 1965, SCC felt that the only way to reach such people and help educate them further was through a process of informal education through the use of mass media.

So it is that from 1965 to 1968, the Social Communications Center produced communications materials (mainly in print) for education and development of peoples: A Philippine Edition of the Catholic Digest was printed. So was a magazine Ang Tao (The Human Being) aimed at people living in the barrios (rural areas and urban slums), for which reason it was printed in different dialects (Tagalog, Ilocano, Pampango, Bisaya and Bicolano). As for the nation's opinion makers and leaders, a special magazine called Now was likewise published and later won a national press award.

The use of Radio and Television soon joined the print medium as channels for informal education. With cheap transistor radios available to people, radio became a potent vehicle for development communication. Likewise, though less wide in its"circulation", television too played a role in SCC's informal education of people through the use of mass media.
II. THE FORMATION OF A DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Successful though its ventures were in the informal education of people through the use of mass media, SCC found itself unduly restricted or limited in its efforts by the "laws of the market." Being a commercial corporation, SCC had to compete with other outfits whose intention was to use mass media mainly or solely as an avenue of information or simply of entertainment. Thus, it found itself at a great disadvantage: for one thing, development communication materials require a lot more to produce than pure informative or pure entertainment materials and were therefore more expensive. Commercial advertisers, being what they are, understandably would settle for programmes which would cost them less; and human nature, being what it is, similarly was more easily lured to pure entertainment programmes, than to more serious developmental programmes.

Thus was born the SCC Research and Development Foundation (SCCDRF). Being a foundation, it found itself able to work with funding institutions also interested in the development of peoples. Through projects grants, the SCCDRF worked with field partners in the production of print materials, radio programmes and television shows. In this way, it was able to overcome the obstacle of the market forces at work in Philippine
Media; and to offset the natural inclinations of people to turn their radio dials or their television sets to pure entertainment programmes, SCCDRF made an effort to turn out programmes which were informative, entertaining but educational as well. As the late Gen Ong loved to say, "the trick was to make education entertaining and to make entertainment education." The trick worked. Among others, Panginorin (a CFA radio drama) and Sangandaan (a CFA television series) rated among the best and most widely accepted shows in radio and TV broadcasting, respectively.

In print media, the same formula was applied with similar success.

III. TRANSITION TO GROUP MEDIA AND TO NON FORMAL EDUCATION

Certain developments between 1972 and 1979 lured SCCDRF (in 1975 renamed as Communication Foundation for Asia) to the area of non-formal education with emphasis on the use of Group Media and Low-Cost/Indigenous Media. It must be emphasised however that while it did wisely allow itself to be so lured, it never discontinued the production of radio and TV programmes with a developmental thrust.

But, perhaps, some definition of terms is in order. First of all, Group Media (soundslides productions, tape-cassettes,
community newsletters, flipcharts, flannel boards, blackboard newspapers, hand-mimeographed newsletters, leaflets, posters, even short films, etc.) refers to media aimed, not to a mass audience of heterogeneous characteristics, but to a small group of people with more or less homogeneous backgrounds and interests. Furthermore, unlike mass media, group media afforded an immediate dialogue between "broadcasters" and people and among people themselves. It was therefore found to be a more effective, though admittedly a much more laborious, way of educating people.

Non-Formal Education was further refinement of the out-of-school educational process. It differed from informal education in many ways, but chiefly in the fact that non-formal education, although outside the formal system, was like it in that it was systematised and followed a progression; whereas informal education was a more casual form of teaching and learning.

The interests of civic, social and religious groups in reaching specific target audience found them ready allies or partners of CFA in the production and use of Group Media for non-formal education. Thus, CFA produced a series of comic booklets on nutrition for the Catholic Relief Services engaged in the nutritional education of peoples. It also
produced comic booklets and flipcharts in support of the agricultural approach to family planning of the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction. It produced soundslides for urban and rural dioceses and parishes in aid of their pastoral work. It also produced cassette magazines (variety programmes recorded on cassette tapes) for the people's School of the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction.

IV. MULTIPLYING ITSELF THROUGH TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The Communication Foundation for Asia has gained considerable expertise in the various forms of media for non-formal education. It was but a natural outgrowth of the foundation that it sought to share its expertise with other people and other institutions. For one thing, CFA realised it can never, no matter how it may want to, serve all groups in the area of production of communication materials. For another thing, it may be more meaningful for an institution and more relevant to its work if it is able to produce its own communication materials.

It was therefore a logical step for CFA to turn its attention to Development Communication Seminars and Workshops for producers of the various forms of media and for the users of these same media. It is true there are 17 schools in the Philippines offering Communication courses. However, only
a handful of these schools had the production facilities with which to train their own students. Furthermore, there were many people who just cannot afford a semestral or a year-long program, much less a four-year degree program on Development Communication. Also, there were many people already working in mass media or in development organisations who would like to use some form of group media but who either have had no formal training at all or who needed further training for the work they were engaged in.

For these people, CFA yearly offers a number of short (10-14 days) seminar-workshops on various forms of media. The first seminar was held in 1973. Four were held in 1975, six in 1976, eight in 1977 and twelve in 1978. These seminar-workshops were made possible through grants of foundations in Europe.

V. BECOMING TRULY ASIAN
The main reason for re-naming SCCDRF into Communication Foundation for Asia was the strong motivation of the foundation to share its expertise with peoples and institutions of other countries of Asia. In this, it realised that it was through its training programmes that a truly Asian dimension could be achieved since in the area of production, the different groups in each country would be in a better position to produce communication materials
to serve their educational ends. It must be remembered that Asia is a vast region in which more than one-half of the world's population of over four billion people live. Likewise, it should always be stressed that Asia is not one homogeneous culture, but many diverse and heterogeneous cultures and sub-cultures.

In September 1977, CFA called Regional Colloquium I which was attended by communicators and educators from some 10 countries in Asia. Its objective was to assess the training needs of Asian countries in so far as Development Communication was concerned. Many conclusions were reached at this event, many of which were implemented in the training programs of CFA for 1978.

In November 1978, the new CFA building was formally inaugurated. The day after began a five-day Conference on "The Use of Media for Non-formal Education" attended by communicators, educators, and representatives of some funding agencies. The Conference was followed by Regional Colloquium II which was attended by some of those who attended the Regional Colloquium I and some other selected participants. Its purpose was to reassess the training needs of Asia in Development Communication and to evaluate what had transpired between the two Regional Colloquia.
Towards the end of November and during the first 23 days of December, two regional workshops on Production of Group and Low-Cost Media for Non-Formal Education were held. 90% of those attended were non-Filipino Asians; only 10% were Filipinos.

On January 1979, a 10-day seminar-workshop on Christian Journalism was conducted by CFA. In attendance were participants chosen by WACC, CCA and FABC. The ecumenical group was composed mostly of non-Filipino Asians.

CFA expects to conduct similar workshops towards the latter part of this year. It is also planning apprenticeship programs and training programs of longer durations. In response, however, to a resolution of Colloquium II, the local seminars to be conducted by CFA for 1979 have been scheduled "in clusters" (e.g. electronic media seminars close to each other) in order to enable non-Filipinos to attend several courses and thereby justify the costs of travel they would incur. As of this writing, many non-Filipino Asians, Catholic and Protestants, have signified their intention to join the TV, Film, and Sound-slides seminar-workshops.
CFA hopes to conduct a training program in Indonesia for an ecumenical group under the sponsorship of an international funding agency. It is also continuing its consultancy work for the Department of Health of Papua New Guinea.