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<th>Public service television programming: yesterday, today and tomorrow.</th>
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Today, one word sums up the multifaceted national goal of the Philippines - development. For the last 3 years, President Fidel V. Ramos has been leading our country’s unrelenting effort to carve out its niche among the community of nations. For Filipinos, development means the ability to compete globally. The improvement of the people’s quality of life from generation to generation. A huge and lasting decrease in the number of the poor. A highly motivated and skilled labor force. A dynamic sector of private entrepreneurs. An enlightened people empowered to chart their own destiny. This is the essence of what we call "Philippines 2000".

To transform these goals into living reality requires no less than a passionate conviction and unshaken confidence in the hearts and minds of Filipinos that they can do it. Values and skills must not only match but also help usher in monumental changes throughout the Philippine socio-economic landscape. This is where public service television plays a pivotal role.

Television with its current technological sophistication is involved in one way or another in virtually everything that is right and wrong in the Philippines. It has decidedly more influence on our information, politics, education, moral values, aesthetic taste and mental health than any other institution in our country.
Because of its influence so many people strive to own television stations. There are 89 TV stations in the Philippines, 43 are originating stations, 34 are relay stations and 6 UHF stations.

The context of broadcasting in the Philippines is primarily a commercial system. It is profit driven which becomes a handicap for commercially unviable public service programs. Radio broadcasting started 30 years earlier than television when Radio Corporation of the Philippines started distributing radio sets manufactured by the Radio Corporation of America. RCA founder David Sarnoff introduced the Philippines to broadcasting. This humble origin of a 100 watt station flourished into a major broadcast industry today with 428 radio stations (250 AM and 178 FM) and 89 TV stations. Television was introduced in the late 50’s. The total TV industry’s revenue takes quantum leap in billions every year. In 1995 the TV billing is projected at more than 5 billion pesos from a conservative estimate of 2.5 billion pesos in 1991.

Electronic broadcast will always have the advantage over printed media because of our country’s archipelagic topography of more than 7,000 islands.

Television broadcasts just like radio had always set aside time for public service broadcast, maybe not by design than but more by accident in response to public demands and needs. Today, it is more deliberate and focused. Still there are no public service broadcasting stations, but there are public service programs and announcements.

Even the only government TV station Channel 4 is reliant on commercial consideration and has to compete commercially.
Public service programs used to mean "unsponsored" or without commercial and religious programs which were either given free airtime or at concessional rates. Now, public service concerns and interests are scripted elements of entertainment programs. In the beginning, public service responsibility was imposed by the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas (KBP), the self-regulatory body of the broadcast industry.

The public service broadcasting in the Philippines that evolved concerns the delivery of information, education and community services to the Filipino people through television and radio. Research studies indicate TV owners in the Philippines at 80 per cent of total households in Metro Manila and an average of 40 per cent of total households in the rest of the country. The phenomenal rise in the number of cable television operators in the provinces and the use of satellite technology made the Filipinos dependent if not acculturated to television.

Under the Philippine Constitution, broadcast networks and stations operate only through congressional franchises since the airwaves are regarded as public domain. Therefore, these media outlets operate in the public interest, convenience and necessity. Public service television programming today embraces a wide and interesting range of formats—news and news commentary programs, talk shows on public issues, documentaries on public concerns, cultural programs, formal and non-formal education programs including children's shows, skill enhancement and features. There
are also special public interest programs that tackle topics such as law, health and sports, architecture and design.

As stated earlier, Philippine television began with a commercial orientation. Television sets had to be sold. Entertainment—(the type of program that attracts an audience fastest)—was the fare catered to the mass audience. With the technology then still at its infant stage, news had to be delivered straight from the newspapers or printed news reports. For educational content, Filipino viewers had to rely almost totally on foreign-produced programs. While there were attempts to produce instructional as well as educational television formats, unfortunately, these were the exceptions rather than the rule. The few sporadic education programs that sprouted during the past three decades survived at most for a few years, then died from starvation due to lack of funds.

The events of 1986 did not only bring about political changes but also created a climate of opinion in the Philippines scene. Television audience in the Philippines reached a vigilant point of awareness where they realized their own need and desire for more information in general and for transparency on the part of the government. And this was to be reflected in positive changes in programming in mass media, particularly television. At the same time, the media responded to the demand for more informative and relevant educational television programs. The era of advocacy for media in the Philippines began. Hence, the proliferation of talks shows in all TV stations, popularization of investigative journalism and greater in-depth treatment in TV news
presentation, right after the EDSA Revolution. Increasingly interesting approaches, including editorializing in the presentation of news, aided by technological advances, consequently also attracted the support of advertisers.

This chart shows that today locally-produced talk shows, docu-magazine and educational programs already occupy a significant share in the allocation of time slots for television programs. Not only government but also privately-owned corporations, including schools, have begun to venture into public service television broadcasting on a larger scale. *Sine's kwela, Chemistry in Action, Science Made Easy* and *Physics for Everyday Life* are some of the programs jointly produced by Philippine television stations in cooperation with the government and non-government agencies and institutions.

The initial public offering of Channels 2 and 7 opens the door for at least a partial public ownership of these television stations in the Philippines. Hopefully, these moves will lead to more aggressive and creative participation of the public in the choices of programs to see and patronize.

Today, though, one must admit, entertainment looms large over Philippine television programming. However, the changing taste and hunger for information augurs well for public service programming which can really become an alternative for people surfing the internet superhighway in this information age.

This development is seen not only in the mounting demand for public service programs. It is also exemplified in the soaring prestige a public service image bestows on the networks and stations, sponsoring such programs. And
so, even commercial stations tend to package and build up their corporate images as public service institutions. Unfortunately, in a number of cases, the actual educational content of programming suffers in comparison to the public service image. On the other hand, the competition among networks and stations to advance public service programs in real and concrete terms has intensified.

One arena of this competition has been the upgrading of equipment and studio facilities for quicker news coverages and scoops, for more sophisticated packaging of public affairs programs and for more attractive education programs.

Today, we see a marked welcome upsurge in the number of non-formal education programs both for adults and for children co-produced by the government’s Department of Education, Culture and Sports, together with networks and academic institutions. The current trend among a growing number of government and non-government agencies, corporations and advertisers is to sponsor public service programs and materials on a sustained basis. Educational television programs, public service plugs, live coverage of national and overseas events belong to this wave of public service television output.

To encourage this trend, the Philippine government has given incentives and grants television networks and stations equipment importation tax credits in exchange for the airing of public service plugs. The government therefore has been instrumental in helping public service programming forge ahead.
Admittedly, however, educational programs remain oases, although expanding and increasing in number, compared to the broad desert of entertainment-oriented programs of low-educational value.

Many advertisers continue to be preoccupied with program ratings and cost per thousand exposures to the exclusion of educational values. The government sector as well as the non-governmental and civic organizations is therefore viewed as countering the rise promoting educational programming. The rise of an articulate and vocal middle class in the Philippines greatly boosts the progressive development of educational programming.

Where there is a felt need to produce and air programs that commercial stations do not find commercially viable, Channel 4, a government station, has assumed the task of filling this void. It has blazed the trail in current, instructional or educational programs on science for teachers through the Continuing Science Education via Television project; on livelihood technologies with the program "Tele-Aralan ng Kakayahan"; on culture with the program "Art for Art’s Sake"; and on agriculture and farming through programs such as "Ating Alamín" and "Dighay-Bayan". Channel 4 has since the late 1960’s devoted at least 1,100 hours or 19 per cent of its total program hours to broad non-formal educational programming (excluding public affairs programs).

As Philippine broadcasting has grown by leaps and bounds, so has the human resource that enables the industry to thrive. The Filipino broadcast and electronic expertise has reached such level of excellence that many Filipinos have gone on to man broadcast entities in Asia and the rest of the world.
On the other hand, the remarkable growth in electronic mass media is not the monopoly of the television industry. The Community Antennae Television (CATV) which is classified in the Philippines as part of broadcasting is mushrooming and spreading to remote areas all over the country where there are no local TV stations, giving Filipinos direct access to numerous international cable channels on satellite such as CNN, ESPN Star TV, etc., and a menu of completely foreign-produced programs. This can be the cultural leveling in the Third World.

Video materials using the VHS, Betamax and lately, the compact disk formats, have also gained much ground as alternative audio-visual channels. And then, though to a much smaller extent, CD-ROM multimedia programs and the information superhighway or the Internet offer yet another alternative audio-visual and electronic sources of education and information mostly from outside the Philippines.

Public service programming and programs, while making significant headway in the mass media scene, is still beset with a formidable range of problems.

For one, sources of funds remain relatively scarce. Funds for educational programs are still relatively harder to access from the private sector and advertisers, compared to other types of programs. Educational programming is banking heavily on commercial advertisers and the private sector for funding. Even People's Television Network, Inc., the government network, does not receive a government subsidy. It has had to generate its own...
funds for operations, program development and production from advertising sales. For upgraded technology, it has had to rely largely on foreign loans or grants. The government budget for communication per capita is only around P3.54 (as of 1989), compared to the government budget for education and formal schooling per capita of P369. This is a major handicap confronting public service television programming. Very small portion of private and commercial advertising funds go to educational programs.

A second handicap of public service television is in its shortcomings in the feedback mechanism. Educational and informational programs lack the machinery and resources to sustain regular feedback with which to evaluate their impacts on their audience. As a result, they are not quick and flexible enough to respond and make the needed improvements and adjustments.

A third one is competition generated by the introduction of the new and alternative educational and informational outlets. This particular situation is at the same time, a source of challenge. The presence of competing alternatives help shake up the complacency of public service broadcast networks and stations, and prime them up to constantly improve themselves. On the other hand, being mostly foreign-produced, these alternative channels, also serve as conduits of Western values and lifestyles that often clash with positive Filipino values. They undermine the Filipinos' sense of national identity. Western commercialism and individualism tend to erode the spirit of community and family centered-ness associated with Filipino values.
The three major difficulties facing Philippine public service television programming cry out for three major changes and thrusts. First is the need to cultivate greater funding support. Second is the need through feedback for greater awareness and sensitivity to our changing public wants and demands. And the third is the need to preserve positive Filipino values and national identity amid the unrestricted influx of alternative channels and information.

With these three thrusts, Philippine public service television programming can make even more gigantic strides than it already has. On the airwaves of such an energized public service television programming largely rides the future of Philippine development.

There are also initiatives in the Philippine Congress which would impact on the future perspective of public service programming.

A house bill has been introduced granting tax incentives to broadcast and print media devoting airtime and space to education as well as to advertisers supporting such programs.

Senate Bill No. 313 proposes to regulate the showing of violence on television. A similar Senate Bill No. 544 was also filed for the same purpose of regulating the showing of movie and television advertisements featuring sex and violence to children, while a Comprehensive Children's Television Act of 1995 establishing a National Council for Children's Educational Television was also filed separately.
We are confident that television public service programs will still reach new heights as the government and private sector broadcasters' vision in our country are realized.