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The Role Of Our Media Institutions In Promoting Pluralism: Perspectives From Broadcast Media - From The View Point Of Bangladesh

By

M I Chowdhury
From the viewpoint of Bangladesh.

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Introduction:

The electronic media of Radio and Television have established themselves as powerful media at our times when illiteracy still prevails and distance impedes communication. These media are important tools for socio-economic development of a country than merely entertaining. In this dynamic Asian environment, it is critical to correctly define the role of our electronic media in this 21st century. Because the social changes do not take place with the calendar years. The media institutions are the nodal points of these dynamic changes. If we look back to our past, we can see that from 1960s to 1970s, our media communication strategies were primarily focused on breaking of our poverty cycle. Today our communication development converges to economic equity, social justice, cultural harmony and sustainable development. Radio and Television play an important role in our national development activities viz: information, dissemination,
non-formal education, enrichment and entertainment. They provide channels for quick dissemination of news, current affairs, results of agricultural and other research activities and mainly they help to foster rural development of the country.

**Media role in Bangladesh Scenario:**

In our country radio began to broadcast more than fifty years ago and Television went on air nearly thirty years ago. Before our liberation these two media were being used as means of entertainment for those who could afford it. It had rare chance to take part in National development. But both media can play an important role in creating awareness among the rural people in arousing and mobilizing them to accept the modern technologies in the field of agriculture and livelihood. The reasons why these two electronic media are booming and accepted by the people may be attributed to the following causes:

- Both the media services are relatively less expensive and people of all ages may listen to in a homely, atmosphere and a relaxed mood.
- The programmes presented orally as well as visually are easily understood by the mass people.
- These two media can entertain people with programmes...
on current events and general knowledge.

- Both the media promote sense as well as commonsense of the people.
- They foster the sensitivity of the people towards development activities and democratic values.

In harmony with other Asian countries there happened a dramatic development in the political scene of our country. In the renewed democratic environment our people are now more tolerant of free market ideas. They are more inclined towards the free market orientation. In this context the electronic media can help obtain a balance between the economic, political, social and national development. Our society in Bangladesh is based upon an agro-economy and 85% of our population are rural inhabitants. As a developing country, our main problems are illiteracy, over population and poverty. The change of our social environment is getting an acceleration from the political and technological changes locally as well as internationally. If our society be defined as "the assemblage of people in communication" then our media, institutions (Radio and TV) are the best for this communication. These media should be matched to the latest

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technological developments and should fulfill the contemporary needs of society. Because transfer of technology in a changing society in the best ways and means for raising the human standard. In this regard the electronic media can act as a co-ordinator between the technologists and the implementers. As an effective co-ordinator, our media institutions (Radio & TV) must consider the following aspects on a priority basis:

**Audience profile:** It is important for a broadcaster to have knowledge of its intended viewer/audience. They should consider the geographical location of the audience, socio-economic grouping, literacy level, occupation, attitudes, language, culture, religion and other social norms. In this way, the communicator or broadcaster can assess the audience's needs, understand listening habits, o' people and timeliness of program.

**Media choice:** Different media may be used for conveying messages, but the selection of media depends upon cost, available resources, urgency and immediate effects. In this present world, the developmental trends are tuned with the technological advancements. For an effective developmental ideas, "timing" is an important factor to the planners and implementers. "Speed" and "immediacy" are mainly stressed. In this regard broadcasting media is the best media for conveying messages in the Audio-Visual format to the public.
The frequency of natural and man-made disasters in our country, as well as in this region, underscores the need for an effective disaster forecasting, preparedness, and management system. In this respect, our Radio and Television play an important role as it can provide adequate and timely information for planning and decision making. These two media have the facility of repetition or "hammering" to disseminate the information throughout the country, which ultimately results in the fulfilment of necessary pre-condition for democratic plurality. Since the last decade, the debut of NGOs (Non-Govt. organisations) and People's Organisations (POs) as the 'third sector' of communication indicates their growing relationship with these electronic media (Radio & TV).

No media should ignore some issues popular among NGOs and POs—such as environment, consumerism, women development, population control and other human development activities. Technology need not be expensive to elicit public involvement.

The main elements that ensure people's participation in the "public perception" of issues, which can be ensured by joint venture activities between media, NGOs and POs.

Programme Planning: In the development communication, two aspects are important—programme planning and evaluation.

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In the electronic media programme planning should be aimed at viewers' benefits in terms of information and entertainment. Programme planning should be categorized as "Short-term planning" and "Long-term Planning".

In the 'Short-term planning' programmes will reflect the objectives of non-formal education and implementation priorities, community and rural development in terms of agricultural, irrigation, seed development, livestock development etc. Effective programmes on these issues should be "aired" repeatedly. On the other hand, for the 'Long-term Planning' due considerations should be given to mass literacy, population control, nutrition, rural health care, development of womenfolk and other socio-economic objectives of the country. Programmes on these issues should continue to a time span from one year or even a few years, according to the duration of development projects.

Programme Scheduling and Presentation: In airing the programmes through Radio and TV, priority must be given to the audiences preferences and viewing time. They should be aimed at the suitability of the daily needs of the targeted viewers.

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The programme contents must be easy to understand to sustain the learning process of the audience. It must have an objective and be applicable to the daily needs or the activities of the people and their environment. When the contents of the programme is tailored to the needs and aspiration of the targeted audience, they will actively participate and be motivated towards the implementation.

The following questions should be asked prior to broadcasting a programme:

* Is the programme content simple to understand?
* Are the programme format, structure, narrative and presentation etc. attractive to the audience?
* Is the language or dialect suitable to the targeted viewers?
* Is the technical quality acceptable?
* Will the programme meet the expectation of the audience?

Some periodic evaluation of the programme and feedback by way of monitoring audiences' opinions are necessary to determine whether the programme is beneficial or whether
Transfer of Technology: In our country education, rural health and population planning, community projects and people's participation and the development process are the vital component for raising the standard of living of our rural people. In this context, in the transfer of technology and development, the role of broadcasting organization is that of a co-ordinator between the technocrats and the implementers to accelerate human development by way of education and social changes.

Among other media, the role of Radio and TV in the developing countries like ours includes the development of natural as well as human resources such as land, agriculture, water, energy, minerals, environment, education etc. The broadcasters therefore should perform the following tasks:

- Interpret a message or information in order to make it easy to the audience for awareness.
- Bring about the non-formal education and enrich the rural people with new and knowledge.
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- Revitalize the use of traditional media such as folk songs, Jatra etc. for strengthening democratic values.

- Encourage people to think positively and motivate their participation in self help community projects and social development.

Electronic technology is changing rapidly. It is felt that in this region although Singapore and Hong Kong are on the cutting edge of technology, many countries like Bangladesh have limitations in financial as well as technological know-how. We are confronting 'today' by using 'yesterday's technology. To make a balance between the traditional system and the present, we shall have to make choices in terms of technology (Satellite Vs. terrestrial, microwave) and its application (education, health and business).

Since our media communication is an important input for our socio-economic development, the characteristics contd........10
of our society viz. political, economic, culture
technology etc. will determine what form of media
programmes and market will prevail or sustain.