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Socio-Cultural Impact Of Broadcast Satellite - Indonesia's Experience

By

F Rachmadi
SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT OF
BROADCAST SATELLITE
Indonesian's Experience

By : F. Rachmadi

Technological progress has enhanced smoothened communication from and to all corners of the world.

Indonesia, which is engaged in development, have utilized the technological progress, especially in the field of communication, by using satellite communication technology for its domestic communication system since 1976. Through the mass media which are supported by modern technology, virtually all remote parts of the country can be covered by the communication networks which connect all the corners of the country.

Indonesia is the most populous country in Southeast Asia with almost 176 million people of diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic background, with over 300 regional languages and more than 13,000 islands, the largest archipelago in the world, whose bigness and diversified stock would otherwise difficult to unite, of broadcasting were not utilized. Cultural diversity and sheer size, however, present formidable obstacles. The situation is further compounded by a relatively low rate of litteracy. In the early 1970s, the government of Indonesia was confronted by a problem of communication between Jakarta (the capital) and the rest of the country. The people needed to know the various development programs and the government wanted feedback.
From the beginning of these challenges, Indonesia has recognized that communications was the key to unlocking the door of growth and development, of penetrating the remote areas, of bridging the gap between the urban and rural dweller. As time passed, traditional means of communications—basically from government to village head to villagers—was not sufficient for the emerging nation. Development plans called for a wide approach and construction of a massive communications network, utilizing all modern technology could offer.

The new communication technology provides us with ample opportunities. Indonesia utilized communication technology development to expend the communication and information networks by launching the "Palapa" satellite in 1976. With the Palapa Satellite Communication System in operation, Indonesia is now enjoying a wider and more effective communication network, capable of disseminating news and information to all parts of the country and, even, all parts of the world. It is a fact that the presence of television as a modern communication medium in rural areas has succeeded in involving the people who desire change, i.e. change associated with a wide variety of cultural life to be enjoyed by them, directly or indirectly.

Our government took this shortcut, because the use of microwave system would take a very long time to complete.

A new dimension was created in the communication network system, including radio and television network. Transmitting and earth stations were built, enabling the broadcasting signal to reach far flung locations.

Although the entry of communication technology into Indonesia was relatively late compared with that in the advanced countries. Nevertheless it has made great leaps
in the last decades. The use of Palapa is one example, others are the use of Colour TV and the International Communication satellite.

The biggest advantage as I said before is that the utilization of the Palapa Domestic Satellite System for radio and television broadcasts. These broadcasts can reach remote places in the country which were hitherto "closed".

Research has been conducted by the Department of Information in cooperation with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), cooperating with the East-West Center Communication Institute, Honolulu, Hawaii, to find out:

a. Whether or not the satellite communication facility has greater significance in supporting the process of development.

b. Whether it will help towards a uniform quality in education, the nation's unification process, the change of values, the change in consumption pattern and the spread of new technology.

The result of the study showed that to certain extents it has had influence on the socio-cultural life of the community in Indonesia. The use of satellite communication had not only speeded up the flow and dissemination of information and increased its coverage, but this communication system has also managed to break through the communication channels which have so far been playing a role locally. This fact indicates that the development of mass media with the support of modern technology, especially radio and tv, will have a very great impact on local communication systems.
While practice has shown many favourable results, we have however to distinct that the power of broadcasting for educational purposes has been still underused, a fact that has been pending during the years and awaits a satisfactory solution.

I am therefore happy to note, that this problem is beginning to be tackled seriously and boldly.

Progress in communication technology has rendered the Indonesian community open to the positive as well as negative influences of foreign culture. In a positive way, communication technological advancement opens the possibility to undertake better communication with a wider coverage. However, in addition to providing amenities and comforts to human life, modern communication technology also bears an implication which can give rise to new problems, provoking social conflicts and change of values due to the disparity of the value systems in the technology-receiving community which subscribes to a different cultural background. The flow of cultural values brought by the mass media may produce change of attitudes among the community which subscribes to a different cultural background. Moreover, it may give rise to cultural problems, i.e. the process of polluting the existing culture in addition to the positive process of acculturation, either because of the strong impact of foreign culture or the absence of capability among the community to adapt to external influences.

Observations indicate that negative influences will clearly affect national identity and faithfulness to the basic norms.

Communication support for the development is essential for the success of any programme, including educational projects. The need for an integrated
communication policy has been acknowledged for some time, yet not quite so many explicit formulations have been the result. The telecommunication development has indeed been overwhelming, however, it must be admitted that much of it has been on the technical side, whereas the software side has to be taken care of more deeply and extensively.

Face to face teaching is of course the best way, but since this is not always possible for places far from educational centres, the use of electronic media is an appropriate option. The face to face teaching has the advantage of a two way traffic, an interaction so far not possible with the media.

However broadcasting, especially TV is better equipped with capabilities of showing graphics, documentaries and other visual aids to illustrate the lectures.

In the Mission's report mention is made that more attention should be paid to the TV medium in popularizing the sciences. This is a healthy attitude as the present state of TV development makes it more meaningful to use it for the implementation of the planned arrangement, although the strong possibilities that radio can offer should not be ignored.

Coming back to the educational subject proper, there is a clear distinction between the two sorts of programming which should fit into any national programme planning.

There is:

1. The Instructional Courses or better known as school-broadcasting courses that are designed with a definite instructional aim, meant for specific and fixed audience.
This could have the character of a classroom teaching with an exact and regular audience in mind, the classrooms at universities, including open universities, high schools, secondary school and elementary schools, the upgrading of teachers, leading perhaps to a formal evaluation. The attendance is compulsory.

2. The General Educational Courses or better : General Educational Programmes are directed to the public in general without any definite audience in mind. Viewing is voluntary.

It is the blatter that is now conducted by TVRI and performed by education personnel. This kind of programmes so far lacks the continuity and progression in exposing the subject. Viewers have the impression that there is no sequence in the choice of subject matter in a given science. It seems that it is left to the speaker what subject he or she would like to deliberate on.

TVRI's policy on Educational Programmes has made it clear:

a. The content and form of an educational programme should be clear and easy to understand and should benefit the viewers.

b. The aim should be to sharp on the minds of the viewers and to broaden their knowledge.

c. The programmes should be broadcast continually within a given period and sequences should be arranged in such a way as to enable viewers to follow the entire programme.
If educational programmes are to achieve maximum results, I would like to suggest the following:

(1) Educational programmer whether instructional or general should be accompanied by written texts, guidance books, put at the disposal of viewers while following the lectures. These pamphlets or brochures should be made available at minimum cost, or if possible free of charge to the public or subscribers. The fact remains that broadcasting is something like "once in the air, forever lost", hard to retain and difficult to make references to post lectures.

(2) Whenever possible and funds are available, a separate channel should be established so as not to interfere with the daily routine programmes. If this is not feasible the educational programmes are to be aired at spare periods when the regular programme are off the air.

(3) Selection of speakers who are able to hold the viewers' attention. As there is only a one direction traffic, viewers can watch the speakers, but not the reverse. On the other hand the speaker speaks to the audience who are to remain silent and not able to respond. Educational programmes for the general public is essentially aimed at arousing the viewers' curiosity and at encouraging them to put the newly acquired knowledge into practical action. This is quite true with rural broadcasting.

(4) As regards the organizational set-up, there should be an integral operational planning, devised by the Department of Education and Culture and the Department of Information, who is responsible for the hardware.
(5) The software side, the production facilities which are in the hands of the Department of Education and Culture should be further developed to fill the time slot provided by TVRI/RRI and the newly established educational channel, if any.

As we have been dealing with television problems at length, it would perhaps be useful to complete the data with some technical details.

At present the number of programme producing TVRI stations is 10, namely in Jakarta, Medan, Palembang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Denpasar, Balikpapan, Ujung Pandang, Manado and Bandung. There are 240 transmitter/relay stations with the primary aim of enforcing the signals of the production stations to be able to be received at "blank spots". In addition there are mobile production stations in Banda Aceh, Padang, Pontianak, Banjarmasin, Kupang and Ambon.

Planning for further development during the Pelita V envisages the establishment of new production stations, rehabilitation transmitter equipments, the building of transmitters by stages 10 to 20 station each year and studio equipments. The second channel will hopefully be ready towards the end of Pelita V.

During the same Pelita V plans are under way to complete the installing of the equipments of the production centre in Jakarta and the establishments of another 3 production station in Banda Aceh, Samarinda and Ambon and the rehabilitation of the equipments of the stations in Medan, Palembang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Ujung Pandang, Balikpapan and Manado, in order to be able to produce full TV programmes. Furthermore transmitter equipments at various stations will undergo renovations to improve the transmission strength. Reserve transmitters will also be set up.
The reception situation at the moment is as follows:

1. Areas where programmes from Jakarta can be fully received and those where local transmitters are able to catch Jakarta through TVROs (Television Receiver Only) and the signals from the Palapa satellite.

2. 20% of the time viewers watch the programmes from the Local Production Stations, whereas the remaining 80% emanates from Jakarta, which signals are relayed by the production stations and further channeled to the other relay transmitters.

To enhance the role of TVRI as mass media in carrying out its mission in providing the people with education, information and entertainment, possibilities are now being studied to render TVRI the status of PERUM (Public Corporation). The study covers also the feasibility to have RRI and TVRI in one Public Corporation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to emphasize once again that so far the strength and power of the electronic media have not been exhausted. There is still much room to be utilized, especially for educational purposes, if we wish to reap the greatest benefit from the infrastructures and the facilities that are available.

Jakarta, July 20, 1990