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Role Of Government Information Agencies In Rural Development

By

Krevi Rama Rao
ROLL OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AGENCIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

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Convened by the Department of Communication and Journalism, Osmania University, Hyderabad in Collaboration with the ICSSR and the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, Singapore (AMIC)
The concept of bare-foot Public Relations has attained currency in rural areas ever since practitioners of Public Relations at Taluk level started functioning. It has been realised by the Political scientists, all over, that the growth and development is non-political in nature. Likewise the Public Relations scientists, the Globe over, have begun to realise that Public Relations is non-political in nature, conception and execution.

Centuries ago, Aristotle posed a question "the environment is complex and Man's political capacity is simple - can a bridge be built between them?" Certainly the foundation stones of Aristotle's bridge must be informative, candid, continuous reporting by Government to its citizens, to make his wants and opinions known. In short the two way exchange of Information and ideas that can bring a mutually satisfying relationship is the function of Public Relations. Democracy, more than any other system of Government depends on information and interest of the people.

The Government Information Agencies perform the key role of dissemination of information that is diverse, purposeful and useful to the Community, and try to obtain feedback back to the Government, through Public response, Public reaction and Public attitudes and the Public understanding.

With the advent of our Independence publicity through Government Agency has acquired a new role and significance that was not assigned to it earlier. During the days of foreign rule it was viewed mainly as dissemination of Information addressed to the educated few through the medium of published literature in the form of blue books, Administration Reports etc. The aim was to influence Public Opinion, allay hostile feelings and if possible winover sections of people to support the Government plans.

It is all fundamentally changed now. National Constitution declares that Sovereignty vests in the people and Government has to be run on principle of Democracy. This makes it imperative for the administration to keep the people informed of the Government plan, progress and problems as one of the duties in a democratic regime and since final sanction for all major policies must be obtained from the people the Government publicity organisations has to seek and enlist popular support.

In this context the role of Information Agencies in rural development makes the Information can function merely as a first aid man to promote an awareness and an awakening in the Masses for promotion of an idea concept for a development project. Of late the practitioners of Information and Public Relations have employed the media of tabloid information for a package publicity deal.
The Information Agencies have to assess the designs and the will of the people and communicate it to the Government for shaping the policies and programmes. Time and again it was emphasised that the technology (applied science) has to benefit mankind and it is the common man who has ultimately to be benefited by technology and science. Our first Prime Minister a veritable giant of vitality addressing a meeting of a Panel of Scientists set up by planning Commission observed this "You cannot expect the peasant in the field, or the worker to understand the details of your plan. Nevertheless it is important even the peasant in the field should appreciate what we are doing and welcome it and tell us in his own sphere whether he considers what we do is right. Continuing he told the Scientists that normally as a group of individuals they were apt to ignore what the non-intellectual thought or did, or to think that the peasant and workers know nothing of planning but they ultimately function with the support of peasants and workers. Government through its publicity organisation today has to carry to the masses: to the teeming millions, the message of the development - Rural development, integrated development, allround development of rural masses to enthuse them for active participation. Publicity has to be based on human lines and must be addressed to the heart of the rural masses. People in villages were to be emotionally aroused to become the builders of new India - the social order, free of all exploitation.

To this end the Information Agencies have to strive and the transformed character of publicity has brought a corresponding change in the methodology and the working patterns, thus widening the scope of work and with its effectively utilising the modern media of mass communication - of Films, Stage, Radio, Press have been adopted.

Thrown to a population of say one and half to two lakhs of people in a taluk the practitioners of Public Relations tries to employ any vehicle that may prove effective to reach the vast masses in rural areas.

The role of Information Agencies in rural development is so vital that his method of publicity, his methodology and technique of public Relations assumes importance and broadly speaking the Public Relations scientist or the communicator at the taluk level has to make all things known to the village community. This art, he practices it by persuasion by description, discussion, demonstration and the like on the basis of facts. The Public Relations man, therefore, is a factual man and therefore facts become sacred. When a person tries to explain a certain thing has or has not been done or why a certain thing should not be done then he is doing publicity. While publicity is largely impersonal in character, Public Relations is a personal relationship. It is an art of making friends of promoting personal contacts, sympathetic understanding of an issue. Like publicity, Public Relations is not unknown to the individual. It would therefore, be a mistake to assume that publicity for developmental schemes and projects can be left entirely to publicity experts. All of us who have the job to perform will have to practice publicity and public relations.

APPROACH TO PUBLICITY:

Experience has shown that truth and sincerity alone can guarantee success in publicity. Tell the villager what he needs and what he can understand. This will necessitate a sympathetic study of his mind, his habits and way of life and what he likes and dislikes of what he considers valuable and worth striving for. Therefore the Information Agencies have to be fully loaded and try to convince the villager not by Information capsule, so that rural people may accept the diagnosis. Normally abstract ideas repel people, but personality attracts them.
Therefore Information Agencies explain ideas in terms of personalities or mythical, religions and spiritual history or contemporary, because of his deep love of family and religion.

**TYPES OF INFORMATION:**

Information is the lifeblood of publicity and while types of information sometimes overlap a great deal, those that suggest themselves are:

1. Information, that is information of general interest.
2. Instructional.
3. Correctional - i.e. information which is designed to dispel doubts and baseless criticism.
4. Information designed to mobilise effort.
5. Information for entertainment and recreation.

The Information Agencies have to create general interest in development programmes, schemes and policies envisaged.

Democracy is not casting of votes or counting of ballot boxes. It is a way of life in which the masses have to participate actively. It is also a process of education whereby the people by being in touch with administration, and by their own growing awareness, learn to appreciate the steps taken in different directions and their own obligation in this great task. In this exciting democratic experiment, the Government has a crucial role both in purveying information to the people as well as in educating them. Mindful of the significant role the Information Agencies of the Government have been tailoring the publicity requirement in rural areas according to changing circumstances, changing needs and changing times.

The role of Government Information Agencies in rural areas, for rural development, has assumed wide character and the Public Relations practitioner to-day has to perform the role of an educator, the role of a change agent, the role of a catalyst and his role becomes a ubiquity. Today more than ever before this practitioner reaches institution after institution and tries to trickle down information i.e., at once purposive and useful to the village community and tries to pursue the community in general and different sections of people in particular to lend their helping hand for execution of different schemes calculated to promote the well-being of the community. He tries to remove the inertia otherwise so prevalent and plays the role that is expected of him in the rural development.

The Taluk Information Centres have come to stay and they are in sense the community centres at taluk level. They function as centres of human activity for intellectual renaissance and for satisfying the intellectual urges and thirst. Almost as a dispensing mini-shop, these Taluk Information centres function and all the inquiries received in the centre are cleared during the course of a day with alacrity, authenticity and accuracy and authority. It almost functions as a clearance house and becomes the hub of community life at the taluk level. Public Relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with public interest and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

The Rural Communicator, the Public Relations functionary at the Taluk level hitherto functioning at the surface level has today become almost an inevitable institution of change - for change to effect change in rural areas and his building up a public opinion. He is playing the role of the conscience of the people and his truthfulness is the basis of Public Relations work. This practitioner of Public Relations in rural area has realised that Public Relations is ethical and propaganda is unethical.
Ethics has made all the difference between publicity and Public Relations. Public Relations is a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to maintain mutual understanding. It is engineering by consent. Public Relations is an attempt where information, persuasion and adjustment are utilised to engineer Public support for an activity, cause, movement or an institution.

The role of Information Agencies in rural development need not ever be emphasised but the Public Relations Practitioner is to-lay work in a spirit of a Mission, trekking on foot village after village to carry on publicity work. The net work of route operations by this bare-foot Public Relations practitioner has today enhanced his prestige and the practitioner is growing himself in confidence, in his professional expertise and the good will returns in terms of indirect returns to the State in terms of enlightenment and in terms of awakening are much in evidence that the institution of Information is in for greater tasks in rural areas. This bare-foot Public Relations practitioner has been adopting villages for integrated development and just as one lamp kindles another lamp, village after village today is getting surcharged with feelings of oneness, of common bondage. The Mini Information Centres organised in rural areas speaks volumes of its ability as a unifier. Information is a unifying force and the Information channel has come to stay as Information is a continued and continuing activity. The community listening sets operated and maintained by the Information Department has immense potentiality of listening together, thinking together, working together and building up a feeling of togetherness in the village community.

The banner of Radio Rural forum is kept aloft in Rural areas by the practitioners of Public Relations and today the Radio Rural forum is playing the role of a teacher, playing the role of an agent of change and is going to the aid of the Public Relations functionary.

Crypotically it may be concluded that when a pretty girl was asked to define public relations, it was stated thus "When I say I am handsome, then I am doing publicity. When somebody tells me that I am handsome, that is advertising. When some one comes and tells me that I have heard that I am handsome that is Public Relations".

This of course is a mere statement to differentiate the words baring in Public Relations lexicon namely publicity, Advertising and Public Relations.

Publicity cannot be done in a vacuum. It has to be based on concrete evidence. It has been said that Public Relations is 90% doing work and 10% talking about it.

Truly the Public Relations functionaries are today playing a key role in rural development and the flag of Government Information Agencies is fluttering in rural areas and Information has become the hard core for rural development. Life is a continuous as also information. So also development.

I need not, therefore, overemphasise the concomitant role of public relations for Public Administration and the concept of bare-foot Public Relations is making the village community arise, awakes to a new life. The practitioners of Public Relations are alive to the situation and demands of a changing society and I am sure that they continue to play a pivotal role in spite of hazards and pleasure but above all is the dedication and devotion of the individual to the profession that gives charm to the profession as well as to one who practices it.