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BEYOND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION
- A Consultation -

BACKGROUND

"Communication" broke upon the Third World scene in the early 60's as an important element of the development package fashionable at the time. "Development Communication" and "Communication for Development" provided the conceptual framework for investments in communication infrastructure throughout the Third World.

Twenty or so years ago there was much optimism and high hopes for the role that mass communication might play in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The mass media, particularly radio, were penetrating further into the mass audience of developing countries, and they seemed to have a considerable potential for helping such nations to reach development goals. Thus, radio and television stations, printing presses, training institutions and scholarships for training abroad, absorbed the largest proportion of investments in communication. It was expected that, as a matter of course, these investments would accelerate development and distribute its benefits equitably. But research findings and field reports found that development did not occur as expected; economic differentials were widened, rather than reduced. The relationship between communication and development was more complex than originally thought.

The 70's showed that our conception of development was rather limited and perhaps not entirely correct. The concept of development, the concept of communication and our understanding of the relationship between the two, underwent fundamental changes. Development came to be seen as including more than merely quantitative growth. Communication came to be seen as being more than merely mass media. The relationship between the two came to be seen as circular, rather than as linear.
The concepts and practice of development work are in transition. The traditional concept of an approach to development emphasizing the provision of communication infrastructure and the implementation of resource-generating projects has not proved its impact. This approach has largely contributed to an increase in GNP but has in most cases not enabled the development of the majority of the people. Such an approach ignores, if not overlooks, the basic defect in the socio-economic and political structures itself, which is the root cause of all problems of underdevelopment.

Today we see that past notions do not completely fit the reality and potential of the contemporary scene. For today, a new communication reality has broken upon the world scene: the communication revolution. This reality is characterised by two poles. On the one hand, satellites, cable, trans-border data flows, global broadcasting and information flows, and centralised international databases are examples of the "big" pole with a bias toward centralised control of information and data flow. On the other hand, small media, narrow-casting, the video cassette recorder, micro-computers and the link between these technologies and traditional and folk communication are examples of the "little" pole with a bias toward decentralisation, participation and local control.

Both "communication" and "development" are caught at the centre of this storm, and neither communication theorists nor development theorists are seldom able to see clearly. Practitioners, trainers and politicians are operating blind, encumbered by out-dated theoretical baggage and without a valid conceptual focus.

THE PROBLEM

By any criteria, this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. While no one seems to know the way ahead, policy makers and practitioners operate using outdated and inappropriate assumptions. Investments continue to be made in mass media, and practitioners
to be trained in communication as if the world of "Development Communication" was, by and large, still a legitimate theoretical framework. Mass media are still treated as if they are the principal agent of change, and the quantitative growth as if it is the only acceptable measure of development. This is the problem.

THE NEED

The urgent need is therefore to reconceptualise the meanings of development and communication and their relationship with each other. Communication thinking, communication investment policies and training programmes need to be brought more into alignment with each other and with the changes which have occurred in our understanding of development.

In addition, there is the need for development and communication theory to be systematically linked with economic theory and patterns of cultural change. Theorists and practitioners alike have to identify these relationships, which are the "hidden agenda" in Development Communication. These relationships are always present, though rarely acknowledged.

In order to respond to the problems and its concomittant needs, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) with support from the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), proposes to conduct a consultation which will bring together representatives of the following groups:

1. Communication theorists
2. Development theorists
3. Heads of media institutions
4. Heads of media training centres
5. Journalists and media practitioners
6. Competent political leaders
7. Selected DevCom practitioners
OBJECTIVES

In general, the consultation seeks to gather a cross-section of sectoral groups involved in policy-making, planning and implementation of communication and development work, in order for them to re-examine and reconceptualize "Development Communication", to see beyond the models and concepts of the 60's and 70's, and to develop, if necessary, a new framework for relating communication and development in the 80's.

Specifically, the consultation aims to generate discussion, debate, and recommendations for action on the following issues:

RESEARCH RESULTS:

1. The body of mass media research which has been carried out during the past two decades. What does this research have to say about the potentials and limitations of mass media as a tool for development? What are the implications for research in the 80's and beyond?

2. The role of alternative communication systems in development, e.g., traditional communication, group communication, small media, etc. What are the implications for communication support planning and implementation?

TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEMS ANALYSIS:

3. The implications of the revolution in new communications technology for the "Development Communication" concept.

4. The extent to which our changing understanding of economic development, economic and cultural structures, technology and education have implications for communication structures and methods.
VALUES AND CULTURE:

5. The nature and extent of the impact of the NWICO debate of the content and structure of development communication.

6. The adequacy of the "Development Communication" concept for dealing with the changing realities in Asia.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

7. As our understanding of development and communication has shifted, to what extent do the communication education and training institutions and curricula produced in the 60's and 70's reflect (1) the DevCom concept, and (2) an emerging concept, as yet not fully defined.

A NEW PARADIGM:

8. Is a new conceptual framework required for relating communication and development? How can communication more realistically be linked to development, economics, and social change theories?

PROGRAMME/METHODOLOGY

The consultation is planned to be a five-day seminar-workshop. The first three days will be devoted to the presentation and discussion of six discussion papers, supplemented by discussion of appropriate case studies to be provided to, and read by the participants prior to the consultation. The next two days will be devoted to working group discussions on four specific topics. The object of these group sessions is to produce an agenda for action in the area of devcom research; technology, development, and cultural values; curriculum development in devcom teaching and training;
development of a new paradigm reconciling communication, development, economic, and social change theories.

The papers, discussions, and programme of action presented during the consultation will be collected, edited, and published into a volume on the recent state of the art on "Development Communication" by AMIC.

VENUE

The consultation will be held in Singapore. Recent decreases in hotel and conference rates in the Republic make it a now relatively inexpensive venue for a consultation of this nature.