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Summary Report

By

Victor T Valbuena
SUMMARY REPORT

"HEALTH AND THE MEDIA:
FORGING A PARTNERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST"

ROUNDTABLE HELD IN THE KINGDOM OF TONGA

SEPTEMBER 22-26, 1986

Prepared by:

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SUMMARY REPORT

"HEALTH AND THE MEDIA: FORGING A PARTNERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST"

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty-four public health planners and field workers, information policy-makers and mass media professionals from fourteen Pacific island-nations and territories met in the Kingdom of Tonga, South Pacific, on September 22-26, 1986, for the third in a series of roundtables on "Health and the Media: Forging a Partnership in the Public Interest". Venue of the meeting was the International Dateline Hotel in Nuku'alofa, capital of Tonga.

The objective of the roundtable was to bring together health and media professionals for them to explore more specific involvement of the mass media in public health information, education and communication programmes and projects. The conference in Tonga examined how the potential of the mass media could be harnessed to promote the WHO goal of "Health for All by the Year 2000" and developed a number of project proposals to enhance Pacific Islanders' health-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. WHO, UNESCO, IPDC, AMIC, The Queen's Medical Center, Honolulu, Hawaii and the Tongan CHADU Society jointly sponsored the roundtable in Tonga.

In the past two years, similar roundtables were organised by AMIC in Singapore and Sri Lanka for the countries of the ASEAN and South Asia. These meetings resulted in health and media-related projects currently being implemented in four of the five participating Asean countries. Projects have also been initiated in Bangladesh and India in the South Asian Region.
OPENING CEREMONIES / SEPTEMBER 22

Her Royal Highness, Princess Nanasiapau'u of the Kingdom of Tonga officially opened the Pacific Region roundtable. In her address, the Princess expressed the hope that the media would indeed be used for better health promotion in the Pacific.

Mr Vijay Menon, AMIC Secretary-General, welcomed the participants to the meeting. In his address, Mr Menon expressed gratification at the representation of fourteen Pacific countries and territories and stressed that the roundtable's purpose was "not merely to hold a dialogue, not merely to share your experience, but to build on it, to plan new public health and mass media projects for implementation in each of the participating countries". He added that during the past decade, there has grown a significant global core of experience involving systematic mass media promotion of public health and nutrition. The AMIC official said that "we need to draw upon that experience and at the same time, utilise the expertise available in the region".

Dr F L Higginson, Chief of Mission, UNESCO Office for Pacific States, speaking on behalf of one of the co-sponsors, cautioned the participants "not to attempt to influence health and nutrition in the Pacific without a solid understanding of how decisions are traditionally made, how goods and services are acquired and exchanged, and how matters of the spirit are attended to". He further said that in instituting educational reform for health through the media, the participants should consider three critical variables that intervene where small island states are considered - scale, i.e., populations are small and specialisations are few; isolation, i.e., they are cut off from the outside world, the global information base, and from each other in the Pacific; and dependence, i.e., Pacific island states are heavily dependent on external assistance. He stressed that it is important not to lose sight of these realities in designing social action programmes.
Mr Fred Pritchard, President and Mr Malcolm MacNaughton, Chairman of the Board, The Queen's Medical Center, likewise gave their remarks at the opening ceremonies. Mr Pritchard expressed his appreciation for the opportunity accorded to their institution to co-sponsor and participate in this roundtable, as well as for the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the health and media professionals in the region. Mr MacNaughton expressed his optimism for a very fruitful roundtable.

Bishop Fine Halapua of Tonga delivered the invocation during the opening rites. The participants and observers were formally introduced during the opening.

The programme and list of participants are in Appendix A and B, respectively.

PAPER PRESENTATIONS / SEPTEMBER 22-24

The opening ceremonies on September 22 were followed by a presentation by Dr Richard Taylor of the South Pacific Commission, New Caledonia. He presented a paper on contemporary patterns of morbidity and mortality and the attendant health issues in the Pacific states. Dr Taylor cited that in the Pacific, the countries with the highest mortality rates have the highest incidence of infectious diseases, and that the countries with the highest life expectancy have the highest incidence of cardio-vascular diseases. He noted the positive correlation between health and economic development in the Pacific. The paper touched off a lot of questions and issues raised by the participants. These included queries and comments on hypertension, leprosy, tuberculosis, diabetes, nutritional deficiencies, radition sickness, alcoholism and suicide in the Pacific.

Dr Taylor's paper and the ensuing discussions provided an overview of the health-related problems later discussed in the country reports by the participating health professionals. These country reports were presented by fourteen health professionals including medical officers, health planners, nutritionists, hospital administrators, and health educators.
On September 23, Dr Karlheinz Renfordt, Regional Representative for the South Pacific, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, presented a paper on the media in the South Pacific and their potential for health and development communications, followed by a related paper on the use of communication media in health education delivered by Dr Pamela Thomas, Liaison Officer of the Australian Development Studies Network, Australian National University. Dr Renfordt said that "if mass media are to serve the cause of development, established relationship between the media and the government is as essential as cooperation with the planner. Only if a joint basis for common efforts is reached, can press and radio act as a channel for the exchange of information and can draw attention to the need for change as well, or to help to suggest ways in which these changes can be facilitated".

In her paper, Dr Thomas presented a typology of the various constraints and limitations on the use and application of communications in health promotion efforts. Preceding these paper presentations was an audio-visual presentation on "The Ministry Needs the Media" - a documentary on the various strategies and approaches taken by Third World countries in using the media for health education and health promotion purposes. These companion pieces provided an overview for later discussions of the various efforts in health education being undertaken by mass media professionals and practitioners in the region. Country reports were given by ten media representatives including managers/administrators of broadcasting and newspaper institutions, programme directors, media training coordinators/producers, and information officers.

Following the country reports, Mr John Laird, Acting Regional Information Officer, WHO Western Pacific Region, gave a presentation on the health concerns, programmes and projects of the World Health Organization. He likewise gave a paper on advocacy for health promotion.

On the morning of September 24, Mr Sam Biddle, President of the United Benefit Corporation, USA, presented a paper on alternatives to tertiary health care in the Pacific. He discussed the development of medical financing programmes to bring cost effective health care benefits to Pacific island communities. It was suitably noted during the country presentations by the health and media representatives that due to the limited health care resources and facilities in the island communities, many referrals/airlifts have had to be made to the United States, principally Hawaii.
Mr Biddle's paper sparked off a spirited discussion of several issues affecting health care in the Pacific. These issues included indigenous development of community health programmes; indiscriminate referrals of even not-so-serious cases to the more advanced medical centres in Hawaii or Mainland USA; and the politics of tertiary health care service in the Pacific.

WORKSHOPS ON PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: / SEPTEMBER 24

Following the presentation by Mr Sam Biddle, Mr Vijay Menon, AMIC Secretary-General briefed the participants on the guidelines to be considered in developing health and media project proposals. Mr Menon emphasized the following:

1. The project should be small scale, in the nature of a pilot scheme, and limited in terms of area coverage, duration and objectives.

2. Purchase of equipment should not be an essential element of the project.

3. The project should include a plan for institutionalization, or absorption of project activities into the regular activities of the health or media institution that implements it.

After discussing the guidelines and reviewing the suggested format, the participants then separated into country teams to work on their project proposals. During these small workshops, the participants also consulted with the speakers and other medical, social science and communication professionals who attended the roundtable as resource persons.
The project proposals developed by the participants were later presented before the entire conference for comments and suggestions. The proposals ranged from action programmes to address the problems of diarrhoea, diabetes, cardio-vascular disease and malnutrition, to evaluative research projects designed not only to assess the impact of existing health education programmes carried by the mass media but also to develop local capability in producing and evaluating health-oriented health education materials. Some of the proposals included huge capital investment (e.g., radio production studio, video production equipment), contrary to the guidelines, but still contained sections that could possibly be supported with more modest funding. After review and endorsement by their respective governments and/or affiliate institutions, it is planned to arrange funding support for the implementation of the projects.

The project proposals are in Appendix C.

At the close of the roundtable, Mr Menon and Mr Pritchard jointly summed up the proceedings and expressed the appreciation of AMIC and The Queen's Medical Center for the support of UNESCO and WHO and the efforts of the Tongan CHADU Society in hosting the conference in the Kingdom of Tonga. Mrs Keiti Fusimalohi, Executive Director of the Tongan CHADU Society, expressed her hope that the participants had enjoyed their stay in Tonga and that the roundtable had succeeded in meeting its objectives.