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The Need To Involve Mass Media
In The Promotion Of Health And Nutrition:
The Indonesian Experience

By

T Atmadi
THE NEED TO INVOLVE MASS MEDIA
IN THE PROMOTION OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The Indonesian Experience
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I. INTRODUCTION

I greatly appreciate initiative taken by AMIC/WHO/UNESCO-IPDC for convening this Round Table, in which media and public health expertise are brought together, to discuss about the basic problem and the role that media can play in promoting public health and nutrition, particularly in Asean countries.
And I also wish to thank AMIC for inviting me to join at this important gathering, to share my experiences in conducting Village Papers' Project or KMD Project, abbreviation of the Indonesian term for "Koran Masuk Desa", literally translated, meaning "Newspapers Entering the Villages".

While the KMD Village Papers' Project only officially started in 1979, the Rural Broadcasting Project run by Radio Republic of Indonesia (RRI), which I also mention briefly in this paper, started ten years earlier, namely in 1969.

From the beginning, both projects have carried items of significance in the fields of health care, nutrition, breastfeeding, birth control, sanitation, family welfare, the use of herbs as traditional medicines and the like. Although, proportionately, the items carried in those media are in greater percentage on agricultural and other matters.

Thus, during the last two decades, conscious efforts have been made in Indonesia to involve modern media, beginning with the utilization of radio media, followed by the press and television, in the establishment of communication with village community.

II. INDONESIA'S INFORMATION STRATEGY AND POLICY.

Information in Indonesia is to support and to serve national development. Thus, the focus of all efforts in Indonesia is centered on national development, pertaining to the establishment of what is called a "just and prosperous society". Consequently, also information strategy follows development strategy.
Implementation of Indonesia's national development is based on three basic strategic considerations, in which development is to bring about equity, growth and stability. Hence, information strategy, while also striving for an equity by ever enlarging the coverage of information audience, at the same time, it aims at stimulating participation of the people in the development, to enhance economic growth and national stability.

The principle of "equity" (pemerataan) in Indonesia, both in terms of the distribution of development gains as well as the distribution of information, is similar to the "for-all" approach of WHO, as in its adopted motto of "Health for All by the Year 2000". But in Indonesia's case, of course, it is a "for-all" approach at national level.

For Indonesia, talking about "development for all" or talking about "information for all" means involving the village people in all the process of development and information. In view of the fact that more than 80% of Indonesia's population live in the villages, it is only natural that the orientation of development is also to the village, while the urban-oriented information media are gradually to be shifted, so as to become also rural-oriented, to guarantee an increased flow of information to the villages.

This process is going on, and, as I have mentioned earlier, during the last two decades conscious efforts have been made to encourage and to facilitate modern media, such as the press, radio and television, to
serve the needs of village community.

On the subject of the promotion of public health, in particular, the Department of Information, which is functionally responsible for making decisions on national policies related to communication and information has adopted policy guidelines for 1983-1988. These guidelines also include a provision, which stresses on the need "to familiarize (the people in the villages) with health care system, in order to increase their standard of welfare".

So, the provision to utilize the available information media for the promotion of health is already incorporated in the general information policy, particularly with reference to the dissemination of information to rural areas.

Of course, the task to provide information to the public is not the monopoly of the Department of Information. In fact, all other Departments have the right and duty to disseminate information on their respective sectors to the public, so also other private and public organizations and institutions. It is functionally the task of the Department of Information, however, to develop and coordinate public information activities. In this respect, the Indonesian general information policy is to create an integrative information system, or what is popularly called as "national information under one banner". The integration covers both aspects, namely the substance of information and the method of its implementation. Integration of the substance of information is to be achieved
through the synchronization of sectoral and cross-sectoral information, while integration of the method of implementation involves cooperation among different units within the Department of Information itself, as well as cooperation between other public and private institutions.

Integrative information system is also applied to the implementation of Rural Broadcasting and the KMD Village Papers' Project.

III. RURAL BROADCASTING.

Started in 1969, Rural Broadcasting has received wide acceptance, and its usefulness recognized by the rural audience. Within relatively short time, this service has developed into a viable village development broadcasting, which involved not only the Department of Information and the Department of Agriculture as was originally started, but has also involved other Departments, such as Health, Cooperative, Education and Culture, Social Affairs, Industry and so on.

While preparing this paper, I am conscious of the warning expressed by Mr. Ronald C. Israel in his Background Paper for our Round Table Discussion, when he said of the "very real limitations on what media can do". He explained about the fact that (1) mass media messages can't be individualized to accommodate personal problems; (2) limited possibilities for interaction and feedback, and (3) the need to make the essential resources available to support mass media messages.

This was exactly the problems that Indonesia
had to face, when starting with the Rural Broadcasting more than two decades ago.

But now, we feel that we have, up to a certain extent, partially solve the problems.

We realize that each step we take in the process of developing village communication through modern media is not easy, and needs concentrated efforts and appropriate resources.

They include the process of: (1) collecting information; (2) selecting information; (3) producing information; (4) disseminating information; (5) receiving information; (6) digesting information, and (7) implementing information and media messages. Every single step has its own problems and requirements in terms of money, professional skill and communication means and infrastructures. And here is where cooperation is very much needed.

It is at the receiving end that "limitations on what the media can do" can be clearly observed, particularly among the village audience.

Even if the process of receiving all the media messages were no longer a problem for the village audience there are still the problems of comprehension, selection of the appropriate messages, the difficulties of getting feedback and creating interaction. Understandably, village audience with more traditional background, would find it difficult to absorb innovative ideas in village development.
It was exactly for the purpose of overcoming those problems that Listeners' Groups were formed, with the objectives (1) to accelerate the adoption of various media messages through dialogues and discussions; (2) to make information they received more effective, for assisting them in the implementation of village development activities; (3) to expedite the flow of feedback.

True to the self-generating character of information, discussion reports and conclusions serve as a valuable feedback, and, at the same time, may be utilized as programme material for further Rural Broadcasting.

Thus, Listeners' Group discussions usher village media audience to a fuller comprehension of the messages, and motivate them to action.

Along similar lines, television media follow suit by forming Viewers' Groups.

IV. KMD VILLAGE PAPERS' PROJECT.

It has been said that people in developing countries are more listening and viewing public rather than reading public. That is true, of course, and this makes the introduction of newspapers to people in the villages and small district towns even more difficult.

Moreover, we have to keep in mind the various kinds of drawback that might hamper an undertaking
like the KMD Village Papers' Project. They are, for instance, illiteracy which has not been fully eradicated; the limited purchasing power of most villagers, particularly for the purpose of subscribing to newspapers (even for people who are well-to-do enough to pay for a subscription, they may still not feel the need to do it); the lack of transportation and the proper infrastructural facilities to reach remote villages, as well as the simple lack of reading-mindedness of most of the people in the villages.

In spite of all those difficulties, the KMD Project was launched 5 years ago, preceded by a 5-year experimental pilot project, in the form of the issuance of weekly publications by selected Provincial Information Offices, for free distribution to district towns and villages. As it is now, the KMD Project is undertaken by private press publishers in the Provinces, with little subsidies for printing cost from the Department of Information, and distributed at low subscription rate.

I visited Bali and Banjarmasin a few days ago, to see some of the KMD Projects in operation. Judging from the increasing enthusiasm of the press publishers as well as the increasing number of readers and subscribers, I would consider this project has achieved success beyond expectation. Some of them are run by senior publishers, but most of the editors are youthful journalists with full drive and initiative.

The "Banjarmasin Post" and the "Bali Post", for instance, although by contract with the Department
of Information they are only committed and subsidized to print 4,000 copies of village papers every week, at their own expense, they print well over 20,000 copies. This is the general picture of the successful village paper publishers. This shows that they have the necessary technical facilities to produce the papers, not only, but that they are successful in creating the demand for these village editions, although each one of them has to pay for it.

Here again, the ability of the publishers to collect, select, produce and disseminate information, in this case through print media, would only have little impact on the readers, if they only partially understand the development messages carried by the papers, and if the messages fail to motivate the readers to take the necessary action.

It was precisely for the purpose of activating people at the receiving end that Readers' Groups were founded among the village paper's readers, thus fulfilling the need to create interaction and to generate the necessary feedback with the media.

V. CONCLUSION.

Following the earlier success made by the groups of radio listeners and television viewers, the Readers' Groups of village papers also scored appreciable progress.
The tendency in many places is that these three groups merge together into one organization, in which members discuss relevant topics, originating either from radio, television or the press.

In Bali, for instance, village reporters join the integrated group organization, and their participation in the group facilitates prompt issuance of various discussion reports, which are usually plied back in the three media.

On matters related to health and nutrition, in accordance with Indonesia's integrative information policy, the Department of Health has effectively made full use of the existing media facilities to increase the flow of information to the villages, under the coordination of the Department of Information. Likewise, do other governmental and private institutions cooperate with the media, in their efforts to reach the village audience, in particular, with their respective messages on various development sectors.

Back in 1969, through the Department of Agriculture, FAO had given assistance to the improvement of village-oriented media coverage, by offering training facilities for reporters on rural areas.

Last year, UNICEF, through the Department of Education and Culture, sponsored training project for village paper reporters of the KMD Project. At the same time, a contract has been signed between the Head
of the Community Education Branch of the Department of Education and Culture in Bali, and the Publisher of KMD rural press, the "Bali Post", for a subscription to the rural paper for one year, between August 1983 to August 1984. The rural edition of the "Bali Post" is to be sent four copies each every week, to 175 UNICEF pilot project villages in Bali.

These are some of the possibilities that we can explore, for the purpose of increasing the quality and quantity of development information flow right down to the villages.

Singapore, 20-22 June, 1984
SELECTED STATISTICAL DATA ON THE MEDIA IN INDONESIA
( Available Data in 1984 )

I. REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

2. Land Area : 1,919,443 sq.Km.
3. Total Land & Sea Area : 5,193,250 sq.Km.

II. RADIO

1. Total Number of Radio Sets : 25,000,000.
2. Radio Network Covering 75% of Indonesia's Sea and Land Area, Reaching 80% of the Total Population.

III. TELEVISION

1. Total Number of Television Sets : 5,343,308 (Public Television Distributed by the Government : 37,072 sets)
2. Television Network Covering 26.05% of Indonesia's Land Area, Reaching 61.82% of Total Population.

IV. PRESS

1. Circulation of Print Media (1980) :
   (a) Dailies : 2,280,633 copies.
   (b) Weekly Papers : 746,675 copies.
   (c) Weekly Magazines : 774,000 copies.
   (d) Bi-weekly Magazines : 903,900 copies.
   (e) Monthly Magazines : 412,250 copies.
   (f) Bulletin : 23,405 copies.

3. Number of Provinces Undertaking KMD Project :
   26 out of 27 Provinces.