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Keynote Address

By

Shamsul Huda Chaudhury
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by

MR. SHAMSUL HUDA CHAUDHURY

HON'BLE MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

at

EWCI–AMIC INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON COMMUNICATION
POLICY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT
2–8 March, 1981

BANGKOK
Mr. Chairman,

Hon’ble Minister for Information
Government of Thailand.

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I express my heart-felt thanks to the organisers of this seminar for giving me the opportunity to come all the way from Bangladesh to associate myself with the International Seminar on Communication Policy for Rural Development. I feel honoured to have been asked to deliver the keynote address on the theme of the Seminar. As a life-long humble practitioner in the field of mass communication, I feel extremely happy to meet my brothers in the profession from the countries of the Region. Experts and academicians are there to thrash out the thorny problems of communication in rural areas where 80 to 90 per cent of the developing countries’ population live. Illiteracy and hunger are their baneful companions.

Irony of the fact is that this rural populace is responsible for the production of the major share of the country’s wealth and in fact, destiny of the nation rests on them. Diverse in many ways, we in Asia share some common experiences. This is as much true of Bangladesh as it is true of any other country in this part of the globe.

In Bangladesh we have adopted rural development strategy not as a political expediency but as a political movement for the development of the entire nation. In fact, to every Bangladeshi it has
become an article of faith. 'Work or perish'—is the only slogan that reverberates throughout the country. Therefore, upon improving the lot of these people depends the development of the country and to an Asian, development means development of these rural people.

Now, the chief task for rural development is to bring about an improvement in the quality of life: more specifically, to improve the availability of a variety of socio-economic amenities and enhance the scope for human development.

Communication may not be the panacea for all the ills. But it can play a definite role in bringing about the desired change through motivation, mobilisation of public support and education.

Like all other less developed countries Bangladesh is following the strategy for planned development. We have launched the Second Five Year Plan (1980—85) for massive national development. The plan has incorporated a model of comprehensive approach for rural development which seeks to expand welfare and security of the people including family planning, health, education, human resource development and sanitation, the ultimate aim of which will be the improvement of the quality of life of the masses.

The recent institution of Gram Sarkar (Village Government), composed of people's representatives, as the grass-root level political and administrative unit for mobilisation of local resources and ensuring greater participation of the people is a landmark in the development of rural Bangladesh. 'Gram Sarkar' is responsible for land use, production plan, employment, planning, education, family planning and environmental health as its primary function.

In the productive side people are being organised in groups of Farmers' Cooperatives under the Integrated Rural Development
Programme and cooperatives belonging to IRDP are functioning in 250 thanas (lowest administrative unit), out of 465 thanas in Bangladesh.

Under Voluntary Mass Participation Programme, 676 miles of canals were dug during the year 1980 alone. These canals are being used for both irrigation and drainage and development of fisheries. This is a unique experience of mass participation in development work.

The leadership comes from Hon'ble President Ziaur Rahman himself. Like a skilful communicator, he enthused and motivated the entire populace, especially in the areas where irrigation and drainage is essential, into participating in canal digging and road building. People were so much enthused that even the high-brow intellectuals in cities and towns are being impelled to join the operation as if they were performing a sacred duty towards the nation.

An evaluation study of UNESCO Experimental World Literary Programme carried out in different countries seems to establish the fact that a significant proportion of new literates acquires a modern outlook, i.e., exposure to mass media, management of personal finances, seeking out technical advice, use of Three R's and participation in formal organisation. Bangladesh has launched Mass Literacy Campaign to remove illiteracy and is going to introduce compulsory free primary education from 1985.

Simultaneously with all other development programmes, Youth Movement has been organised to mobilize youth population in rural areas. In the process they will be trained in agriculture, livestock, poultry farming and fisheries including marine fishing.

Communication has a tremendous role to play in the context of development work that is going on in the villages throughout the
length and breadth of the country. As I have mentioned earlier, mass contact at political level headed by the President himself has gone a long way in disseminating messages of development in rural areas. Nevertheless, entire mass communication media of the country have been geared up to carry the messages of this gigantic task of development.

In Bangladesh, the most extensive as well as effective of all the mass media is radio. At present eleven transmitters with a total capacity of 1268 kilowatts are operating in the medium wave and the rest four transmitters of the total capacity of 225 kilowatts are operating in the short wave. Area-wise, it covers the whole territory of Bangladesh. However, the country has at present about three million radio sets. Efforts are being made to supply sets at cheaper rates by increasing the assembling capacity and also through import of one-band cheap sets from abroad. Radio Bangladesh has 17-5 hours a day non-stop broadcast from 6-30 morning to 12 midnight. Radio can reach a large audience cheaper and more quickly than any other means of communication.

Bangladesh Television has at present 6 relay stations—all the programmes originating from the main station in Dacca. These stations cover 90 per cent of the country's area. Bangladesh Television has also started second channel. Television sets being costly, the number of sets available with the people is still limited. There are about 100,000 TV sets in the country including about 4,000 community sets. Using a multiplier of 10 and 200 persons per private and community sets respectively, the total number of viewers will be around two millions. The Government has further been distributing free and subsidised TV sets for community viewing to local organisations and it is planned to make one TV set available to each
of the 68,000 villages of Bangladesh. Where electricity is not available, we are giving battery-operated sets. Programme-wise, TV has a total of 13·5 hours' telecast a day, a considerable portion of programmes being oriented towards social and economic development. The Government is also planning to launch an Educational TV programme to reach the formal educational institutions in a scientific manner.

As for print medium, it moves slowly but steadily. Bangladesh has 44 dailies and 150 weeklies having a combined circulation of a little over a million copies. Because of low rate of literacy in our country it cannot be taken to be an effective medium, but it has a lasting value. The other media that can play an effective role in development are the traditional media and the inter-personal communication. In the field of inter-personal communication extension worker plays a key role. He also assists in productive or programmed activity through training, advice and local trial and demonstration. He is also useful as an intermediary between the productive worker and the public sector agency for arranging supporting services, i.e., credit, input and marketing, etc. Many of the Extension Workers and Communicators have been found to be not very clear about their roles. Lack of proper communication skill to handle the entire operation affects communication adversely. Some of the communicators do not listen to the farmer patiently nor do they encourage them to put forth questions and problems to be solved. How to initiate a discussion, report messages and influence public opinion—are all important in which most of the extension workers are often found deficient. A communicator devoid of these tacts is likely to have little impact on the mind of the rural people. Bangladesh has about forty thousand Extension Workers engaged in various
development work. Training of extension workers in the technique of communication is vitally important and I am happy to note that AMIC has taken up a project for their skill development in Thailand and Bangladesh. I wish them success.

Realizing the importance of the role of inter-personal communication, efforts have been made to utilize the country's 5,000 mosques and their Imams for mass education and rural development. Favourable responses are forthcoming from all quarters in this regard.

Proper emphasis is also being laid on the use of folk media for development purposes. The folk music and drama such as Jari, Sari, Baul, Bhatiali, Murshidi, Kavigan and Jatragan, etc., can be effective communication media for development-oriented programmes and we are making their appropriate use.

I have narrated the overall communication situation of Bangladesh. Experience have shown that no single medium is suitable for communication with rural people. It has to be a combination of some or all the media available in any country. There is no set formula in this matter. Like all other great human endeavour, it requires sagacity and foresight on the part of the leaders of communication backed by the past experiences of given social conditions to determine how much of what should be accepted and adopted. Policy should be such as to produce the maximum effect. We have many problems ahead. Self-sufficiency is one of our great goals and I am confident that our efforts to tackle the communication problems in enhancing rural development can be given a definite direction.

I beg to be excused for taking so much of your valuable time.

Thank you very much for giving me a patient hearing. Before concluding, I thank the organisers again.