

# PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN INDONESIA

By

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### **What is Happening ?**

Television industry is now undergoing very profound changes. Direct satellite broadcasting, pay television, commercial television and interactive communication via information superhighway have broadened the choices of audience both in terms of programming content and delivery channels.

There is nothing can stop the ever changing of broadcasting technology advancement. We should ride along with technology and not oppose the change. The dilemma is that no one can accurately predict which service and programming approach that will meet the need and interest of society as we move into the next century.

The main question for public broadcasting is to determine the type of programming which will best meet the future need of the nation within an expanding variety of direct satellite broadcasting and commercial programming.

Hundreds of programming channels coming from international satellite are now available to the public. The audience now have many more channels to view, to compare and to select. There is a very serious threat that Public Television is loosing its positioning just because there is too many channel choices for the viewers.

Hence Public Television is becoming less feasible unless they have comparable strong programmes to match. This is something that National Public Television has to be prepared and position themselves properly. National public television should review its programming policy in order to captive its viewers.

## **Broadcasting in Indonesia**

Broadcasting is the most outstanding channel of mass communication in Indonesia. It plays important role in the effort of unifying more than 200 million people from different ethnics who live in more than 17,000 islands and speak in about 583 languages and dialects.

The diversity of culture, tradition, ethnics, religions and languages in the archipelago claims the Indonesian broadcasters to be more cautious in presenting adequate programming that meets the requirements of government policy, the community aspiration and business interest. The role of broadcasting in Indonesia increases when the country started to use Palapa domestic satellite in 1976 which has made it possible for radio and television to reach bigger audience and wider geographical area. Acknowledging the important role of broadcasting, the government policy affirms that the quality of broadcasting should be continuously improved to create a conducive climate for the enhancement of the people's participation in national development.

Regulation of broadcasting in Indonesia is based on the consideration that spectrum is a public resource and broadcast frequency is limited. Bearing this in mind, broadcasting should be efficiently regulated and is directed to the interest of the public. Its programming, be it educational, cultural, or informational, must be accessible to all members of the public, providing some sort of service to them and help them in their daily lives.

The Department of Information and the National Telecommunications of Indonesia are the main regulatory bodies in the issuance of permits to operate radio and television stations in Indonesia.

After 18 years of lengthy process and deliberations, the Broadcast Law in Indonesia was officially signed by President Soeharto on September 29, 1997 through Act no. 24. Details of regulations and operational guidelines of the broadcasting law are now being worked out by working groups coming from various institutions relevant to broadcasting.

## **Radio**

After the World War II several radio stations had been established under the colonial government. The history of Indonesia broadcasting began in 1940, when the first radio station was founded in the middle of the nation struggle for freedom against colonialism. On September 11, 1945 Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) was officially inaugurated. RRI was then recognized as government body under the Department of Information. RRI is now becoming

the largest radio network in the country servicing 24 hours of programming daily. Its foreign services last for 12 hours daily airing programs in English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Malay and Japanese. Since the beginning of the administration of the new government (1966), many private radio stations have been growing fastly and becoming an integral part of the broadcasting system in Indonesia. Private radio stations set up their own programming but they have obligation to relay news from RRI. At present the number of radio station is as follows:

- 52 RRI broadcasting stations (1 national broadcasting center, 5 regional stations and 46 local stations).
- 780 commercial stations
- 133 stations managed by local administrations
- 4 non commercial stations
- 4 stations under the auspices of different Departments.

### Television

The first television built in the country was the state-owned Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) which was founded in August 24, 1962. The opening ceremony of Asian Games 1962 held in Jakarta was the first live broadcast of TVRI. Since then television has become a magic box in every household. Today TVRI stations have expanded all over the country consisting of 1 national broadcasting center, 13 regional stations, 7 mobile production centers and more than 350 transmitters spread out throughout the country. The domestic satellite Palapa which was launched in 1976 has made TVRI broadcast accessible to remote places in Indonesia.

With its various public service programming RRI and TVRI had played an important role in supporting and accelerating the process of national development.

Indonesia's domestic satellite Palapa was found to help the viewer acquire a wide range of useful knowledge and information, about national events, about family planning practices and about development programs.

The impact was so profound that television became the most important source of news information for rural villagers. In depth observations conducted in 1989 and 1993 in several Indonesia villages found out that the people in one village (Lubuk Sukon) to be "unanimous in their opinion that the radio, television and newspaper are very useful in broadening their minds and enabling them to

know about people and events beyond boundaries of their village community" (Soemardjan and Breazeale, 1993; p.33). This finding suggest that if national televisions offer news and information which is relevant and readily comprehensible to viewers, then it will definitely contribute to acquisition of knowledge.

RRI and TVRI had been the only broadcasting channels for so many years. In 1989 the government gave opportunities to private sectors to operate commercial televisions in Indonesia. This deregulation was applied based on three considerations: (1) The government realized that the presence of private television networks was needed to provide more entertainment and more independent information, especially that are needed by urban audiences, (2) efforts to control home videos and illegal television broadcasting seemed difficult to be conducted effectively, (3) People who lived in the border areas preferred to watch foreign television programs which were easier to access than the national television programs, and (4) after the domestic satellite Palapa being rented to foreign television networks, Indonesia people could access to many television channels by using parabolic antennas (Ishadi, 1992: p.30-32).

Those private commercial television stations are: Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI), founded in 1989, Surya Cipta Televisi (SCTV), founded in 1989, Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI), founded in 1991, Andalas Televisi (ANTV), founded in 1993 and INDOSIAR, founded in 1995.

The presence of the private television stations is seen very important to give more choices to the audience, to compensate the overflowing transnational broadcasting and to cope with the progress of economy in Indonesia.

In anticipating the impact of commercial network, whose programs are mainly directed to urban and metropolitan audiences, since 1991 TVRI has developed additional channel called TVRI Channel 2. This channel initially was operated only in Jakarta and Surabaya. In the near future TVRI Channel 2 will be expanded to the regional stations of Yogyakarta, Bandung, Denpasar and Medan.

### **Efforts to Redesign Public Broadcasting**

It was mentioned earlier that due to the fast development of broadcasting technology, the audience now have a lot or programme choices to compare and to select. There is a threat that public broadcasting will loose its audience who prefer to watch commercial and transnational programming which many of them are more entertaining and better produced, Public broadcasting have

to prepare and position themselves properly in facing this changes. Public broadcasting strategy should be rethought and reexamined in order to be able to continue their role as public service without being left by their audience.

To address the present broadcasting environment, the Indonesian public broadcasting has taken and conducted necessary steps and regulations.

Education and training in the field of broadcasting has been intensified to produce more professional broadcasters by improving their insight, capability and skill in handling public service broadcasting.

Compared to international programme materials, local programming has more emotional attachment to local audience. Bearing in mind that people like to watch their own face on the screen, priorities have been given to local and relevant programming which meet the need of national audience.

In this era of rapidly multiplying viewers choice it will be difficult for public broadcasting to sustain its traditional "voice of the nation" role. Public broadcasting is traditionally organised and regulated in such a manner that the programming is too much government oriented. This approach is not popular since here the broadcasters tend to neglect the audience's wishes and expectation. This kind of "government oriented" approach has been adjusted to be more accommodative to the audience.

Research and surveys have been conducted to find out what viewers want from national public broadcasting. On the other hand, viewers are also given the opportunities to understand the role and function of national public broadcasting. This is done to ensure that viewers understand how programming policy is decided and how far they can be involved.

A major drawback of public broadcasting like RRI and TVRI which is funded by government is the lack of information to evaluate their public services. To address this problem we have been doing periodical audience survey to understand what viewers think of each programme and what are their suggestions.

Law on Indonesian broadcasting went into effect on September 29, 1997 after 18 years of lengthy process and deliberations. Lower level regulations and operational guidelines are now being completed. In principle, the broadcasters in Indonesia accept this broadcast law with great relief and enthusiasm. They consider that the regulations are flexible enough to accommodate and anticipate the changing of broadcasting environment.

Referring to the Act No. 24, 1997 it is worth to highlight some of important points:

- Broadcasting in Indonesia is authorized by the State. Control and supervision on broadcasting is done by Government.
- Broadcasting is organized and carried out within one national broadcasting system.
- Status and position of public broadcasting and private broadcasting is getting distinctive, the relationship between them is well regulated based on mutual benefit for the sake of public interest.
- Public broadcasting should be professionally managed and operated in fulfilling their functions and objectives.
- To control and to supervise national broadcasting, the Government set up consultative body whose members comprise of government officials, broadcasters, professionals of culture, religion, and other social organisations relevant to broadcasting activities.
- The establishment of monitoring and consultative body is aiming at accommodating the people's aspiration and giving opportunities to public to get involved in broadcasting activities.
- Foreign service broadcasting and educational channels must be handled by public broadcasting.
- At least 70% of total broadcast hour should be filled with local programmes, the remaining 30% is available for foreign programmes.
- The choice and the airing of foreign programs is done selectively and wisely to avoid the negative impact which may influence the audience.
- Dubbing of foreign programme is prohibited.
- Special slot time must be dedicated to quality children programming.

It is sincerely hoped that the broadcasting law will be able to improve the performance of broadcasting system in Indonesia either public or private.

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