Low-Cost Audio-Visual Aids : The Philippine Case

By

G D Feliciano,
V C Jesus
&
T C Atienza

LOW-COST AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS: THE PHILIPPINE CASE

G.D. Feliciano, V.C. de Jesus and T.C. Atienza

Paper prepared for the SEAMIC/FAO Workshop on Low-Cost Audio-Visual Aids held in Chiengmai, Thailand 19-22 March 1979

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LOW-COST AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS: THE PHILIPPINE CASE*

G.D. Feliciano, V.C. de Jesus and T.C. Atienza**

Introduction

Need for low-cost, audio-visual aids

For the Philippines, the timeliness and importance of this AMIC/FAO Workshop on Low-Cost, Audio-Visual Aids cannot be over-emphasized.

Based on the findings of a study done by the senior author in January 1979 and those of previous studies (1), there is a clear and urgent need for the country to shift from the more sophisticated high-cost information technology which appears to be the trend now, to the simpler, low-cost audio-visual materials as support to development efforts, particularly in the rural areas.

There are several realities which argue for this urgent shift in approach/strategy. These are:

1. The share of information in the national budget is less than one (1) percent. This is very low when compared to education which is over 10 percent (2);

---

* Paper prepared for the AMIC/FAO Workshop on Low-Cost Audio-Visual Aids held in Chiengmai, Thailand on 19-22 March 1979.

** Professor and Dean, University of the Philippines Institute of Mass Communication, Officer-in-Charge, Information Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Deputy Director, Regional Operations Division, National Media Production Center, respectively.

2. The literacy level in the rural areas which constitutes about 70% of the population is still, at 62%, equally low (3);

3. There is a very short supply of skilled manpower to meet the increasing demand for competent extension information workers at the farm level; there are a total of roughly 82,000 extension information workers or one for every 325 rural folk (4);

4. Person-to-person communication is more effective in inducing farmers to change some of their traditional farming ways if supported by low-cost audio-visual media such as coordinated radio messages and leaflets/pamphlets (5); and

5. The acceptance and use of new farming practices and ways also imply a need for a variety of locally-based, familiar communications media to suit the interests, needs and expectations of the rural folk (6).

In this paper which addresses itself to a status analysis of low-cost, audio-visual aids, these media will be defined to include not only the purely audio-visual types such as sound slides and filmstrips but also the visual materials that are used with audio support either from personal channels or from broadcast media such as radio.

Status of Low-Cost, Audio-Visual Aids

A. The Urban Scene

Availability and use

The January 1979 study of 24 development-oriented organizations in Metropolitan Manila including nine ministries, two media production agencies, seven schools/departments of communication in universities and six urban development institutions cited earlier showed that all these agencies use both, high-cost and low-cost audio-visual aids in their work.

The great majority (21 out of 24 agencies) use high-cost films and sound slides. Eleven agencies use overhead transparencies and 10 agencies use video-tapes in color and in black and white.

Ten agencies reported using filmstrips.

At the time of the study, two agencies were producing stage plays (dramas) on an experimental basis.

The high-cost films and sound slides were mostly in color. A great number were developed and produced locally using foreign-assisted project funds. They dealt mainly with population-health-nutrition-food production themes.

Likewise, the video-tapes consisted mostly of recordings of project and program activities done in color and in black and white.-

The more traditional and purely visual media such as print materials consisting of leaflets, pamphlets, brochures and manuals, displays which include simple exhibits, pictures and illustrations, blackboard and chalk and flipcharts (graphs and tables) were used as aids by personal channels in lectures, dialogues and group discussions to provide audio-visual communication support to the development efforts of the agencies studied.

On the other hand, instructional, purely audio-cassettes were reinforced by blackboard notes or worksheets so that the "mix" or combination resulted in coordinated audio-visual messages.

The stage presentations with their visual urban/rural sceneries and dialogue also functioned as "audio-visual" media, a unique type of low-cost, audio-visual series of related messages using the development theme.

Most of the sound slides and videotapes were informative and hence, were often used in briefings and in training activities of the agencies. Such sound slides which sometimes used more than one screen and one projector were the most popular audio-visuals used for briefings since these were held within the premises of the agency. In addition, because of the sophisticated equipment and gadgetry used (ektagraphic projectors and multi-screens) they were looked upon as status symbols.

The audiences catered to by these low-cost audio-visuals included, in the order of frequency of use, visitors, agency

staff, students and faculty, government officials and to a lesser extent, the general public.

Filmstrips

The status of filmstrips in the Philippine appears to be an exception to the trend toward their greater use as discussed in the Workshop's background paper.

The January 1979 study saw filmstrips coming in only ninth in frequency of use behind print materials (brochures, leaflets, etc.), displays, blackboards and chalk, films, sound slides, posters, flipcharts and overhead transparencies.

Among the other roughly comparable media mentioned -- i.e., films, sound slides and video tapes -- filmstrips found their greatest rival in sound slides.

When informed of some of the merits of filmstrips over sound slides, persons interviewed failed to justify their preference for the latter. As earlier pointed out, it would appear that the preference is due simply to the prestige currently attached to sound slides as the medium for briefings and other communication activities of these agencies.

A few of the respondents frankly admitted to a lack of knowledge on the production and use of filmstrips. (Most of the agencies produce their own materials.) For most of them however, the reason for their failure to use filmstrips in their informa-

tion work was simply the lack of knowledge of and hence, of appreciation of the value of the medium and its merits over other similar media.

Some indications of effectiveness

Only two out of the 24 agencies studied had research and evaluation offices. However, the developers of materials in most agencies appeared to realize the value of pretesting and evaluation of the low-cost audio-visual aids to determine either their potential or actual impact in terms of their stated or implied objectives, e.g., to create/increase awareness or knowledge or to change attitude/behavior of the intended users of the materials.

Of the 24 agencies studied, 20 did pre-tests on their materials. The methods used were informal -- eliciting comments, reactions and impressions of the agency heads and/or staff and of samples of the intended users of the materials. Formal pre-tests were seldom done and these were undertaken by the staff who requested the production of the materials.

Some letters sent by the users were regarded as indicators of their interest and involvement. And so were program/project results, e.g., high rice yields in food production.

Formal evaluation included the use of questionnaires and of achievement tests on students and evaluation sheets on teachers.

On the basis of local study findings, the following audio-visual mixes or combinations have been found to be effective in inducing change among farmers: (a) radio tips ("how-to-do-it"), leaflets and Extension workers repeating the tips on radio; (b) line/taped broadcast, group discussion and pamphlets using coordinated messages, and (c) lecture, video-tape and popsheet.

Some challenges/problems

Foremost among the problems faced by the agencies was the lack of funds. Interviewees said that it was difficult to get approval for the production of audio-visuals especially of films which were too costly to produce.

The second biggest problem given by some agencies was the lack of modern equipment. Many interviewees cited the lack of accessories for their slide-tape equipment that would allow the use of several screens at a time.

Two reasons were given for the lack of equipment: the lack of funds to buy these and the recently imposed restrictions on their purchase by government.

Three of the interviewees cited the "lack of knowledge on the latest audio-visual techniques", as a challenge. It appeared that although they did not know the different types nor the relative merits of some audio-visuals, e.g., filmstrips vis-a-vis sound slides, they were quite willing to learn.

This is one reason perhaps why the use of filmstrips appeared to be so limited: there was very little awareness of the merits of the medium. Several of the interviewees even had to have a filmstrip described to them before they could reply as to whether or not they were using such material.

With regard to the "short life (timeliness) of data", there were two possible sources of the problem which were cited during the interviews. These were: a) national development is going on at such a rapid pace as to render pertinent data obsolete just as speedily and b) the priorities of some of the agencies are being changed too frequently. In each case, the net effect appeared to be the same: the inclusion of already obsolete or "no longer-timely" data in an audio-visual material would call for costly revisions, if not the "withdrawal of that material from circulation."

B. The Rural Scene

Availability and use

Information/media centers affiliated with either the Ministry of Public Information or the National Media Production Center in the 13 regions of the country use a variety of audio-visual aids in their public information work. The latter agency, through its Regional Operations Division, supervises, among others, 78 audio-visual mobile units.

The audio-visual mobile van is equipped with the following 16 mm film projector, manual operated slide/filmstrip projector, public address system and tape recorder/player. It has the following technical capabilities: film showings, tapings, sound slide and filmstrip presentation, play back, public address system, distribution of print media materials and assistance in photo and radio coverage.

In 1978, an information distribution system using the audio-visual unit as an aid to the key channel of communication, namely the audio-visual personnel, was launched. This program resulted in the production of low-cost materials such as slides and filmlets to cater to the needs of regional audiences. It also led to the showing of films followed by a forum and the use of the audio-visual materials as more support to the mobile van staff in organizing and mobilizing the rural folk (7).

This information distribution system resulted in several new audio-visual schemes/approaches.

One of this was the "talking points", an approach whereby a team led by information officers visited with the rural folk in places where they congregated: a river bank where womenfolk do their laundry or a makeshift shed where farmers take time out after plowing or harvesting. Visits with these rural folk were very useful in terms of gathering information on their problems and needs and getting their reactions to national issues and problems. This was done verbally using audio and video tape

recorders. A similar approach was tried by riding on watercraft or pumpboat to reach the menfolk in far-flung coastal areas; this was"dubbed" "floating media".

The use of "blackboard newspapers" which were installed in strategic places in the community utilized both the medium of the blackboard and the personal communication network which planned and implemented the "newspaper activities" which was organized by the regional media center. A variant of this was the municipal newspaper or newsletter which used "retired wisemen" in the community to gather and interpret the news, both verbally and in written form.

Another audio-visual approach was the theatre and puppet groups which produced and presented plays for rural audiences to convey messages relating to land reform, integration of cultural minorities, population welfare planning, nutrition and others.

Still another approach was the showing of movies and the use of the public address system during town fiestas to ensure maximum exposure of available documentaries at the rural level.

The newest approach introduced by the national leadership uses the marketplace in 1,700 municipalities as distribution centers for multi-media materials and also existing television and radio stations and theatres. Each center is equipped with film and slide projectors, video-tape cassette unit, public address system, special media materials, a generator and a small library. The equipment for this approach include 1,700 units

of film projectors, 1,700 units of slide projectors and 1,700 units of Betamax VTR machines. The aim of this project is to inform, educate and involve the rural citizenry in a concerted effort at countryside development.

Some indications of effectiveness

Except for the "talking points" and "newspaper-people network" projects which received the enthusiastic support of the rural folk, there are no clear indications of effectiveness of the audio-visual approaches being used in the rural areas just discussed. Evaluation is yet to be planned and implemented.

Some challenges/problems

A 1976 survey brought out some problems restricting smooth audio-visual operations. The survey findings pinpointed the following major weak areas:

a. low educational and technical qualifications of audio-visual personnel. With the unexpected arrival of 100 audio-visual units, there was a rush to man the units. Thus, the majority of personnel needed training and skills upgrading.

b. funding for audio-visual activities was highly centralized. At that time the government had no mechanism for decentralizing funds. This had a paralyzing effect on

movement of audio-visual personnel as they had to await per diems and gasoline requirements, spare parts and other needs from the Central office. These resulted further in a decline in performance, low morale and weak communication lines between field personnel and the Central office.

c. rising costs of rentals of commercial films and lack of copies of documentary films. While at the start of audio-visual operations software was adequate, rising costs limited the supply of new or replacement software.

d. rapid change in technology. As the project equipment started to break down and needed spare parts, there was great difficulty in securing spare parts from abroad.

e. lack of coordination of personnel in the field. Audio-visual field personnel used to minimal or no supervision in the past resented merger with regional media center personnel (8).

Since 1978, steps have been taken to respond to the above challenges or to minimize the problems, e.g., training of audio-visual personnel, decentralization of funds, a program for screening films and purchasing film rights and others.

The section which follows focusses on the experience of the Ministry of Agriculture on the filmstrip.

The Filmstrip: The Ministry of Agriculture Experience

Arrival of filmstrip equipment in mid-50's

The use of low-cost media, particularly the filmstrip, in the Ministry of Agriculture is a curious story. It starts auspiciously with the arrival sometime in 1953 of a complete set of still photography equipment. This set of equipment included one Rolleiflex camera and laboratory gadgets, 41 units of 2 x 2 slide and filmstrip projectors and an equal number of screens.

The projectors which were all assigned to the Bureau of Agricultural Extension were electric-powered Viewlex SVE Instructor No. 300 with film take-up/rewind and carrying case. The screens were DA-LITE "Versatol" Beaded screen, mildew and flame resistant, 52" x 70" on folding and adjustable height tripod.

Cost of equipment

All these were purchased from the United States at a cost, then of $3,536.25[+] C & F Manila for the screens and projectors and $487.24 for the photographic equipment. These were purchased under a U.S.-Philippine agreement which provided for U.S.

[+]Equivalent to roughly ₱7,072.50 considering the rate of exchange at the time of $1 = ₱2.

aid to the Philippine extension program. Among other U.S.-made equipment bought were generators which were to provide power to the projectors, among others.

The following year, 1954, more arrived. These were 25 SVE slide/filmstrip projectors, gasoline and kerosene powered, complete assembly with carrying cases, rewind/take-up, and 2 extra CM-13 Reflectors. Also included were 25 dozens Special SVE Mantles (1 dozen per box). Cost of all these was $1745.50 C & F Manila.

At the same time, 22 Audio-Visual Mobile Units (costing $187,958.59 C & F Manila) arrived with complete accessories such as screens, 16 mm movie projectors, generators and others.

Distribution

Of the first set of 41 electric-run filmstrip/slide projectors, 25 went out to 21 provinces and were issued to the respective provincial agriculturists. The records of the Bureau of Agricultural Extension are silent about what happened to the rest; although its inventory balance states that only five were left.

The second batch of projectors were all sent out to the provinces.

But it would not have mattered much if they were sent out or not. There were hardly any filmstrips and very little of slides to be had.

Subjects of filmstrips

From the arrival of the projectors until the 1960's when annual reports no longer refer to filmstrip projection, there were available only some 13 different titles of filmstrips. Ten of these were made in the United States (in color) for American audiences and the three others, in black and white, were produced by the Agricultural Information Division of the then Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources which was the "software" production center for the whole Department. The three dealt on home management (entitled "Kitchen Sink"), another on swine raising which was based on a frame slide tape presentation, and a third on quality leather.

The 10 American filmstrips were about backyard vegetable gardening, canning chicken, canning meat, cooking meat according to the cut, cooking poultry, planning home chores, home-grown food production/preservation, making a bed, sharing and planning family chores, and simple ways to iron shirt.

Filmstrip use

One copy of each of these filmstrips were available in the film library of the Department. The Bureau of Agricultural Extension had very few copies of the filmstrips, there were not enough for all the projectors sent out to the provinces. There were also copies available for short-term borrowing from the United States Information Service (USIS).

Reasons for limited use

As one BAEx oldtimer described the situation then: "Seldom were filmstrips used. Slides, mostly borrowed from USIS, were used." The slides were for lectures and seminars in the central office of BAEx.

Several factors may help explain the dismal record of the filmstrip in the Department:

1. There was no suitable camera to produce the single-frame, 3/4 x 1 inch filmstrips which was the only kind that could fit into the projectors;

2. Kodak Co., which was the sole processor of color films, was not very encouraging to local efforts to produce filmstrips and this dampened initiative to come up with filmstrips comparable to the colored ones imported from the U.S.;

3. There was only one man trained to produce filmstrips (he was the chief of the Visual Section of the Agricultural Information Division) and he was understandably more drawn to produce motion pictures (about 10 black and white films of varying lengths from 20 munites to 40 minutes);

4. Because of the basic fact that there were very few filmstrips to go around and the absence of suitable equipment for copying the filmstrips, and since there is no way to repair damaged filmstrips, many projectors were

early condemned to non-use as soon as the filmstrips were torn and made useless;

5. According to the then head of the Visual Section of the Agricultural Information Division, top management in the Department never quite appreciated the value of filmstrips and this explains why the needed equipment never came.

6. Scripting for filmstrips requires rather logical sequencing of pictures and there were none trained for this specialized writing skill; and

7. Lack of spare parts, absence of service capability both in the Department and within the country itself doomed many of the filmstrip projectors to early retirement.

Looking Ahead

While the data presented in this paper have shown that the availability and use of filmstrips vis-a-vis other low-cost audio-visual aids have lagged behind, it is noteworthy that some filmstrips and filmstrip projectors are available in the local media scene (86 in the National Media Production Center alone!); that the receptive media personnel are there too, waiting to be tapped, to be trained toward its greater and more effective use for development.

The challenge is certainly there and with this AMIC-FAO Workshop as a start, the future of the "lowly and neglected" filmstrip looks less dismal.

References

(1) Feliciano, Gloria D., Rebecca F. Maceda and Melina S. Pugne. "Audio-visuals and Audio-visual Evaluation in Development-Oriented Agencies and Educational Institutions in the Philippines." January 1979 (mimeographed).

(2) Public Information: Issues and Facts, Studies Submitted by the Institute of Mass Communication Working Group to the Ad Hoc Presidential Committee on Information Policies, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, January 1977, 104 pp.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Feliciano, Gloria D., The Role of Media in Health Promotion, Background Paper No. 1, WHO/UNICEF Workshop on the Promotion of Health Information, Manila, Philippines, 6-12 March 1979.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Puangco, Tita Datu, National Media Production Center's Audio-Visual Experience, Manila, Philippines, March 2, 1979, 14 pp.

(8) Ibid.