

**Reaching Out to the Grassroots :  
PCARRD's Regional Applied Communication Outreach (RACO) Program**

**By**

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**Rationale**

Improving the lives of the Filipino people provides the major legitimation for Agriculture and Natural Resources Research.

As the research system develops and new information from the network is generated different approaches are explored but the underlying commitment to move research results to the countryside/remains constant.

In response to the need to make research a partner in countryside development, a new approach to technology dissemination and utilization was developed, known as the Regional Applied Communication Outreach (RACO) Program.

The Program was initiated by former Applied Communication Division (ACD) Director Dr. Rogelio V. Cuyno in 1979, and further strengthened through the leadership of Dr. Thelma S. Cruz in 1984-86 and Dr. Angelina G. Bautista in 1986-88. At present, the RACO, under the leadership of Dr. Teresa H. Stuart shows some innovative changes and bright prospects for the future.

The applied communication program is premised on the intent of the research sector to make a positive impact on the lives of the ultimate users of agriculture and natural resources technologies.

It recognizes that the transfer of information is not without cost; therefore, the poorer sector should have easier

access to information. This becomes possible when the source is closer to the user.

It also recognizes that technology is location specific and that the only way to backstop development in the regions is for the technology to be appropriate.

#### **RACO As Part Of Regional Consortium**

A Regional Applied Communication Office (RACO) is an integral part of the Regional Research Consortium coordinated by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD).

It is an organization of communication specialists within the Research Consortium.

RACO members are usually the regional information officers of the government departments and extension-communication officers of State Colleges and Universities.

A communication specialist from the R and D center or lead agency of the consortium serves as coordinator.

He or she initiates linkages with prospective cooperating agencies and corresponds with the consortium coordinator who in turn recommends possible actions from the Director of the ACD of PCARRD.

#### **The Tasks**

The ACD of PCARRD provides technical assistance and guidance in the pursuit of the applied communication activities in the regions.

As representative of PCARRD, the ACD carries the voice of the RACO and makes the region's needs and problems known to the rest of the R and D sector.

In 1983, ten Regional Applied Communication Offices were set up. Today, 15 RACOs are working components of the regional consortia.

As working components of the national and regional research centers, the RACOs, have the following tasks:

- o to plan technology transfer strategies with the research commodity teams of the consortia for faster technology adoption and utilization
- o to pool the scant communication resources of consortium members and cooperating agencies;
- o to foster interagency cooperation by providing the venue for cooperative communication work and
- o to develop and upgrade regional communication capability and eventually make the region self-reliant in meeting their communication needs.

### **The Activities**

There are six general activities that the RACOs pursue but they vary in the number of activities they undertake depending on the need and resources available among members and cooperating agencies.

Publications/Prototypes production. These activities include: planning, preparation and production of publications such as annual reports, newsletters, leaflets, brochures and other print materials on practicable technologies.

Instructional materials production. Realizing the limitation of publications, the RACOs have embarked on the production of low cost instructional materials such as posters, slide tape presentations, primers, technoguides and fact sheets on recommended technologies.

Scientific literature services. It has also activated the scientific literature service in the regions in orchestration with PCARRD's national research information retrieval and documentation program.

Mass media linkages. Another activity that was given considerable mileage is the use of mass media services for technology dissemination. Most RACOs utilize radio as a medium for technology dissemination in coordination with the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Radio script writing and rural broadcasting are skills that most RACOs possess or intend to develop. The use of indigenous media in technology transfer is now underway.

Communication research. Some RACOs have been involved in communication and evaluation research for years and they are expected to conduct their own applied communication related research to further improve communication project planning and implementation needs.

Communication trainings. To develop communication capability, the RACOs have organized trainings and workshops on communication skills and technical expertise.

### **The NIACP**

The RACO Program is strengthened with the implementation of the DA-PCARRD National Integrated Applied Communication Program (NIACP) in the regions. The NIACP is a joint undertaking of the DA through its Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and PCARRD through its ACD. The program aims to institutionalize the research and extension linkage.

### **The Strength**

Aside from being close to its clientele, the strength of RACO lies in its having access to research information that are ready for dissemination and its awareness of the needs of the agricultural communities in the regions.

It also develops the region's capability to produce communication materials which translate technical information into forms that are comprehensible and useful to the field workers and the farmers.

Its strength also lies in having access to an existing corps of field workers maintained by cooperating agencies who have established relationships with the rural communities and who are not considered as intruders.

As part of the regional consortium, the RACOs reduce cost and avoid duplication and contradictory recommendations through the pooling of scarce communication resources of cooperating agencies.

It has also developed a strong linkage with the national R and D research coordinating agencies through ACD. Through this linkage, the RACOs are promptly made aware of the trends in agriculture research, and can arrange its activities in anticipation of expected results of R and D endeavors.

As part of its task to make the regions self-reliant, the RACOs are given opportunities to develop and upgrade their respective communication capabilities and learn from each other's experience while retaining the freedom and flexibility to design their own communication program to suit the region's unique needs and purposes.

The creation of RACO has led to the development of a sense of cooperation and common responsibility for the whole region among applied communication units (ACU) of consortium member-agencies.

It breaks down interagency rivalries and strengthens mutual commitment to the cause of regional development.

### **The Achievements**

After nine years of existence, the RACO can be proud of its achievements in the regions.

It has set the stage for an integrated communication program based on cooperation, joint accountability and greater interaction and participation among R and D agencies in the region.

Operationally, the RACOs have piloted an approach in communication design and implementation by focusing their strategy on the pilot communities, utilizing community resources and involving local organizations to explore ways of achieving faster rates of adoption.

The most important change that the RACOs have brought about was on upgrading of the scientific community's perception of the role of communicators as mere processors and disseminators of research information.

They are now recognized as integral participants in planning development activities in the regions. They are now also heavily involved in the implementation and evaluation of these plans together with the people at the village level.

Such functions are carried out because the communication B unit is now situated within a management structure. This is made evident by the fact that inviting RACO coordinators to the Regional Technical Working Group (RTWG) and Regional Research and Development Coordinating Committee (RRDCC) meetings of the consortium has become a standard operating procedure.

The RTWG is composed of Research Directors and heads of research centers and stations. It reviews and recommends guidelines and policies on research management and operation of the regional consortium to the RRDCC.

The RRDCC, which is composed of heads of member agencies, in turn determines such policies and formulate guidelines for the operation of the consortium.

Such guidelines are formulated within the framework of the national and regional agriculture and resources research and development system.

Recognizing the vital role that communication plays in the success of any R and D endeavor, the RRDC has institutionalized its working relationship with the RACO.

The RACO coordinator now works closely with the consortium coordinator. The RACO has since then been part of R and D planning and implementation.

The RACOs have, in essence provided the communicator with an enhanced sense of self worth.

They have played a vital role in the aggressive implementation of the Technology Packaging for Countryside Development Project that has become the very foundation for the establishment of CV-CIRRD, a regional R and D consortium in Central Visayas.

The fact that communication work has become the basis for the institutionalization of an interagency R and D endeavor is a breakthrough, an accomplishment that is probably the first in the annals of development communication.

It is a continuing concern that established linkages remain strong and the benefits from cooperation overwhelming enough for linkages to endure even after a project is completed.

Today, the RACOs pursue the planning of their programs of action with a view towards sustaining each effort tested to work within their domains.

At CLARRDEC, local agencies are being tapped for resources generation, a clear step towards the goal of being more self reliant.

At VICARP and ILARRC, the lead agency's mandate of instruction is being strongly welded with regional communication responsibility.

The RACOs are now the centers in which development communication students practice their craft to complement their academic training. Their laboratories encompass the scope of work of the RACOs.

This conscious effort to sustain development efforts could be gleaned from the fact that the RACOs have now assumed the responsibility of packaging the best current technology recommendations for major commodities in the country's most socioeconomically depressed provinces.

The RACOs serve as proof of PCARRD's commitment to give development communication the priority it deserves.

This commitment has borne fruit as confirmed by the significant strides made by the RACOs in strengthening applied communication in the regions and in ensuring that research information are attuned to the needs of the people.

#### **Greater Challenges For The Future**

But the RACOs cannot rest on its laurels for ahead lies a greater task: the task not only of disseminating research results but making sure that learning resources and opportunities are

provided not only to those who enjoy economic, educational, and social means, but more so to the less fortunate Filipinos; for serving them is the true purpose of agriculture and natural resources research and the very essence of the word development.

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THE RACO COORDINATORS IN THE REGIONS

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