

The Need For Education And Research In Mass Communication Towards Development

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Role Of Mass Communicators In Development

THE Policies and planning of mass communication has to be concerned with its education and training aspects. Apparently those who are involved in mass communications on whatever level need an understandable concept of what they are going to do with their communicative instruments on hand for development. The uncertainty among the media practitioners regarding their role as mass communicators is at least partly the result of the incompatibility between their education, training and their job requirements.

Communication for development presupposes a psychological profile based on the felt needs of the target audience as a first priority. This requires a dynamic approach by individuals committed to the service of the people's welfare. It also requires purposive communication and goals based on national objectives. It also needs the active involvement of people covering both the rural and urban areas.

Since the people are the primary beneficiaries and an essential part of the development process, the education and training of mass communication should be geared to the purpose of development, the patterns and processes of the people's active participation. Teaching methods and objectives should be relevant to the needs and resources of the target audience and the working situation. Mass communicators should be made to realise their role as facilitators and mediators in a climate of change. They are neither neutral technicians nor aggressive propagandists but people concerned with and committed to the welfare of society.

Mass Communication Education: The Necessity

Mass communication education and training should include the means of assessing people's needs, aspirations, grievances and suggestions to assist the communicator in evoking people's responsive participation in the development process. Training objectives should include the imparting of sound theoretical framework, practical and applied communication skills in relation to the concrete local situation. It is equally necessary to organise courses for decision-makers, administrators and policy planners to give them an understanding of the relevance of communication to social planning so that, while planning, they keep the importance of communication in mind.

For mass communicators at all levels, field training should be part of their coursework so that they are able to innovate and devise skills and practices to sustain the dynamic process of communication through interaction with the audiences. Education and training should aim to increase skills, sharpen insights and acquaint the communicator with development objectives and process in the perspective of national development, embodying as fully as possible local initiative of indigenous relevance. To achieve an integrated approach to communication education and training, it is felt that no matter what specialised skill of the students or trainees, they should be able to realise the value of multi-media approach. In all these courses, there should be definite emphasis on the role of communication as an agent of change in development.

Courses in mass communication could include as background subjects like: sociology, social work, psychology of communication, government and law, and the study of different mass media agencies and institutions. To enhance professional skills in communication, all the modern tools of media should be taught.

As a tentative guideline for a teaching and training manual the following areas are suggested for inclusion: teaching, training methods in print, radio, television, film and interpersonal communication; research on effective communication practices and findings on communication projection campaigns in the region; evaluation methods of different communication techniques and practices relating to all media in the region. The contents of the manual should be such as to be applicable to the different communication needs in the countries of the region.

Looking at some few training institutions and programmes devoted to communication training, in the third world countries of our time, it appears that the efforts towards structuring courses in mass communication are haphazard and inconsistent. This stems from the lack of a clear grasp of the relevance of communication as a critical element in the development process. Too often our mass communication function in isolation.

Towards this end, there is a need to establish more institutions of education and training in mass communication in the third world countries at university level as well as at the level of government training and other similar centres. Of course,

education in mass communication can not be limited to communication institutions only.

It is necessary to shift the teaching and training from the field of pure communication in the direction of its application. That means for the developing countries institutions working in the primary sectors of development are the logical places for secondary training programmes in mass communication for development programmes. All institutions involved in training activities in these areas should add to their curricula a course in mass communication for development. Again in this chain we can find the linkage between content and methodology. Only if all involved in the communicative flows know how and what to communicate, will the efforts put into this exercise result in a smooth stream of balanced information within the whole communication system of a society thus adding a very important factor to development.

Mass Communication Research: The bones of planning

It is one of the new aspects of mass communication that the communication flow is directed toward a chosen target with a certain purpose. Both the target and the purpose are derived from the overall development plan that a nation has decided to follow through. But how do purpose and target get their final shapes? How is a development plan transformed into a chain of communicative steps? The answer is simple: research has to play a big role in defining a communication strategy for development. Mention may be made about research which will provide the decision-makers as well as the communication practitioners with the kind of information which they will need to start the planning process for development.

Just in line with the overall importance the development plans have given to the pure economic factors there are already a great number of studies dealing with the process and effects of communication in relation to agricultural development. Most of these studies focus on dissemination of new farm practices.

These studies describe "cases" or are trying to assign a certain progress to certain communicative input. Rarely are the psychological and social-psychological mechanisms

which have triggered the result investigated. There is an open area where academic researchers mostly confined to their small-group laboratories and communication practitioners out in the fields should be able to pool their effects.

Equally, the communicative chain through which a message is passed has not yet been analysed completely mainly because media-Scientists and social psychologists are not able to look into each other's field without prejudgement. To transfer a development message means to let it pass through various different communication-steps and as long as we do not know exactly what happens with the message at all these steps, we possibly cannot conceptualise the information sufficiently to hit our target group with the intended purpose.

A third and almost entirely neglected area is research into organisational communication. If so many institutions are involved in the development process it is necessary to determine the amount, the formats and the contents of information passed through these organisations. Nobody will state that the usual form of "reporting" represents the optimal information transfer between concerned organisations. Questions for research should be: What type and amount of communication should exist within and between involved institutions. What should be the nature and the direction of the communication flows? What factor help and what factors impede this flow? If these questions can be answered a great step is made toward a meaningful planning of communication.

Some other factors should become prominent in research activities in development communication. There is, for example, the process of monitoring communication efficiency. Essentially this is a feedback process which should lead to an improved communication activity. Audience research is another area which at least for the mass media in developing countries is an entirely new field.

Reviewing all these possible fields of research related to development communication, we probably will find that the results can be fed directly into the planning process thus providing the framework for an efficient planning and decision-making in development communication.