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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication occupy an enviable status in the process of development regardless of government and non-government sectors. Many scholars have studied the role of information and communication in the process of development in India and abroad. The policy makers were greatly influenced by the western model of development which advocated that mass media could be utilized properly for the dissemination of new ideas and information which would facilitate adoption of innovative technologies, practices and behaviors that were necessary in the modernization process. The Five Year Plans gave substantial emphasis to the expansion of mass media networks and information and publicity units all over the country with a view to provide development-oriented education to the people in urban and rural areas. Several institutions started using information and communication technologies for development communication purposes in the country. An element of advocacy has been added to the process of participatory development communication in India by the progressive organizations and movements over a period of time. The implementation of Right to Information Act, 2005 has enabled the beneficiaries of government welfare programmes to become aware of the facilities and benefits. The goals of transparency, accountability, good governance and participatory development can be achieved well if this right is implemented all over the country. Optimum use of all grassroots level communication channels in proper combinations can certainly bring about development in the rural areas. The media institutions need to be sensitized on their social and developmental obligations in the age of globalisation. The future agenda for development information and communication at the grassroots level must deal with the process of participatory communication and development.

KEYWORDS: *Information and communication, globalisation, development, agricultural universities,*

PREAMBLE

Communication occupies an enviable status in the process of development regardless of government and non-government sectors. Many scholars have studied the role of communication in the process of development in India and abroad. According to them, development communication remains as a neglected sector of media management. The scholars have also suggested that communications media should play a pivotal role in the process of development by organizing meaningful publicity, propaganda and advertising campaigns. In this paper, the role of communication in the process of development is primarily discussed with suitable examples.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN INDIA

The policy makers were greatly influenced by the western model of development which advocated that mass media could be utilized properly for the dissemination of new ideas and information which would facilitate adoption of innovative technologies, practices and behaviors that were necessary in the modernization process. People also needed information and education on government policies, plans and programmes concerning the goals of national integration, unity and progress.

A widespread understanding of the Plan is an essential stage in its fulfillment. An understanding of the priorities of the Plan will enable each person to relate his or her role to the larger purposes of the nation as a whole. All available methods of communication have to be developed and the people approached through the written and spoken word no less than through radio, film, song and drama (Government of India, 1953).

The five year plan documents also reveal the significance of communication in a developing country like India. The establishment of agricultural universities, directorates of development, extension divisions, media units, training organizations and other agencies reveals the significance of development communication in India. Though communication for development or development support communication grew out of agriculture and rural development communication, the term comprehensively includes all spheres of development such as education, health, family welfare, social change, environment protection, industrial development, employment, training, personality development and so on. All these spheres of development required planned, deliberate and systematic communication inputs to widen the horizon of development and expedite the process of development.

In the post-independence era, series of efforts are made by the various agencies to improve the status of development coverage in the media. The government departments, non-government organizations, universities, training institutions and other agencies have borrowed the experience of these scholars and adopted communications strategies in the implementation of various development projects in the country. Development planning put right emphasis on expansion and utilization of communications media at various levels.

The Five Year Plans gave substantial emphasis to the expansion of mass media networks and information and publicity units all over the country with a view to provide development-oriented education to the people in urban and rural areas. Rural broadcasting was an important component of the expansion plan of All India Radio (AIR) and community listening sets were installed in villages on a cost sharing basis by the central and state governments. Radio Rural Forums project was implemented in 1956 under a collaborative project with UNESCO in order to established a two-way communication link between village audiences and the programme organizers in the radio station. There was substantial increase in knowledge among the forum members on various aspects of national development as compared to the others, according to the studies. Initially this project was confined to Poona but was extended to all radio stations broadcasting rural programmes on the basis of the success of the project. However this project could not achieve overall success due to improper maintenance of radio sets, irregular supply of batteries and inadequate coordination between broadcasting centers and government agencies.

The Government of India and state governments have formulated development policies and implemented programmes with a view to eradicate poverty, develop community infrastructure, generate gainful employment opportunities and improve the living standard of the people in the country. The community development programme was implemented in the country with a view to improve the social and economic status of villagers. The basic needs approach was followed in India on the basis of the recommendation of World Bank, UNESCO, ILO and other agencies since the usual indicators of development such as GNP and per capital measures did not facilitate the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens.

The Government of India established the Directorate of Field Publicity and created regional information units with mobile cinema vans that showed films on various developmental endeavors. The Films Division produced news reels and documentaries on communal harmony, national

integration and other subjects related to development projects. Agriculture and family planning were the thrust areas of development communication services offered by the government. The Green Revolution gave a fillip to the practice of development communication in the country.

Agricultural universities established Krishi Vigyan Kendras and spearheaded the campaign for increased agricultural production and productivity in the rural areas. Radio broadcasts, field publicity campaigns, extension programmes and audio-visual communications were the salient features of this campaign. Farmers' Functional Literacy Programme was started in the mid-1960s in order to ensure familiarity with the agricultural innovations, new seeds, fertilizers, cultivation procedures and crop protection measures among the people in the countryside. Significant use of various communications media was the salient feature of the Green Revolution according to some researchers. Subsequent research revealed that Green Revolution was limited to irrigated areas and affluent farmers who took the advantage of various incentives offered by the government.

The department of health and family welfare was also actively involved in the family planning communication programme implemented by the Mass Education and Media Division (MEMD). In 1966, the Mass Education and Media (MEM) organization was created within the department of Family Planning to promote health and family welfare. In 1970, the campaign for distribution, sale and use of condoms was launched on the basis of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) formula. The extension education approach was adopted to facilitate effective implementation of health and family welfare programme all over the country with the help of a bandwagon of field workers spread across the length and breadth of the country.

The adoption of the 'extension education' approach, with fieldworkers reaching out to people to motivate them to adopt family planning practices, meant the creation of a network of field personnel at the national, state, district and block levels, following the pattern of the agricultural extension services already established by them. Radio and film also began to be used in a limited way. Films, owing to their powerful impact as an audio-visual medium, were also seen as a major vehicle of communication and the district units of the MEMD were equipped with audiovisual vans for exhibiting motivational films. It was in this period that a strategy for communication and a pin pointed, clear and specific message to the family were articulated for the first time. The Red Triangle symbol for family planning was developed and slogans preparing 'two or three

children – enough' and the small family norm began being used as a mass campaign (Kakar, 1987).

This programme also had a limited success in view of centralization of services in the urban areas, inadequate area-specific and target group-specific programmes, non-availability of relevant services in the countryside, limited communication funds and facilities, inadequate training and orientation programmes, lack of coordination between the production and distribution channels and a host of other constraints.

The implementation of Community Development Programme, Minimum Needs Programme, 20 Point Programme, New 20 Point Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Rural Employment Programme, Training the Rural Youth for Self Employment, Integrated Child Development Programme, Command Area Development Programme, Drought Prone Area Programme, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, Prime Minister Rojgar Yojana and other programmes in the post-independence era called for utilization of communications media for the purpose of motivating and persuading people to take active part in the process of development.

The agricultural universities also established extension divisions and implemented grassroots communication programmes which focused on the achievement of the goals of agriculture and rural development. The Family Welfare Programme was implemented during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1979-84) with a focus on child survival, maternal health and adoption of family planning methods. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) was perceived as the appropriate communication model in the planning and the implementation of health communication programmes. Several television spots and quickies were aired regularly. In particular, expansion of extension communication services and applied research facilitated flow of development information into the rural areas. The non-government organizations also employed certain communication tools and techniques to reach out to the people and disseminate development information to the beneficiaries.

The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (1975-76) is a landmark in the field of development communication in India. Satellite broadcasting services which were designed by Vikram Sarabhai were implemented by the Government of India in the rural and remote areas. Agriculture, rural development, health, family welfare, adult education, environment protection, national integration and other important subjects were covered by this project.

If India wants to reduce the overwhelming attraction to cities, enrich cultural life, integrate the country by exposing one part to the cultures of the other parts, involve people in the programme of rural economic and social development, then the best thing is to have TV via satellite (Sarabhai, 1968).

SITE amply demonstrated that sophisticated broadcasting systems could be used in the context of rural communication quite effectively and that it was quite possible to organize and manage the maintenance of Direct Reception Sets (DRS) for TV viewing in rural areas. It also showed that programmes based on familiarity with the socio-economic and cultural background of audiences and representing their field needs had greater likelihood of evoking involvement and interest. If the telecast was supported by coordinated follow-up by the field staff, the development objectives of the telecast were more likely to be met (Ghosh, 2006).

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) established a rural television project in Kheda district of Gujarat near Ahmadabad, where the Space Application Centre was located following the SITE project. The experiment was intended to overcome the limitations of SITE and facilitate production and dissemination of locally relevant and low - cost television programmes that would bring about social change and economic development in the countryside. The project attempted to promote self-reliance among the community by showing that the goals of social change and economic development could be achieved through optimal use of resources without depending on external sources. Instructional programmes on agriculture, animal husbandry, health, family welfare, functional literacy and other developmental issues were broadcast to the rural poor. The project considerably improved horizontal communication among the rural communities and facilitated a dialogue between the people and policy makers.

Production methods followed a pattern of maximum interaction with the villagers of Kheda. An idea for a series was discussed by the production team and developed further through formative research (audience profile and felt needs assessment). Further research and pretesting was done using the convenient portable video equipment. Based on this research, scripts were finalized and pretested with the villagers for comprehension and acceptance of the format. This ensured that communication gaps between the producers and audiences were minimized (Karnik and Bhatia, 1985). Topic research ensured that the programme content was relevant and appropriate for the audience. Prototypes were pretested to make sure that the villagers would understand and like the programmes which were modified based on the pretesting results. Sometimes,

producers viewed programmes with the village audience in order to get a first- hand experience of audience reactions”.

Several institutions started using broadcasting technologies for development communication purposes in the country. Prominent among them include-Chitrabani in Calcutta, Xavier Institute of Communication Arts in Bombay, Centre for Development Communication in Hyderabad, Centre for Development of Instructional Technology in New Delhi, Jabhua Development Communication Project in Jabhua, and so on. These organizations produced slide-tape presentations, films and video programmes that supported the face-to-face communication work of voluntary organizations engaged in social work and rural development activities. Teachers, extension educators, development workers, social activists and others were also trained in the art and craft of producing low-cost materials and disseminating people-friendly development communication services.

International agencies like UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF and FAO extended necessary educational and financial support in order to promote the active participation of voluntary organizations as facilitators of social change and economic development in the country. Non-profit organizations also used communication tools and technologies to document their nation building activities and enlist support from various sources. Video became very effective tool of development communication since it opened up communication channels both within the community and between the community and the outside world.

The progressive mass movements namely – farmer’s movement, worker’s movement, Dalit movement, women’s movement, writer’s movement and environment movement began in the 1970s. These movements also became useful fora for the articulation of the points of view of the oppressed and depressed sections of Indian society. Several intellectuals, organizers and activists came to the street and protested vehemently against the anti-people policies and forces. These movements altered the way in which development was defined in the country. The social activism was suitably complemented by the media activism and judicial activism which made series of efforts to document the agonies of the people and facilitate the social and economic development of the marginalized sections of society in India. Several new tools and techniques of development communication namely pamphlets, protest marches, wall writings, street plays, public speeches, group discussions, demonstrations, agitations, documentaries, short films and so on were employed by these progressive organizations with a view to educate, organize, emancipate and empower the women and weaker sections of the society. These

progressive movements also provided a rational dimension to the practice of development communication in India.

Women's liberation movement, Dalit empowerment movement, peasant development movement, environment movement and other progressive movements were also influenced by the international movements. Chipko Movement in Uttar Pradesh, Narmada Bachav Andolan in Gujarat, Silent Valley Movement in Kerala, Movement against Bhopal Gas tragedy, Movement against Enron Project, Movement against Cogentrics, etc demonstrated the strength of people and 'bottom up' mode of communication in the country. Effective networking of individuals, agencies and institutions became a possibility of progressive movements which strengthened the process of grassroots communication in the country. These instances aptly illustrate the innovative means of participatory communication that were adopted by the progressive organizations for reaching out to the people, registering the protest of the people, building public opinion against injustice and pleading for justice – centered progress in the country.

The National Literacy Mission (NLM) launched by the Government of India in 1988 facilitated communication skill development among the people through promotion of functional literacy. A variety of communication materials were required to improve the communication skills of the instructors, supervisors and field staff. It enabled the people to become aware of the causes of their deprivation and means of their empowerment through participation in the development programmes. This programme would become successful if the project authorities enlist the support and participation of educated people in the programme as trainers, motivators, volunteers and evaluators. The implementation of another project in Radio Education for Adult Literacy (PREAL) in 16 selected districts of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan through eight AIR stations also facilitated awareness about various development programmes among adults. The PREAL (1990-91) was a collaborative project of NLM and AIR which broadcast fruitful radio lessons for the benefit of adults. However, this project achieved limited success due to negative political and bureaucratic environment that prevailed in the country. The New Policy on Education (NPE) initiated by Rajiv Gandhi clearly articulated the need to address women's education as a means of women's empowerment.

Social mobilization is defined as the process of bringing together all feasible and practical inter-sectoral social allies to raise people's awareness of and demand for a particular development programme, to assist in the delivery of resources and services and

to strengthen community participation for sustainability and self-reliance (McKee, 1992). This observation clearly reveals the significance of community organization and social mobilization in a developing country like India which enables the service providers to respond swiftly to fulfill the unmet needs of the under-privileged sections of the society.

An element of advocacy has been added to the process of participatory development communication in India by the progressive organizations and movements over a period of time. Advocacy has been defined as the marshalling of facts and information into persuasive communication for a particular development objective. It has to be addressed to the political leadership, planners, administrators, academics, media, judiciary and the general public in order to arrive at a consensus regarding a particular developmental endeavor.

In the decade of 1990s mass media, government agencies, non-government organizations and social groups put forth united efforts toward creating awareness among the people about various developmental issues, trends and opportunities. The literacy campaign in Kerala, Kalajatha publicity campaign organized by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad, Pudukkottai Case Study, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Jatha, Jhabua Development Communication Project, Indian People's Theatre Association's activities and Samudaya Experiment in Karnataka State invited the attention of scholars and general public for their notable contributions for development support communication in the country.

The Eighth Plan (1992-97) called for a review of communication and development approaches in the country. The document emphasized that personal issues should be emphasized in the communication campaign rather than national issues and argued for a convergence of communication services. It reads: "Based on a holistic approach to social development and population control, integrated programmes for raising female literacy, female employment, status of women, nutrition and reduction of infant mortality will be implemented". The Government of India laid emphasis on decentralized planning and implementation with a collaborative role for Panchayati Raj Institutions and non-government organizations. The plan document highlighted the development of grassroots level communication network and operations.

Rural newspapers were brought out as a new media vehicle for neo-literates. Special audience programmes were broadcast by All India Radio and Doordarshan for the benefit of farmers, artisans, women, children, youth and other beneficiaries of development projects. The print media and electronic media disseminated information on various

development projects through special supplementaries and special audience programmes. Non-government organizations also used their own extension communication channels to reach out to the people. New media like tele-communication, computer communication and satellite communication were also tapped for the development communication purposes. A new era of e-governance, e-development, e-commerce and e-education facilitated the application of new information and communication technologies for various development projects. People had the benefit of interactive communication and participation communication mainly because of the intervention of new media.

The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India facilitated a third tier of governance institutions in the country at village, block and district levels. This system of governance also provided useful opportunities for the development of grassroots political leadership and intervention of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the process of integrated rural development in the country. The information and publicity campaigns were also carried out by the state government departments in order to enlist people's participation in the process of nation building. The self help groups also came into existence since local organizations are a necessary condition for effective implementation of various development programmes at the grassroots level. These organizations also provided adequate human resources to convey the development messages to the women and weaker sections in the rural areas. The grassroots women realized that they are masters of their own destiny through their direct participation in decision making and implementation processes.

In Karnataka, satellite communication was effectively used for training Gram Panchayat Members as effective change agents and catalysts of development. The Indian Space Research Organization, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj department, Women and Child Development Department were involved in the this project which created notable awareness among the elected representatives. During 2002-04, Karnataka State trained Gram Panchayat Members by using SATCOM technology with a view to prepare grounds for democratic decentralization and development administration through active people's participation. The training programme provided unique opportunity for participants to explore new ideas and initiatives toward effective implementation of grassroots level development programmes.

The communications media have played a role in the issues and concerns for basic development of the people but this role was largely restricted to the

ruling elite and educated middle class in the urban areas. The implementation of Right to Information Act, 2005 has enabled the beneficiaries of government welfare programmes to become aware of the facilities and benefits. The goals of transparency, accountability, good governance and participatory development can be achieved well if this right is implemented all over the country. Communications media have also played a considerable role in demand generation by providing basic information and creating awareness about various development projects implemented by the government agencies and non-government organizations.

The development policies, models and programmes have not brought about absolute progress of the mankind in India during the last 64 years of national independence. Development communication initiatives have brought about limited success in the countryside due to urbanization, commercialization and liberalization of media in India. People's participation and empowerment of people are currently accepted as meaningful alternatives to communication and development in India. Communication scholars and social activists have advocated the need for participatory communication and development in a developing country like India.

Series of examples of participatory development are seen in the Indian Republic since the concept of sustainable development is adopted toward meeting the needs and aspirations of present generations without affecting the right to the progress of the future generations. The United Nations organized about 189 countries in September 2000 to commit themselves for development of underprivileged and disadvantaged sections of the population under the banner of Millennium Development Goals. India is also one of the signatories to the Millennium Declaration which reaffirms universal values of equity, mutual respect and shared responsibility for the conditions of all peoples and seeks to redress globalization's hugely unequal benefits. Eight Millennium Development Goals: 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) Achieve universal primary education, 3) Promote gender equity and empower women, 4) Reduce child mortality, 5) Improve maternal mortality, 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, 7) Ensure environmental sustainability and 8) Develop a global partnership for development emerged from this declaration which has given a new dimension to the practice of development communication in India and other developing nations.

Communications media and judicial organizations have also demonstrated healthy activism and complemented the efforts of government and private sectors toward establishing a

welfare state in Indian Republic. A perusal of media contents rightly reveals that development communication is not responsive to the needs of the people who have a right to development communication in civilized society. Scientific evaluation of development communication services assumes great significance in this age of developmentalism. Development communication is the only way to broaden the agenda of planning and include all stakeholders in the process of nation building.

CONCLUSION

Indian Republic needs a communication strategy which should be considered as a sub-system of the overall grassroots development system. Optimum use of all grassroots level communication channels in proper combinations can certainly bring about development in the rural areas. The global media should also be actively involved in the process of development communication as a matter of corporate social responsibility. The media institutions need to be sensitized on their social and developmental obligations in the age of globalization. The future agenda for development communication at the grassroots level must deal with the process of participatory communication and development since globalization in media scenario assumes profound significance in the new millennium. Thus, factor

analysis addresses the affiliation of media variables as systems and sub-systems in the contemporary socio-economic scenario. The temporal constraint in the behaviour of the major systems and sub-systems envisages future investigations at different time periods and scales thereby evaluation of future socio-economic conditions could be appreciated.

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