

Communication for Rural Development in India: An Overview

Communication & Journalism
Research
3 (1&2) p 19-26
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masscomhod@uoc.ac.in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

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Abstract

"The soul of India lives in its villages", declared Gandhi at the beginning of 20th century. The development of the county depends on its rural development. Communication plays a vital role in the development of any society. Communication is a complex process which is closely associated with social, economic, political and cultural structures and processes. Development communication came to the Third World Countries in the 1960s as an important component of the developmental package. Many scholars have studied the role of communication in the process of development. The essence of ideology of developmental Communication is crucial for the creation of a new society on the basis of social justice. Communication is indeed a major development resource in the process of sustainable rural development in India. A new upward movement for development has emerged with the decentralization of democratic system in the country. The current article provides an overview of the communication for sustainable rural development in India.

Keywords

communication, rural development, democracy, third world countries

Introduction

Communication is as old as the humanity itself. Communication has been viewed as the process of sharing information, experience and expertise between the source of the communication and the users of the communication services. Communication is defined as the exchange of information, education, entertainment, guidance, counselling and other services which benefit the mankind intellectually and otherwise. Communication is a linear process of information transmission, causing or contributing to change in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Communication is closely associated with social, economical, political, and cultural structures and processes.

Communication etymologically implies sharing, a community of interests and social cohesion based on social needs and aspirations. The Mac Bride commission (1980) states that “communication maintains and animates life” It is also the motor and expression of social activity and civilization. The task of communication has become ever more complicated and subtle to contribute to the liberation of mankind from want, oppression and fear and to unite it in community and communion, solidarity and understanding. However, unless some basic structural changes are introduced, the potential benefits of technological and communication development will hardly be put at the disposal of the majority of mankind”.

Development is the watchword of 21st century planners. Conscious efforts are made by the governments all over the world to achieve development encompassing all spheres of life – social, economical, political and spiritual. Development scholars have proposed various theories and models during the last few decades. Development agencies have set various goals for the achievement of development and followed certain models. The necessary key to any development is a change in the attitudes and actions of the persons affected by the development. Such concept acquired importance especially after the Second World War. There are many theories of development that are only partially expressed in economic terms. Every country perceives development in unmistakable terms as an irreversible process to maintain and raise the living standards of its people. Practically it is impossible to reach a consensus on a working definition of development.

The concept of development has undergone series of radical changes over a period of time. This fixation with the “Dominant Paradigm” in the fifties and sixties slowly gave a way for a critical evaluation of its efficiency and relevance. Today in all developing countries, development is considered to be a subject of special concern. The economic approach is being replaced with social, political and cultural matrix, which emphasizes a new set of indicators of development.

The champions of new paradigm of development offered new definitions of development which emphasize growth with equality, decentralization, democratization, social justice, empowerment of the weaker sections and so on. Many scholars in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East and other parts of the

under developed world have seriously thought of alternative approaches to development to overcome the imbalance created by the western model and to bring about immediate development and communication order. The role of communication in the processes of social change and economic development is now widely recognized by the scholars and policy makers all over the globe.

Concept of development communication

The role of communications media systems was seen as critical in popularizing the beneficial effects of various development projects and enlisting active people's participation in the process of development. A new discipline called development communication emerged on the basis of the wrings of scholars who argued that communications media were agents of social changes and indicators of national development.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation defines development communication as the planned and systematic use of communication, through interpersonal and mass communication channels. They are

1. To collect and change information among all those concerned in planning a development initiative, with the aim of reaching a consensus on the development problems being faced and the options for their solution.
2. To mobilize people for development action, and to assist in solving problems and misunderstandings that may arise during project implementation
3. To enhance the pedagogical and communication skills of development agents so that they may dialogue more effectively with their audiences
4. To apply communication technology to training and extension programmes, particularly at the grass root level, in order to improve their quality and impact.

A commonly used definition of development communication is the one given by Nora C. Quebral in 1973 "Development communication is the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater economic and social equality and the larger fulfilment of the human potential". While the Quebral definition remains a salient one, ore recent definition reflects the thinking, which has taken place over the past decades.

Rural development communication in India

The positive role of communication in rural development has been recognized in India before and after independence. Buddha, Basava, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Joythi

Bha Phuley, Dayananda Saraswathi, Govinda Ranade, Balgangadhara Tilk, Goplala Krishna Gokahle, Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar, many other philosophers, social reformers and national builders had practiced development communication in an informal way. They were great development educationists and communicators who led series of social reformation and national building movements in India during pre- independence era.

Buddha fought against the dominant forces which ruled the ancient India and liberated the mankind from the draconian clutches of traditionalism which was responsible for uneven development of people in India. Buddha propagated truth, non – violence, equality, fraternity, freedom and collective welfare all through his life and established an egalitarian society in India 2500 years ago. The Panchasheela and Astangamarga were great tools of emancipation and empowerment, which are emulated by the mankind regardless of religion and region.

Basava established *Anubavamantapa*, which is regarded as the foremost democratic forum in Karnataka and created several *Vachanakaras* who served the humankind. He created an egalitarian society in Karnataka and remains as the great social reformer, mass educator and development communicator in the history of Karnataka.

Mahatma Gandhi used traditional cultural symbolic systems, print media and inter-personal communication tools to propagate new ideas, values and behaviours among the masses. His papers “IndianOpinion, Young India, Harijan and Navajeevan”were great tools of development communication since Gandhi provided multi –faceted education to the people of Indian. Satyagraha was the greatest instrument of development communication, which was used to protest the anti-Indian policies and programmes of the colonial rulers. Gandhi also launched Sarvodaya movement,which used traditional forms and philosophies of communication to meet user needs in the rural and remote areas. This approach Considered local culture as a facilitator of development in India.

The British rulers implemented the Government of India Act, 1935 that favoured the control of radio broadcasting by the central government since it was a powerful instrument of propaganda and development. Radio was used as a means of dissemination of news about administration, agriculture, revenue and other aspects of development. Radio was primarily used to broadcast news, curre4nt affairs, music and cultural programmes during those days. However limited efforts were made to provide development support broadcasting services to the people since radio was simple, cheaper, flexible and accessible medium of mass communication in the country.

The framers of Indian constitution have accorded priority to freedom of speech and expression Article 19 (1) (a) which is a fundamental right to communication and development. The five-year plan was a major instrument for achieving the goals

of social change and economic development through public sector investment in industrialization.

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 behaviour 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.

The government of India (1953) emphasized the role of communication in development in the first five-year plan document thus: "A widespread understanding of the plan is an essential stage in its fulfilment. An understanding of the priorities of the plan will enable each person to relate his or her role to the larger purposes of the national as a whole.

All available methods of communication have to be developed and the people approached through the written and spoken words no less than through radio, film song and drama"

The five-year plan documents also reveal the significance of communication in the process of rural development in 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.

However, 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 require4d planned, deliberated and systematic communication inputs to widen the horizon of development and expedite the process of development.

Scholars have also studied the role of communication in the process of rural development and suggested appropriate media and measures for the improvement of the status of development communication in India. The government departments, non- government organisation, 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 Indian Radio 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 establish 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 Pune 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 centres and the government agencies.

The government of India has formulated rural 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. The community development programme was implemented in the country with a view to improve the social and economic status of villages. The government of India established the directorate of Field publicity and created regional information units with mobile cinema vans that showed films on various rural developmental endeavours. The Film Division produced newsreels and documentaries on communal harmony, national integration and other subjects related to development projects. Agriculture and family planning were the thrust area of area of development communication services offered by the government. The green revolution gave a fillip to the practice of development communication in this country.

Agricultural universities established Krishi Vigyan Kendras and spearheaded the campaign for increased agricultural production and productivity in rural area. Radio broadcasts, field publicity campaigns, extension programmes and audio-visual communications were the salient features of this campaign.

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)

The implementation of 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, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Prime minister Rozgar Yojana and other programmes in the decades of 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s called for utilization of communications media for the purpose of motivating and persuading people to take active part in the process of development. The agriculture 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 and adoption family planning methods.

Information, education and communication (IEC) was perceived as the appropriate communication model in 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 organization 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 rural 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.

The India Space Research Organisation (ISRO) established rural television project in Kheda district of Gujarat near Ahmedabad, where the space application centre was located following the SITE project. 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 private sector and commercial organization have successfully used corporate communication and advertising campaigns to generate demand for their goods and services in this age of competitiveness. The government sector and non-government organisations are certainly lagging behind in generating public enthusiasm practice of rural development communication for several reasons. The government functionaries and activists of non-government organization are not working together on the basis of sound vision and missionary zeal in order to do absolute justice to their role as rural development communicators.

Conclusion

The vision of 21st century may remain empty and the progress towards that goal delays if the policy makers and implementers of various rural development

programmes fail to establish the communication network at various levels and extends the base of informed skilled and competent people for participatory and balanced development in the countryside. Development communication is the premise of progress in our modern society. What is new is the realization in today's increasingly democratizing world, lack of development communication and restraints on the flow of information directly undermine development of every kind in the rural areas. The challenge facing the society today is how to widen the reach of rural development communication, how to make accessible to people everywhere and how to empower the rural people in every aspect. It is here that the social responsibility of the media, government and non-government bodies assumes profound significance. The country needs a communication strategy, which should be considered as a sub-system of the integrated rural development system. Optimum use of all communication channels in proper combinations can certainly bring about rural development in the country. In the absence of planned, systematic and sustainable development communication, inclusive, integrated and sustainable rural development is blocked, poverty is spread and self-reliance becomes a casualty.

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