

What Does Development Communication Mean To Managers of Mass Media?*

John L. Woods

I SEE TWO VERY ENCOURAGING developments taking place in Asia. First of all, government officials who are responsible for key decision-making for socio-economic development programmes are beginning to recognize that their programmes must be relevant to people, especially the poor. Increased attention to the social component of socio-economic development is being reflected in more and more national development plans. Secondly, I see an increased interest among all kinds of communications officials, including mass media managers like yourselves, to make available their resources for socio-economic development programmes. I think this working seminar is an excellent example of how Asian mass media leaders are studying how their resources can be used to benefit national development programmes. I am happy to be with you today because the goal of DSCS Bangkok is to help governments build a bridge between the development decision-makers and the managers of the various types of communication resources.

Having spent quite a few years as a working communication specialist, I believe that I understand your problems and interests. However, today I see my role as representing government development administrators. From their perspective I want to first present the view of utilizing communication to facilitate development programmes. Then I want to raise five key issues which communication, especially mass media, managers must begin to consider if they are to make a contribution to national socio-economic development programmes.

1. Planned versus Spontaneous Socio-Economic Development

When we speak of development communication, probably the first confusion that arises is defining "development" in operational terms. I will side step the actual definition of development, but rather for this discussion I want to distinguish between what appears to be two types of socio-economic development.

"Spontaneous development" has been taking place throughout the world for many centuries. An example of this is a community or family that

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changes some aspect of daily life which results in improving their social or economic well being. This spontaneous development can take place by inputs generated within the community or by some inputs brought in from outside. These inputs can be new ideas, materials, products, etc. Spontaneous development does not occur as a direct result of an externally planned programme or national development plan.

"Planned development" is change which has resulted from outside programmes that are planned and implemented by government agencies. In most Asian governments the overall responsibility for planned socio-economic development lies with their national central planning units. However, at the operational level the primary decision-making for planning and implementing specific development programmes lie with administrators in the agricultural, health/family planning, and industrial sectors. In many countries each of these sectors may have more than one ministry.

I feel that mass media probably have made significant contributions to spontaneous development. This has probably come about without the conscious effort of the recipients, the media or the government development workers. I believe that much of the academic writings about the role of mass media in development has concentrated on spontaneous development. The impact on spontaneous development is almost impossible to measure because there are so many variables in addition to mass media. Since there are so many variables and unknowns, almost any particular discipline can claim credit for influencing it or suggest failures.

Today I want to limit my comments to the field of planned socio-economic development programmes. I want to investigate with you how a better bridge can be built between the development administrators in agriculture, health/family planning, and industry and the managers of various communication resources.

2. How Do You Define Communication?

We are constantly getting in trouble because of the different meanings of the term "communication". I assume that most of you would define it generally as "mass communication". This particular workshop is concentrating on the print media although I am sure there will also be discussion about other mass media such as broadcasting and the cinema.

A group of agricultural extension leaders or adult educators would define communication much differently, primarily limiting themselves to face-to-face or inter-personal communications. People from the library field think of communications more in terms of clearinghouses and the flow of scientific information. Anthropologists and sociologists consider traditional folk media such as plays and music as important communication channels. The field of education views communications as being primarily textbooks, audio-visual instructional materials and classroom teaching. On the other hand, many government agencies, private companies and universities see

social survey research as a form of communication. Managers look at communications as being management information systems or organizational communications techniques.

For the purposes of this discussion I want to make it clear that I consider all of these as being legitimate communication resources or techniques that should be utilized in the planning and implementing of planned socio-economic development programmes.

3. Development Communications—What Is It?

From the perspective of a development administrator I believe the best analogy for development communication is the basic concept of marketing. A company would never design a new product without first doing a considerable amount of consumer research. This information from the intended clientele to the planners influences the final design of a product or service. Most companies have very extensive organizational communications systems for linking all of the various operating units that are involved in planning, producing, distributing and evaluating results. When you move towards the output side, most companies put a major emphasis on training field salesmen and providing them with sales materials to use with their clientele. A very carefully integrated advertising campaign using mass media is usually part of the total scheme. Throughout the introduction of a new product line a company will very carefully monitor results and obtain feedback on consumer behaviour, field staff performance, advertising effectiveness, and other factors which are constantly fed back for product modification and adjusting the overall marketing plan. The development field does not really have a systematic programme that would be comparable to what marketing does for industry. I see development communication performing this function for the development field.

Development communication must look at four basic flows of information: (1) from (or about) the intended beneficiaries to development decision-makers prior to the design of the development programme and then continued monitoring of beneficiary behavioral change throughout the programme implementation; (2) from the implementing agency to the intended beneficiary; (3) within the beneficiaries' community; and (4) among the various governmental and non-governmental units that are involved in the planning and implementation of a development programme.

I believe mass media people have been guilty of taking a much too simplistic view of development communications. For the most part they have looked at only increasing the amount of information from the development agency to the intended beneficiary. In recent years they have talked about a two-step flow of information from the development agency through mass media to a local change agent who then relays it to the intended beneficiary. Again, this is much too simplistic. Chart 1 is a "systems chart" illustrating how many different groups must be included

in the planning and implementing of a single government development programme. An administrator must look at each of these groups as an audience at one time or another during the planning and implementing of a development programme. There must be planned communications among all of these groups.

I feel that the greatest communication problem in development programmes is with the flow of information from the intended beneficiaries to the development decision-makers. Survey research centres have collected much relevant information on villagers. Unfortunately, very little of this has been transformed into useable information for decision-makers to use. Also, many decision-makers assume they know what is going on at the village level. Much of the new technology is created based on information received from the Western world and designed with almost no consideration of the intended beneficiary within an individual developing country. This is probably the greatest reason why there is a growing gap between "haves" and "have nots" in developing countries. Even though there is a considerable amount of talk about closing the gap between the elite and poor, I see only nominal movement by government development decision-makers in utilizing relevant information on the intended beneficiary. Also, I see the mass media almost completely ignoring this very important communication function.

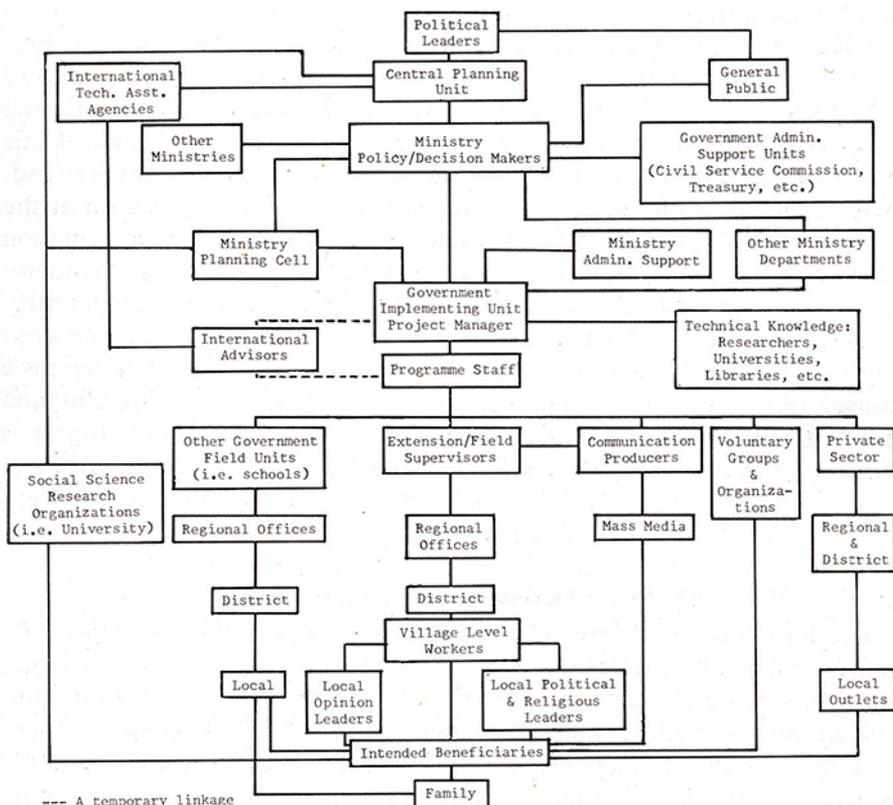
4. Some Confusion About Development Communications

In addition to the confusion caused by differing definitions of development and communications there are, especially among mass media people, two other misunderstandings. First, I see the role of development communications as being an integral element in the overall development planning and implementation process. For the most part, communications people — especially mass media managers — are very reluctant to become an integral part of the central development decision-making process. They are preoccupied with techniques, equipment, free flow of information and similar issues rather than integrating into government development programmes.

A second misunderstanding I very often see among mass media people regards the purpose of development communication. Many times they think that "telling people about development programmes" is development communications. I see this as a public relations or public information activity and definitely not development communications. The function of development communications, being an integral part of the development process, is basically management and non-formal education. When you look at the social system flow chart below, note that each box represents an audience which means that the specific development communications functions and the types of messages will vary tremendously. They must vary if the development communications activity is to be successful.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Primary Linkages



5. Issues Mass Media Managers Must Consider

Before getting to the five specific issues I do want to point out that in overall terms mass media perform many different functions. Probably the greatest amount of the mass media resources is devoted to entertainment. However, this would vary greatly among the various media such as broadcasting, newspapers, cinema houses, etc. Only one small portion of mass media resources should be utilized for development purposes. In the five issues outlined below I am only concentrating on that small portion of your media resources that should be allocated to planned development activities.

- Who controls this resource?** — No matter what political ideology you follow there is always the question of who controls what goes through the media. Even within government, the media control question

becomes, “does the Ministry of Information or the Ministry of Agriculture control the portion of the media related to agricultural development programmes?”

- b. **How do you pay for development communication activities?** — It is generally assumed that development communications activities are not commercially viable. Schools, agricultural extension services, scientific information clearinghouses, etc., are not profit-making operations. If you are a government media channel or a private one, you must receive sufficient money to perform the development communication activities. An easy solution might be for the government development sector, such as agriculture, to pay the cost. However, it must be recognized that funding is linked to control.
- c. **What audiences can your media effectively influence?** — As indicated above, I feel mass media managers have concentrated much of their efforts on the wrong audience. This is especially true, I feel, for the print media. Instead of villagers, maybe your audience for development messages should be political leaders, development decision-makers, and the researchers who are developing new technology. How many of your reporters have attempted to educate these audiences on what life is like in the village?
- d. **How can coordination between communications channels and development decision-makers be improved?** — One linkage is between your individual communication resource and the primary development decision-makers. The second linkage is between your specific communication resource and other communication resources that must be systematically used and carefully coordinated in development communications. How can you be sure that conflicting messages will not be transmitted through various channels of communication?
- e. **How can communicators achieve recognition for contributing to development?** — Mass media managers I have talked with feel they have never been able to achieve any creative status or recognition among the key government development decision-makers. I feel that part of the problem is due to the fact that most communicators know very little about socio-economic development, including the concepts and definitions of terms. I want to challenge you in this meeting to seek out ways in which you can become recognized by the development decision-makers in order for you to join the “development team”. I feel that mass media specialists and people working in the other communications areas must try to be members of the development team in order to make creative contributions to the planning and implementation of socio-economic development programmes. I feel that you can make a much greater contribution than just being technicians responsible for delivering messages.