

# Fading Future of Development Communication

BINOD C AGRAWAL  
VINOD KUMAR PANDEY

## Abstract

*The paper narrates the story of what has been witnessed over half a century while working and researching in development communication for last four decades. In the early 70s, social scientists were engaged in social evaluation of one year (1975-76) world famous experiment and the largest satellite based techno-social initiative for education and development known as Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) (Agrawal 1981). Briefly this paper aims to describe and discuss what were experiences of development communication over a period of time in India<sup>1</sup>. A synoptic analysis is presented to examine as to what happened to development communication as a concept and practice in national and global perspective.<sup>2</sup>. The effort is to bring out the main features and the diversities in the multi-linear evolution of development communication.*

**Keywords:** Development Communication, SITE, Health Communication

**Authors:** **Dr Binod C Agrawal**, Visiting Professor, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad – 380014, India, Email: agrawal.binod.c@gmail.com

**Dr. Vinod Kumar Pandey**, Associate Professor & Head, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad-380 014. India. Email: vinod29.pandey@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

It is important to discuss the term “development” in the context of a large part of Asia and particularly India, which has encountered multiple communication changes within a short

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the ideas have been drawn from the paper entitled “Rise and Fall of Development Communication: The Asian Scene” presented during 22<sup>nd</sup> AMIC annual conference held on 4-7 July 2013 and a paper entitled “Information Communication Technology and Development in India: Perceived Promises and Performances by People” (2014). In addition some of these thoughts were presented on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Celebration Conclave, in Department of Development Communication and Extension, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India, March 13-14, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Part of this section of the paper has been drawn, revised and enlarged from Agrawal:2000a

span of time<sup>3</sup>. Development as commonly understood and expressed by political leaders, academicians and several UN bodies, is an enabling force for improvement of the socio-economic life of the poor. It helps empower the poor, reduce exploitation, oppression and unequal treatment by those having economic, social, psychological and political power. It also means an equitable sharing of resources, improved healthcare and education for all. Communication is considered as a support intervention and pre-condition to accelerate the development process and bring transparency in governance for development.

Indian scholars became aware of the concept of development communication in early seventies of last century and endeavours were made to define terms like “development” or “developmental” communication. It must be mentioned in passing that even today these two terms are being used interchangeably and have found place in the literature of development communication. Other terms used are ‘development support communication’ and ‘development for communication’.

### **Socio-Cultural Perspective of Development**

India is one of the world's oldest and ancient civilisations that evolved, matured and decayed over several millennia and now carving a path of revitalization through democratic political governance aided by digital communication. Historically, an existing divide between rulers and ruled is attributed to British colonial rule in South Asia. It led to creation of small “socially dominant and economically rich” and a large “socially deprived and economically poor” “social class”. As a result, while the rich have had immense access to information and knowledge, both the poor remained confined largely to oral tradition. The imposition of secular non-discriminatory British education during the same period led to creation of another layer of information and knowledge gap between them. Therefore, the rich elite continue to dominate the contemporary social and political scene at the cost of the poor who remain oblivious of media and communication use for any improvement in their existing miserable life. In spite of a large number of development planners who believe media and communication is a panacea for solving major social ills and problems. Apart from development, the introduction of media and communication in the educational process has seen a step forward towards improving the quality of education and bridging the social and educational gap (Agrawal 1993). However, experience

indicates that rich class who could afford access to media and communication have cornered the benefits of development and education. In this respect, it seems that media and communication has, in no way helped the poor despite research studies of selected development projects contradicting the premise. Even if, there was some change due to media and communication intervention, the same could not be made into a national programme to benefit the poor (Agrawal 2000b:13).

### **Current Communication Scenario**

The closing decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century was the opening of historic digital media communication interventions for development. It witnessed enormous and unprecedented changes in every aspect of digital media and communication technologies. India has begun abandoning archaic government control over information, digital media and communication that has lately moved from government control to civil society. Finally after 1995 landmark judgement of Supreme Court of India, airwaves and electronic signals were liberated from century's old colonial bondage and control of government.

International and national private players have taken dominant role in redefining, reshaping and providing telecommunication, broadcasting and information services for development. It has initiated an era of partnership of public and private entrepreneurial skills and abilities to bring about connectivity. It seems media and communication has already started reshaping the life of marginalized. In the backdrop of what has been said, a synoptic analysis is presented to examine as to what happened to development communication as a concept and practice in national and global perspective.<sup>4</sup> The effort is to bring out the main features and the diversities in the multi-linear evolution of development communication.

### **DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

The first compendium on development communication was published in 2009 entitled *Development Communication: Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*. In more than one way, this book represents what was achieved by then in various facets of development over a period of quarter century and brought together development communication experiences from various fields of agriculture extension, home science, health and family planning to mention a

---

<sup>4</sup> Part of this section of the paper has been drawn, revised and enlarged from Agrawal:2000a

few. The publication of development communication compendium attempted to fill the gap of reading material on the subject. Two of the pioneering papers that were included in the compendium was that of Nora C. Quebral (2009a:19-22), Rogers (2009: 239-256), Melkote (2009) and Rogers and Singhal (2009). In the remaining paper a historical analysis of growth and develop of development communication will be attempted with the help of content analysis of journal *Media Asia* which has gone through multitude of changes and in the process got vitiated and lost its original importance, meaning and use<sup>5</sup>. Today, development communication has moved into the arena of “social marketing” in many Asian countries under the tacit pressure of multinational corporations and UN agencies. This is what has been referred to a fading of development communication<sup>6</sup>.

Historically, *Media Asia* first published an article on “development communication” by Nora Quebral in 1973 (Quebral 1973 and 1975). Later Nora Quebral (2009b) elaborated the concept of development communication. According to Quebral, “Development communication uses the communication media to help bring about socio-economic....change in ways that are compatible with its humanistic goals. ... Development Communication is circular and not a linear process and ...It accepts that there is no one model of development” (Quebral 2009:21-22). Further, development communication, shared the prescriptive and empirical characteristics of the parent discipline of agricultural extension and general objective of development (Nora Quebral:1973)<sup>7</sup>. Development communication is a field capable of absorbing and synthesizing varied talents.

Earlier Everett Rogers (1962 and 2003) and Wilbur Schramm (1964) and many others mooted the idea of ‘national development’ and ‘diffusion of innovations for agriculture development’ especially in the United States of America (USA). Their strong argument and assumption was that “communication is a crucial element in the process of development of Third

---

<sup>5</sup> The author has attempted to analyze published articles on Development Communication of *Media Asia* as a part of this presentation. *Media Asia* is one of the leading communication *journals* of Asia. I have reviewed *Media Asia* for a period of forty years between 1973 to 2013 for this purpose.

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_communication)

<sup>7</sup> See “Rise and Fall of Development Communication: The Asian Scene”. It was presented during 22<sup>nd</sup> AMIC annual conference held on 4-7 July 2013.

world society” (Schramm 1964 as quoted by Goonasekhera 2009: 4). In this assumption there was no place for the existing structural inequalities and impediments that would act as barrier for any development, apart from information barriers arising out of multilingual societies of Asia having built-in social hierarchy, structural inequalities and religious heterogeneity.

An insightful critique of development communication was brought out by Narula and Pearce (1986). Narula and Pearce (1986:5) suggested a new “communication perspective” which included “all of the actions taken by the government legislation, public works and the development bureaucracy itself as well as the IEC programme ... as powerful forms of communication”. Hence, Narula and Pearce (1986) recommended that the concept of development communication must recognize the relationships between government and civil society .

In democratic India, in its broadest sense development communication is a post Second World War phenomenon. Hence, its progress and growth must be seen in response to several converging needs of development like Agriculture, AIDS Control, Drinking Water, Health Care and Adult Literacy. Within multiple divergent theoretical and methodological frame development communication began to be practiced for improving socio-economic life of poor and weak. The canvas of development communication today includes non-conventional energy, environment consumer education, political and democratic participation (Agrawal 2009:45). In doing so, development communication assumes that “human behaviour” has a built in plasticity which can be molded, modified and changed through media intervention by persuasion and by creating conducive conditions. In spite of several vigorous and sustained communication interventions in large part of India, limited success has been achieved. One wondered whether development goals can be achieved in a multi-religious, multi-lingual and socially stratified India having built on structural inequalities of access to various kind of resources and power?

Similar observations have been made in the context of Africa and Asia-Pacific countries during (1997-99). Obijiofor, Inayatullah and Stevenson<sup>8</sup> suggest ‘...that there [ICT] are serious barriers to their use in educational and socioeconomic development, such as issues of infrastructure support, access to the ICTs, training and skills development, and hierarchical social relations which

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.metafuture.org/Articles/icts.htm> access on February 26, 2015.

determine who has access to ICTs". In the recent past within India, one has experienced a great deal of "social marketing" approach in place of development communication. However, the Indian university departments and selected educational institutions continue to teach and research development communication though to a lesser extent. Also, scene of development communication has largely shifted from traditional forms of communication including broadcasting to Internet and social media within social-marketing framework.

### **Academic Spur of Development Communication**

In 1976, after the completion of Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) at Ahmedabad a group of scientists, engineers, creative and communication researchers proposed to carry forward the practice of development communication in India. The vision was to push rural development and to boost and accelerate the process of development in which communication would play a critical role. Hence, it was thought essential first to train a cadre of development communication professionals. It was felt that they would be trained and be committed towards rural development. This gave birth to a teaching programme and setting up of "Centre for Development Communication" at Gujarat University, Ahmedabad in 1982. The first batch of students were offered a Diploma. The medium of instruction of teaching was largely English. The 18 months Diploma course attracted bright and young fresh graduate men and women. The programme was a great success and very soon, it was decided to raise the level of Diploma to Masters Degree. Hence, Master of Development Communication (MDC) was born that continues even today though with low visibility and priority as a section under the Department of Mass Communication. Since then several hundred students have passed out and were placed in variety of media/communication organizations. The sad part is that very few students after graduating from MDC actually worked in development communication whereas large majority moved or got absorbed in entertainment media industry. At the turn of the century, the MDC degree lost its sheen and finally has to be integrated with the conventional courses in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Gujarat University. At the same time, a number of departments of Home Science and Extension Education have introduced agricultural communication, development communication and extension in the courses. Similarly in US especially East-West Communication Institute, Honolulu shifted its focus of development communication to other areas and finally East-West Communication Institute was closed down.

### **Development Communication and Extension**

Extension Education as an academic discipline in its many incarnations has the credit to highlight the role of communication in development. In India, departments of agriculture, home science, animal husbandry, fisheries, horticulture, and poultry teach and carry out research in development communication. Due to direct USA assistance to help increase production in India and other Afro-Asian countries, experts visited India and shared their first hand experiences and began to advice and implement a large number of development programmes for meeting the food requirements of the country. The American experts thought there were three missing links in achieving the goal of development. These included appropriate technical information, various agricultural inputs and persuasion if appropriately followed that would increase the agricultural productivity of land and improve the quality of life. In turn, it was thought to help improve the economic condition of the farmers and all those who had depended on agriculture and allied occupations.

“Communication model” for agriculture development was directly borrowed from Mid-Western Sociological Society adoption diffusion model developed by mid western “Rural Sociologists” in USA and later championed by Everett Rogers (1962 and 2003 5<sup>th</sup> edition). In the span of half a century, India is yet to have a major publication on development in India without direct or indirect reference of Everett Rogers (1962) and his other publications. However, at the turn of the century, agriculture communication for development began to shift its focus and now moved into M-service for agriculture development as reported in Bangladesh (Islam, 2011) and also in some parts of India especially Tamil Nadu. Similar references can be found in plenty in the Indian Journal of Extension Education founded and published by an Alumni of University of Wisconsin, US and under publication since 1965. Similar publication could be found elsewhere in the country.

### **Health and Family Planning Communication**

Information, Education and Communication (IEC) approach in health and family planning represents and remained the corner stone of development communication as understood and discussed by several communication scholars in Asian countries. In addition, to a large number of publications in India on Health Communication, *Media Asia* has carried several articles on health IEC from time to time which started as early as in 1974 (Bautista, 1974). *Media Asia* continued such publications until the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, at the turn of the

century, the interest in health communication has hovering around web-based telecommunication health system (Lim Chia Ng and Omar Ismail, 2005).

In India, HIV/AIDS has taken a center stage in the development of health communication since 1986. Several research studies since then in several aspects of HIV/AIDS have been carried out. Also, another focus area has been National Family Health Surveys (NFHS). Malaria healthcare, health insurance for poor occupied a great deal of health communication researchers. Some of the important health communication research sponsored by the Department for International Development (DFID), U.K. during 1997-99, 'Compliance Study of Malaria Control and Research Project (MCRP), Surat District, Gujarat'. It involved a series of studies dealing primarily with compliance behavior of rural folks related to malaria prevention. A large number of media products including posters were developed in project to reach out rural population and were tested in the field before use. It would be difficult to give any definitive conclusion that emerged from the study leading to prevention of malaria in target areas.

Similarly, communication aspects were studied in detail under Reproductive and Child Health project (RCH). The first and second phases of RCH survey were completed in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 respectively. The two-year study covered all 38 districts of the three states namely Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. These surveys provided several demographic and socio-economic estimates and media and communication behavior of men and women to the policy makers and programme managers for implementing and strengthening the ongoing RCH programme at district level. The salient point to mention is that lack of information was not major predicament or barrier of any healthcare programme, It was other structural factors that negatively affected the adoption of healthcare programmes. To a large extent, same can be said about HIV/AIDS related communication approach and outcome.

It seems health concerns and communication strategies for health have shifted. The new effort is increased use of communication technology for health which is continuing along with added focus in HIV/AIDS and sexual health. Similar shift has been observed in conventional family planning communication, though the term development communication is not explicitly recognized in context of health communication.

### **Community Radio and Development**



At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, articles on community radio has frequently appeared in India and in academic circles especially in *Media Asia* along with several edited books on community radio. These articles have been part of research projects supported and carried out by media and communication researchers to assess the possible impact of community radio to accelerate development and empower women. The Indian government has been loudly proclaiming the setting up of 4000 community radio stations for several years but performance and use has been dismal so far. However, community radio in India in its brief history has come a long way without any major contribution in development of poor and other members of civil society<sup>9</sup> (VOICES-UNDP).

### **Current Development Communication: An Indian Perspective**

The rise of development communication seems to have declined at the turn of the century as a concept and practice , which was yet to be fully internalized and accepted by the Indian scholars beyond non-government organizations and in few university departments. Eapen's (1988:67) diagnosis and analysis was that the concept of development communication had opened up a Pandora's box related to the inherent conflicts and contradictions between the stated policy of the state regarding electronic media and actual use for development. Development communication as it stands today is inter disciplinary in approach and content in which almost all disciplines of social sciences have contributed but has anything to do with development and change. As the interest of other disciplines has enlarged the scope of development, the old concept of development communication in India has started dying as an old paradigm.

The privatization of communication, rapid changes in communication technologies and increasing influence of social marketing model for development has already undermined the role of development communication. The other model of development communication emerged from China, which is not fully understood in a democratic country like India. Publications on China's development communication seemed to have somewhat different meaning, focus and slant that are yet to be fully understood. Earlier, communication scholars had raised a question: how transferable could be development communication experiences of China in other Asian countries including India. It has been reported that in China development depended on interpersonal

---

<sup>9</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/ev.php\\_URL\\_ID=24250&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/ev.php_URL_ID=24250&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

communication then through intervention of electronic media (Chu 1987). Several papers in *Media Asia* have covered a variety of development communication articles on China, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Pakistan and Bangladesh without giving any universal or Asian prospective which could meaningfully be applied in India.

Further, analysis of *Media Asia* publications at the turn of the century showed that development communication started losing its importance under the pressure of market economy, international financial institutions like Asian Development Bank and World Bank and international donor agencies, and other UN agencies. K.E. Eapen (1988) thought development communication was “Country Cousin Syndrome of Development”. The brief story certainly provides a declining trend of development communication at least in India. Now, one is tempted to say that colleagues of the Euro-American countries might re-coin a new label or concept or title to sell development communication in the globalized market economy.

## REFERENCES

1. Agrawal Binod C (1981), *SITE Social Evaluation: Results, Experiences and Implications*, Ahmedabad, Space Applications Centre
2. Agrawal Binod C (1993), *Communication Technology and Democracies of South Asia: The Danger of Curbing Freedom*. In S.Splichal and J.Wasko (eds.), *Communication and Democracy*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
3. Agrawal Binod C (2000a), *Culture, Communication and Development: An Indian Perspective*. In *Third Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology*, ed. M.S. Gore, Indian Council of Social Science Research and MANAK Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
4. Agrawal Binod C (2000b), *Cultural Colonization through Communication Media and Communication Convergence: A Perspective*. Presented in the ‘Digital Millennium-Opportunities for Asian Media’, 9<sup>th</sup> AMIC Annual Conference, Singapore. 29 June – 1 July 2000.
5. Agrawal Binod C (2014), *Information Communication Technology and Development in India: Perceived Promises and Performances by People*” Paper to be presented during 38th Social Science Congress on 27-31 December 2014 with the focal theme is "Knowledge System, Scientific Temper and The People" at Lucknow.
6. Anonymous (2005), *Compilation of Research Abstracts (1991 - 2005)*. New Delhi, Lady Irwin College.
7. Bautista, Paulina F.(1974), *Applying advertising principles to family planning information campaigns Media Asia* pp 27-34.
8. Chu, Godwin C (1987), *Development Communication in the Year 200. Future Trends and Directions*. In *Rethinking Development Communication*. N. Jayaweera and S. Amunugama, eds.,

- pp 95-107. Singapore: The Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC)
9. Dubey, V. K, K. N Pandey and Ranshekhar Pandey eds. (2009), *Development Communication: Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*. Lucknow: International Book Distributing Co (Publication Division)
  10. Eapen, K.E. (1988), *Development Communication: A Country Cousin Syndrome ICCTR Journal Vol. 1No. 1*, pp 67-74.
  11. Goonasekhara Anura (2009), *What is Development Communication? In Development Communication Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*, eds. V.K .Dubey, K.N. Pandey, Ranshekhar Pandey; pp3-18. Lucknow; International Book Distribution Co.
  12. Islam, Sirajul (2011), *Evaluation of an M-Service for Farmers in a Developing Region: A Case Study from Rural Bangladesh*. *Media Asia Vol 38, Number 1*,pp 41-51.
  13. Lim, Chee Peng , Wan Chia Ng and Omar Ismail (2005), *A Web-based Tele-health System for Medical Diagnosis and Information Management*
  14. Melkote Srinivas R (2009), *Academics vs Communication Practitioners: Implications of their Paradigms on Development Support Communication In Development Communication Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*, eds. V.K .Dubey, K.N. Pandey, Ranshekhar Pandey; pp 257-270. Lucknow; International Book Distribution Co.
  15. Narula, Uma (2009), *Priorities in Development Communication Research in India – Some Salient Issues. In Development Communication Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*, eds. V.K .Dubey, K.N. Pandey, Ranshekhar Pandey; pp 151-170. Lucknow; International Book Distribution Co.
  16. Narula, Uma and W. Barnett Pearce (1986), *Development as Communication. A Perspective on India*. Carbondale: Southern Ullinois University Press.
  17. Obijiofor, Levi; Inayatullah, Sohail and Stevenson, Tony (2015), [http://www.metafuture.org/Articles/media\\_and\\_communications.htm](http://www.metafuture.org/Articles/media_and_communications.htm)
  18. Quebral, Nora C (1973), *Teaching Communication for Development*. In AMIC Refresher Course On Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), Singapore.
  19. Quebral, Nora C (1975), *Development Communication: Where does it Stand Today*. *Media Asia Vol 2 No, 4*.
  20. Quebral, Nora C (2009a), *Priorities in Development Communication Research in India – Some Salient Issues. In Development Communication Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*, eds. V.K .Dubey, K.N. Pandey, Ranshekhar Pandey; pp151-170. Lucknow; International Book Distribution Co.
  21. Quebral, Nora C (2009b), *Concepts and Practice of Development Communication. In Development Communication: Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies*. eds. V.K .Dubey, K.N. Pandey, Ranshekhar Pandey; pp19-27. Lucknow; International Book Distribution Co.

22. Rogers, Everett M (1962), Diffusion of Innovations: New York,The Free Press
23. Rogers, Everett M (2003), Diffusion of Innovations: New York,The Free Press (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)
24. Schramm, Wilbur (1964), Mass Media and National Development. Paris: UNESCO.
25. Singhal A and Rogers E.M. (2009), A High-Tech Route to Development *In* Development Communication Applied to Journalism and Mass Communication, Extension Education and Communication, Rural Development and Management Studies, eds. V.K .Dubey, K.N. Pandey, Ranshekhar Pandey; pp239-256. Lucknow; International Book Distribution Co.
26. VOICES-UNDP (2004) [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/ev.php\\_URL\\_ID=24250&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/ev.php_URL_ID=24250&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)