

PSC Paper No. 5

"Communications for Development"

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You have already heard some valuable contributions about the importance of communication techniques, when applied to development. I would like to discuss now some of the developments which have taken place here in Eastern Africa, and also further afield, in putting these ideas into practice.

But first I feel I should re-state some basic facts so that you get a better grasp of the situation from the start. I find wherever I go that people tend to confuse development support, or programme support, operations with ordinary publicity or information work. It is important to appreciate the differences, right from the outset.

DSC, or PSC, is not publicising through the media of news, radio, film or TV, Government officials visiting a project, laying a foundation stone or making speeches. These "publicity" activities cannot motivate anyone who is affected by the programme, nor can they stimulate the appeal for innovations to be introduced. They may have their place, but we are not so much concerned with those here than in communication to stimulate development.

You might well say: "Why bother to motivate people? Surely it is enough that the Government is giving them some help; they should be grateful for it and benefit from it". But human nature does not really work like that, and in fact millions of dollars in aid all over the world are being wasted as I speak to you here today, simply because of this attitude - that people should be glad to get help.

Communication Gap

It can result in vast sums in development aid lying unused because the human element has been ignored, or overlooked. There is what we call "the communication gap" and it can hinder a project in various ways. If the beneficiaries are told beforehand what the development project is all about and how it will improve their lives - not just change their lives - they will tend to be more co-operative.

We take an extreme, hypothetical case - you don't go to an area, say a river valley, where thousands of people are living and cultivating quite contentedly, and tell them they must move out next month because the Government has new plans.

The plan may in itself be a good one - such as the construction of a multi-million dollar hydro-electricity scheme on the site these people are at present living. They must move because the land is to be flooded and their homes and fields will become inundated with the vast new dam which is to take shape.

The project may not only be a national development priority which will benefit the entire country, but it may mean that the area involved is to be an industrial site, the people housed in modern, sanitary conditions in contrast to their present insanitary and temporary homes.

All these things must be explained carefully to the people before the Government makes any moves. And even if it is in the national interest that they must be moved, you have to persuade them it is also in their interests.

Must Think the Same Way

And, most important of all, the man from the big city who is planning the communication campaign, must try to think like the people in that piece of countryside, and not apply his own judgements and his own values. Being a city man, taking city facilities for granted, he might assume that everyone wants the same conditions.

He must put himself in the position of the people living in the valley and look at it from their point of view, trying to anticipate what awkward problems might arise from the change that he and the experts have not thought about.

It is obvious, I am sure, that before mounting a communications campaign to back up a development project, very painstaking research has

to be gone into in the preliminary planning, and much of it from a sociological aspect. In brief, the campaign should be planned in co-operation with a communications specialist and a sociologist who has closely studied the people in the area to which the message is to be directed. It goes without saying, of course, that the Government must also be closely involved, for it is the Government's message which the others are trying to get across most effectively.

An Old Example

One of the oldest situations in this context, which my colleagues from FAO often quote, is taken from Italy, almost 300 years ago. In the Pontine Marshes, just outside Rome, the authorities had worked for almost a hundred years to drain the extensive marsh, or swamp, to create arable land nearby which could yield much-needed food for the Romans.

However, while the city dwellers welcomed the operation, since it opened up prospects of their getting fruit and vegetables and other supplies more plentifully and cheaper than before, this wasn't the reaction of the people inhabiting the swamps.

The swamp dwellers always earned their livelihood from fishing and as they saw their income drop day by day with the gradual draining of the swamps and area in which to fish, they reacted quite naturally - they wrecked the whole Pontine project, tearing down the dikes or walls that had been built to keep out the water.

We didn't have development, or project support communication, 300 years ago, but maybe if someone had tried to communicate with these swamp dwellers before they became disillusioned with the project, the disaster could have been averted. Perhaps it could have been explained to the fishermen - and their families - that they could have switched their mode of living from being fishermen, to being cultivators, and once they had accepted the change, and been trained for the new way of life, they could have prospered and become much better off as farmers than as fishermen.

I am sure you can think of several situations in your own countries where a properly-planned and executed communications campaign would be a very useful addition to a development programme. In fact, there is a tendency today among development planners to feel that communications should not be looked on merely as an addition or an appendage tagged on to a project as an afterthought, but should be an integral part of the programme, right from the start; right from the planning stage and that the communication aspect must rate as high a priority as all the other technical considerations.

Motivation and Training

I said earlier that what we are concerned with in such communication campaigns is simply - motivation. But I also mentioned the training aspect, and this goes hand in hand with motivation, because once the people have accepted the idea of change and are prepared to go along with it, they usually need some form of training so that they can adapt themselves.

It might be training for teachers in an entirely new concept of education, such as we have in Tanzania with education for self-reliance, where many of the old ideas have to be dispelled and new values accepted and included.

It could be training for mothers to change the diet of their infants so that they give the babies a higher intake of protein to make up for deficiencies in their traditional diet. (I could digress here and say maybe that whereas the medical people pinpointed the diet deficiencies in a community, the sociologists might come up with the interesting point that the traditional diet used to have adequate proteins but had to be changed years back because of some new developments in the area, and that it should not be so much a matter of persuading people to add proteins to their diet, but finding an acceptable substitute for a food which they used to have, but can no longer grow.)

I hope that what I have been saying, helps to clarify the difference between ordinary publicity work, aimed at showing what Government or local authorities are doing for the people, and PSC, which is aimed at motivation, training and, where necessary, persuasion, so that programmes can be implemented speedily and things can run smoothly once implemented.

Development programmes can founder because of other factors too. It often happens that because of minor local problems, which were never taken into account, a project is held up for years because these small local problems cannot be over-come. Once they are, the initial goodwill that had been generated when the project was first announced, has lost its momentum, maybe become "stale", and there is no longer any enthusiasm among the people - only disappointment and frustration at the long delays.

Here again there is a role for communication men to play in re-generating the enthusiasm, explaining away the delays and creating a proper atmosphere for the development to take place.

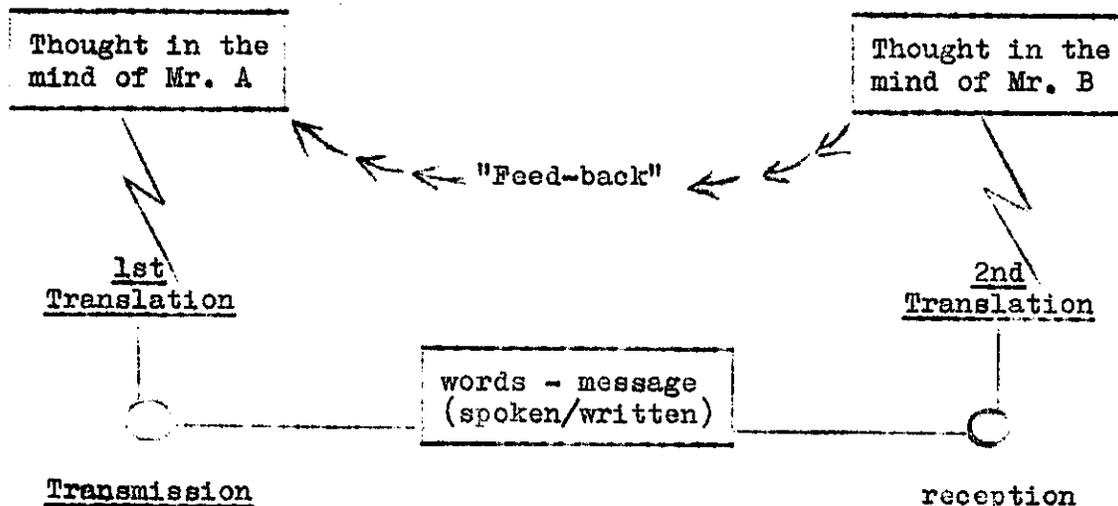
A Definition of PSC

So now that I have given you some of the essential background to the subjects, let's define Development Support Communication. It can be described as:-

1. Promoting understanding of development objectives among the people affected.
2. Creating motivation towards change.
3. Eliciting participation and action in the development process.
4. Instilling a sense of responsibility and self-reliance in the individual and his family.
5. Assisting and supporting extension and training in the field.

It is important to think in terms of two-way communication. Let's look at it this way - in a diagram.

COMMUNICATION FROM A TO B



Not only is it important to think of the way the message travels in one direction, from the **transmitter** to the receiver, but also how it comes back again.

In the armies of olden days, it used to be standard practice for the soldier giving the order to repeat it so as to avoid any misunderstanding. That was all very well, but it would have been better if the soldier receiving the command had been asked to repeat it. It is in the process of passing or communicating the message that a mistake can occur, maybe in mis-hearing, or mis-interpreting - and it can have dire consequences.

By having the soldier who received the message repeating back what he heard - and understood - we get "feedback", and this is the second direction of the two-way communication.

A successful communication campaign should take into consideration the "feedback". It can be done in various ways, even to the extent of

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using video equipment to go into the field and interview people on a project to get their views on how the project is working - or is not working. Then the planners back at headquarters put their heads together and weigh up this "feedback" and see whether some improvements may be made in implementation, if it should turn out that there is some strong opposition developing against one particular aspect of the scheme.

I should mention here that the United Nations Development Programme has asked all specialised agencies of the UN family executing UNDP-assisted projects to keep a close watch on projects for emergent communications problems. They are thus fully aware of the need for "feedback".

Communication Problems in the Field

There are three main "communication gaps" in development work:

1. A gap between those carrying out development work and those to be affected by it. More specifically, this type of gap exists when a project is misunderstood or mistrusted by the local population, or when broader development activities such as family planning, health education, or general rural development fail to enlist support and participation.
2. A gap between a development project and government echelons. This type of gap can grow up when a long period of time elapses between project formulation and project implementation: the officials responsible for the original planning may have moved on to other assignments or ministries and their sponsors may not understand, or agree with the original objectives of the project. Lack of interest in high level government circles will permeate to the lower and executive levels also, with obvious loss of operational effectiveness.
3. The gap that occurs in teaching, training or extension situations when no audio-visual aids are available or when attempts are being made to use audio-visual aids that are not entirely relevant to the situation.

Typical examples of these three different sorts of communication gaps are as follows:

Gap 1. Misunderstanding around UNDP assisted projects have led to local populations damaging drainage installations, throwing stones into boreholes, or merely watching a demonstration project passively with no discernible inclination to put into practice what they see.

Gap 2. Lack of awareness of a project's activities, purpose and importance among government circles and the nation at large have led to governments closing down potentially successful projects, to difficulties over recruitment of the best available national expertise and to innumerable detail problems of project implementation - everything from very long delays in customs clearance of vitally needed equipment and spares to lateness in meeting available counterpart contributions.

Gap 3. This very common communications problem shows up in the majority of training, teaching and extension projects in developing countries. Attempts to teach African pastoralists better animal husbandry with a slide set made, say, in Denmark are unlikely to succeed, as would be attempts to train Asian nutrition workers with a film made in Sweden. The shortage of suitable training and extension "software" relevant to given situations in developing countries is very serious. The UN system is attempting to promote production of suitable "software".

Work In Eastern Africa

As you know, I work for the United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF - and in addition to our normal Public Information work, I am also becoming increasingly involved in Development Support Communication, but because in our case it is strictly limited to campaigns directly in support of projects in which we are involved, we call it PSC - Project Support Communications.

We have not yet reached the stage where we are concerned with supporting development on a wider framework. This is because our work is quite new in Africa and I think I am right in saying that we are pioneering the field in Eastern Africa in co-operation with Governments, Government organizations and other members of the UN Family, such as the Programme for Better Family Living Unit of FAO.

UNICEF's first venture in this field was in South-east Asia, where there is now an ambitious set-up known as the Development Support Communication Services, based in Bangkok (Thailand) and supported financially not only by UNICEF, but also by UNDP. It handles communication campaigns not only for the two agencies directly involved, but also for other UN agencies which require advice or technical services on a repayment basis.

What we have set up here in East Africa, now based in Nairobi, is an embryo unit with the capability to produce 16mm colour films in "synch sound", and also able to turn out slide sets, black and white pictures, newspaper and magazine articles and radio programmes in support of specific projects in which UNICEF is directly involved.

Role as Catalyst and Adviser

Our resources are very limited, and we do not wish to duplicate communication services which Governments themselves can undertake. Ideally, a unit such as ours should be a catalyst to spark off action by Government Information Services to tackle local district, regional or even national development support communication campaigns.

We hope that before long we need only act in an advisory role and it is encouraging to note that even now we are engaged on co-productions with several African Governments. In the meantime the material we produce can serve as prototypes.

It might be of some advantage to list the projects in which we are no actively involved, one year after our formation.

Tanzania

In Tanzania we are engaged on two campaigns - one in support of nutrition education, basing our experience in the Morogoro Region out of which we shall produce a film, a set of colour slides, and hopefully a song in Ki-Swahili which might "catch on" in the charts. Here we have worked with the Audio Visual Institute of the Ministry of Information,

and one of your number, Mr. Rayami, has given me full support and encouragement in this endeavour from the start.

Our second Tanzanian project is in the field of teacher training and we are engaged on producing material which shall have the dual purpose of activation and training. While the Tanzanian Audio Visual Institute is tackling the curriculum reform part of the education project (the TAN/UNICEF/UNESCO project) our unit is tackling a film and slides on the integration aspect, in which the school teacher and secondary pupils are encouraged to play a leading role as animators in the rural development work and in Tanzania's "ujamaa" society. We have also produced a radio programme in support of this.

Southern Africa

Going further afield, we have done some work in Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland to back up three projects on applied nutrition, youth training and teacher training respectively. In Swaziland, where we filmed, we had valuable back-up support from a second cameraman provided by the Swazi Government.

Mauritius

Another of our efforts is taking place in Mauritius, where UNICEF has been working with UNFPA (The United Nations Fund for Population Activities) in support of the Mauritius Family Planning programme. Here our work has been delayed pending the integration of the family planning services into the Government health services, but this is taking place this month, and I shall be visiting Mauritius early in the New Year to work out how we can assist a communications campaign on the island in co-operation with the Audio-Visual Centre of the Mauritian Education Ministry and the Health Education Unit of the Health Ministry. This campaign will, of course, be mainly a motivational one - motivating the people of Mauritius to try and keep the family "norm" at two children rather than at three, which was the target of previous campaigns.

Kenya

And here in Kenya, we are starting in a few weeks on a communications campaign aimed at motivating field workers to co-ordinate their efforts so that each department is not working in isolation, but planning and co-ordinating their activities. In this work we are co-operating not only with the Ministries of Planning, Health, Information, Agriculture, Co-operatives and Social Services, but also with the FAO's PBFL unit, which is sharing production costs for a half-hour colour film, and the Kenya Institute of Mass Communications.

Afterwards we have a campaign to mount in support of day-care centres. This will be almost entirely a training operation, producing material which can be used to train more effective day-care teachers and supervisors to strengthen Kenya's large chain of day-care centres now to be found all over the Republic.

Finding the Right Media

Now some points about communication techniques, finding the media best suited for the campaigns.

It is fashionable to think that the most modern and expensive equipment is the best and most effective for use in mounting such campaigns. There may well be a place for video equipment, or for 35mm colour films, but it is important not to lose sight of the less glamorous but often more effective means of communication.

Take the very simplest, the word-of-mouth. There is really nothing to replace it, especially when it is used by a person from the area to which a campaign is directed.

Even in the communication systems of the most developed countries, there is a complex inter-action between the modern mass media and the traditional network of personal word-of-mouth communication.

Mass media provide people with new, basic information but before people will act on such new information, they must be encouraged by persons in their immediate environment whom they both know and respect.

For instance, farmers can learn about some new agriculture technique from listening to a farm radio programme, but they are only likely to adopt it if they see one of their neighbours getting a better yield by using the practice.

The Director of the MIT's International Communications Programme, Professor Pool, summed it up neatly in these words:

"The media may din propaganda into people incessantly, but if their friends and relatives preach different values, the mass media are not likely to win ... in securing action, the mass media are even less effective in the absence of personal reinforcement. To get people to act in ways that conform to new values almost always requires that mass communications be reinforced by personal influence."

Indian Experiment

There was an interesting experiment in India worth referring to in this context. Some time ago, All India Radio broadcast a series of programmes containing farming advice to farmers. Listening groups were assembled in one set of villages to discuss the suggestions after each broadcast. Sometimes the groups rejected the advice out of hand, at other times they readily accepted it.

In another set of villages, no listening groups were organised, and villagers were left to listen to the broadcasts on their own - or ignore them if they wished. No action at all resulted in this second situation. It took a combination of information through the mass media and reinforcement by personal discussion to get the people to act. The same thing can be found in advertising - it needs salesmen to follow-up any campaign to sell a new product, plus a few "gimmicks" to build upon the advertisements.

Need for Personal Contact

I may have dwelt on this aspect at some length, but I have done so to stress the importance of the personal contact for in rural Africa this is no problem - you have been doing it since time began and the only change could be that modern mass media techniques are being introduced, but it still requires the personal contact as the essential follow-up.

It is often said that the most effective way of getting some facts spread around is to start off at the village well, or the market place - and let the women take it from there. This is still largely true, and it can be varied to make liberal use of traditional methods of communication. For instance, we should not ignore local music and songs in the vernacular which can be used to carry the same message. A variation can be introduced into some folk play to introduce the same message - and I am sure you can suggest many other ways of using, or adapting, traditional means of communication to back up the message carried on the mass media.

A Choice of Techniques

Now let's examine some of the techniques of modern media that can also be brought into play.

It is important, when considering what is best suited for the purpose you have in mind, to remember two points. One is the expense and the other your audience. It would be absurd, wouldn't it, to produce a 35mm feature film to try and get your message across to a small group of people who might influence public opinion in one district of your country.

It would also be costly to make a radio programme aimed at the same audience, but it might be practicable if the same message had a secondary use and you could have "spill-off", as we say, in broadcasting this on the national network and the message could benefit other communities.

But given such a situation, the obvious answer would be to get a person with local influence and stature to meet and merely talk with the small group of influential leaders in the district.

Films

With this in mind, then, let's look at film-making. This is very popular as a medium and 9 times out of 10, people will ask for a film to be made, without first considering if there might be some cheaper, more effective, way of persuading, or motivating, people.

We must find out, for a start, how many film projectors there are available in the target area, but even more important, if electricity is available, unless you are going to rely on mobile vans with their own power.

You must also remember that film shows can only be given at dusk or at night, so limiting the time your van can operate.

Radio

Radio is probably the easiest medium to use, and provided you have the full co-operation of the network, is your "best bet", but here too it must be followed-up by personal contact or written material as we have seen in other examples I have mentioned.

Local Person Vital

Another important point to remember is that when you are using individuals to get the message across, either over the radio or at meetings or by village-to-village contact, the person should be from that same community.

It is often forgotten that a man or woman from a city, even though it isn't too far away, is probably just as credible to the local people as someone from Mars. This may be stretching things too far, but the question of credibility is very important and you must try and get a man or woman having full rapport with the people you wish to reach.

And when you are planning your campaign, always try to do as much research beforehand, so that you can find out what resistance you might expect and try to meet that opposition at the start and anticipate the critics, so that your campaign will not flop, if some local "smart guy" starts to demolish your argument by a series of down-to-earth facts from his local experience. Don't ignore the traditional, well-tried means of communication, and be too tempted by costly, sophisticated gadgets which could well be unsuited to the particular job you have in hand.

Finally, remember that Development, or Project Support Communication, can at best serve only as a support, and is not in itself a substitute for action - and it can never replace personal contact between extension workers and the people, but it can make the extension work easier and more effective.

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Nairobi, 7 December, 1972



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