

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:

- AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING BASIC SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

by RRN TULUHUNGWA
CHIEF, PSC SERVICE
UNICEF, NEW YORK

(This paper supplements that titled", Programme Support Communications Service (PSC) : Present status in UNICEF").

1.0 NOMENCLATURE

1.1. Communication, broadly speaking, is a process through which human beings share social and cultural experiences, ideas, skills, motivations and aspirations. One of the ends results is or may be attitudinal/behavioural change, through knowledge and skills acquisition. It is necessary to emphasis this obvious fact because too many people concerned with development work still tend to think that they are talking about communication, when, in fact, they are restricting themselves to communication aids, such as posters, billboards, oneway TV or radio programmes etc. Thus communication, as a social process, is mistaken for transmission towers, documentary films, oneway lectures, press releases etc.

1.2. Community participation is and should be viewed as :
. peoples' contribution to the development efforts as equal partners and not merely beneficiaries.

- . some self-reliance, power and independence at community level with emphasis on the potential of local resources. Rural and urban societies have a wealth of knowledge and tradition which should be respected and utilised and not merely tolerated.
- . integration of traditional and modern systems so that development becomes a systematisation of old and new ideas- with the exact mixture somewhat different in each locality.
- . distribution of qualitative information, socioeconomic benefits and so forth.
- . decision making in and sharing of benefits of development.

The critical features or factors inherent to community participation may include:

- level of political and administrative commitment,
 - reflexion in national development and other plans of community aspirations and needs.
 - extent of decentralisation, of power and accountability.
 - degree of community capacity to mobilise, organise and administer own resources and outside assistance.
 - sincerity, capability and quality of local leadership.
 - extent communication flows from centre to the periphery and vice versa.
 - relevance of community and family life education components of the development programmes.
 - extent and involvement of trained and dedicated personnel who are or have to spread into rural and poor urban areas with maximum catalytic and educational impact.
 - educational quality and relevance of mass media (print and electronic) programmes
- ./.

1.3. Basic services strategy focuses on people's education, motivation and participation. In practical terms, this means that programmes which have direct sociological, economical and educational implications must focus on needs/problems as seen by the people and implemented within the economic, political social structure and other realities of the communities. Therefore a strong educational component is a must for basic services development. Thus, programming development activities including social development services for children and women necessitates emphasis on :*

- . basing planning for programmes/projects on the needs of intended communities and promoting more programming consultations between planners and implementors, on the one hand, and the intended beneficiaries, on the other.
- . redefining development as a social process based on strong advocacy for meeting the needs of the poor:
- . improving the application of social science knowledge particularly from cultural anthropology and sociology, to planning and implementation of services for and with people. Moreover, the intended beneficiaries are seen as active, discriminating consumers rather than as passive, captive clients.

* Adapted from papers set to the writer by the Regional PSC Officer, Bangkok.

- . increased encouragement for community self-organisation and education so that communities can better pursue two demands: demands that government provide services in at least a minimally acceptable (politically, socially and economically) manner, and demands on other community members to band together to support various issues in the public interest.

2.0. THE COMMUNICATION FACTORS

2.1. The current emphasis on the basic services approach and communications (popularly known as programme support communications - psc-) in UNICEF, is part of a larger humanitarian response to the failures on development thinking and programming. These failures included projects which :

- . threatned or harmed communities.
- . invoked hostile reactions' from communities.
- . were supposed to benefit certain communities in specific ways but failed to do so.
- . failed politically or economically and clouded the performance record of the sponsoring governments and donors.
- . concentrated on delivering of technologies and services only.
- . ignored the human factor (strengths and weaknesses).
- . focussed on peoples needs as perceived by government officials in the capital city. In most cases the real peoples' problems and cultural realities were different but ignored as unimportant.

2.2. Key components of the communications, community participation and basic services cycle and equilibrium.

(a) advocacy for community or people oriented approach to development amongst development programmes planners, managers, professionals, extension workers, community leaders and members and donors. This involves the design of a communication strategy and plans and activities (comprising of the disaggregation and analysis of audience and what is required for each specific audience including the production of specific materials to support the issuing messages). The major objective of this activity is to - (i) influence and facilitate the development of plans, services and eventually policies which create an environment conducive to the optimal development of the child, - (ii) encourage the allocation of more resources for social and economic programmes benefiting children - (iii) reorientation of prevailing services and programming approach - (iv) adoption of new approaches to dealing with mother and child problems and needs.

Failure to carefully design and implement this activity in the case of primary health care, for instance, has resulted in an extremely slow adoption of this concept as a viable means of extending to or generating from the people basic health and medical care.

A communications or a social marketing expert is required for this activity.

(b) Identification, mobilisation and continued utilisation of credible communication resources, technologies and services to facilitate community education and a two way flow of information cum messages between development planners, workers and communities. This involves identifying also individuals through whom the villagers may express themselves; and from whom they may derive information.

(c) Qualitative data . Social situation analysis focussing on : -

- . knowledge, attitude and practices
- . degree of community capacity to organise, mobilise and manage resources.
- . peoples' perception of current services.
- . extent and relevance of current community education programmes.
- . ability on the side of field workers to communicate and work with communities.

This information is essential for enabling programmers to determine priority educational (PSC) components of the programme, monitoring parameters etc.

(d) Training and orientation of field workers in community development, group and social change dynamics, monitoring procedures, new programme delivery processes and mechanisms, communication techniques etc are a must. This is imperative because these are liaison persons and need to learn this in order to perform their role in (i) establishing a dialogue between the community and the external agents with respect to the proposed project (ii) educating communities (iii) training and supervising/^{village}workers or volunteers. They may or may not require teaching aids. It has been realised that most extension cadres get excellent training in their particular profession but nothing or not so well in terms of preparation in communication techniques.

(e) Community education as an entry to participation.

Most communities whether urban or rural have a social structure and organisation systems to meet some of their societal goals, objectives etc. However these tend to be static with tremendous episodic reactions/responses to emergencies. This scenario is both an asset and constraint

as far as development programming is concerned. It is an asset because some of the indigenous leadership systems, practices and technologies are solid and form an important benchmark for the acquisition or introduction of new knowledge and skills. On the other hand there are social structures, beliefs etc. which are harmful and very difficult to utilise or modify. Hence the necessity of social situation analysis.

Community education falls in the following categories.

- a. Information and knowledge on the project even if the project has been formulated in consultation with them. The time lag, over processing and interpretation of their needs into practical programme activities may make the project look different from their original perception.
- b. Reorientation of existing community organisation structures to meet the implementation and monitoring requirements of the project.
- c. Training of community workers, leaders and selected groups of communities, eg. small committee members, to undertake new roles in the community organisation and the new project
- d. Design of a mechanism that will enable communities to communicate with the bureaucracy and other communities and vice versa.
- e. Education of community members on opportunities, skills and mechanisms of dealing with pressing problems and needs- either directly or through the community organisations which may be economic, social or political etc.

- f. The above activities will necessitate the provision of educational materials.
- g. Mobilisation and use of mass media. The traditional one way print and electronic media (radio ,TV) have not contributed as much as they should have done. They have concentrated on news, political announcements and in conveying information from government to the public in a downward and hierarchical way. But several countries, e.g. India, El-Salvador, Tanzania and Senegal, have started using mass media particularly radio to improve the follow of information , system of education and the process of two way communication through listening and discussion groups. The people listen and disucss the programme content under the guidance of a trained facilitator and also have access to a technocrat such as an agricultural assistant, and then decide the application or rejection of some or all of the programme recommendations. In order to efficiently use mass media to effect rapid social change in rural areas special attention is to be paid to :
- . decentralisation of the design and content of mass media content.
 - . social-structural or systems changes in addition to communication, if development is to occur.
 - . the shortcomings of the classical diffusion and adoption of innovations or outside view points which have become an important explanation of micro-level development.
 - . the development and sustenance of government structures that promote and support community efforts and organised participation.

h. The press. Recently there has been serious discussion on how the press in developing countries can be a medium to foster change. To meet this need courses in development journalism have been founded in several countries. The approach is to direct the press to :

- . advocacy work amongst national policy makers and villagers on development issues.
- . disseminating ideas and research findings on development in an readable form.
- . monitoring the consequences of development innovations in villagers or poor areas.
- . writing materials for enhancing and strengthening newly acquired numeracy and literary skills.
- . disseminating ideas and efficient processes for community based educational programmes.

CONCLUSION. Experience up to now shows that long term community participation in development is a process to be established through systematic education and consequential changes in government or agency bureaucratic procedures. It is not automatic by all means.

RRN TULUHUNGWA

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Notes

"Communication and Community Participation: As a means of developing basic services for children" draft paper by RRN Tuluhungwa supplementing the paper entitled, "Programme Support Communications Service (PSC): Present Status in UNICEF" also by RRN Tuluhungwa (see CF-RAI-USAA-PD-GEN-2007-000111 "Programme Support Communications Service: Present Status in UNICEF". Internal paper by RRN Tuluhungwa, Chief, PSC Service, UNICEF Hq, 1/19/1983)

The paper deals with nomenclature, defining terms such as 'communication' 'community participation', 'basic services strategy', and details the factor involved in PSC. Defines key components of the communications, community participation and basic services cycle and equilibrium. Concludes that experience up to now shows that long-term community participation in development is a process to be established through systematic education and consequential changes in government or agency bureaucratic procedures, and is not automatic by any means.

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