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PSC. Ghana. Development Support Communication and the Role of the Communication Specialist: A perspective from a project in Ghana, by Gary Richard Gleason, PhD Thesis submitted to the University of Iowa

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The thesis traces Ghana's political, economic and social development during the 1970s and 1980s, and the incipient role of project communications, including efforts made at setting up printing and communications facilities.

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processing and packaging of "feedforward" information into a message form which can be used by supporting institutions. These functions need to be described and elaborated in models of development support communication.

This elaboration must emphasize the maintenance requirements of the communication support agency beyond that suggested by Westley and MacLean. These agencies exist within organizations and thus require their support in order to operate. That these agencies have necessary maintenance functions with their parent organizations -- apart from activities linked directly to clients -- has to be explicitly noted in development support communication models. Although the project demonstrated that some products such as the maize booklet were insufficient to solve farmer problems and other necessary changes were not planned, it went ahead and published the booklet.

A descriptive model of development support communication maintaining a prescriptive, client-centered orientation a la Westley and MacLean should be a priority for researchers in this field.

Advocacy a Major Function of
Communication Specialist Role

From the perspective of control and persuasion oriented institutions, the communication specialist role becomes more complex. Bureaucratic problems in institutions dealing with

social change in the Third World contribute substantially to problems of rural farmers and other assistance clients. As this study has shown, institutional features lack client-centered goals or are so enmeshed in manipulative and persuasive strategies that service to the client has been forgotten.

When this occurs, the role of the communication specialist expands beyond that of setting up communication support agencies and also beyond the scope of the Westley-Maclean model.

The proposed communication specialist role would have to grapple with problems associated with bureaucracy, institutional mismanagement, and the failure of some institutional features to function from a development orientation.

The communication specialist role should go beyond support for a concept of development support communication which embraces media production and other communication support activities at the grass roots level.³

UNICEF suggested that project support communication has objectives including "informing, generating interest, developing empathy, and encouraging positive opinion formation, thereby creating the climate for action."⁴ While some of these objectives may be questionable from the client-centered perspective, they may be entirely appropriate for activities aimed at the institutions supporting the clients.

UNICEF has advanced the idea that project support communication should "reach out to the grass roots via several stages, enlisting support at many levels of the infrastructure that delivers services and ideas to the grass roots."⁵ This process involves institutions directly, and these problems cannot be attacked by non-purposeful communication.

Persuasive, purposive attempts to change the behavior of some institutional features are clearly required. In dealing with institutions, the communication specialist should be an advocate for strategies and programs which place clients at the center of the institution's overall structure.

In the context of the Westley and MacLean model, the role of the communication specialist is the opposite of the non-purposive channel role (C). While the communication specialist establishes and protects non-purposive development support communication agencies in a channel type role, the communication specialist role itself becomes a purposeful one. This role attempts to persuade various institutional features dealing with social change to function in a client-centered fashion.

The communication specialist role finds its referent in the Westley-MacLean model in the purposeful communicator role (A). But, the behavioral role that the specialist

attempts to affect would seldom be the client system. Normally, the behavioral role would be an institution or project component operating contrary to developmental criteria. The communication specialist role includes manipulation of any feature of an institution constraining the overall system from carrying on client-centered assistance programs.

One major tool the communication specialist has to assure the system operates developmentally is the development support communication agency. The role of the proposed communication specialist would include requests to this agency to perform tasks beyond those oriented toward directly serving rural and/or urban clients. At the request of the communication specialist and other bureaucratic authorities, this agency would also produce materials oriented toward persuading institutional members to function consistently with developmental goals.

Communication specialist advocacy entails reaching decision makers and executors through both direct and indirect communicative means.

An indirect approach would have the communication specialist enlisting the development support communication agency in the production of institutionally oriented publications, workshops, and demonstrations discussing and explaining client-centered development.

Direct methods may be outside the realm of the development support communication agency. They could involve lobbying for changes in structures and changes in behaviors constraining an institution from serving its clients. This direct lobbying is within the scope of the communication specialist role.

In advocating and guarding institutional functions necessary for client-centered development, the communication specialist role may need to utilize mass media channels, group channels, and interpersonal channels.

The function of the communication specialist role as a purposeful communicator may, at times, include persuasive messages directed at the client system. Such occasions should arise only when the client system is too disorganized to articulate its needs, or when the client organization becomes dysfunctional vis-a-vis development. If this occurs, persuasion should be limited to encouraging change in the client organization.

The experience of the Ghana communication support project suggests that many constraints on development assistance institutions are related to internal bureaucratic malfunctions and to poor relations with other resource agencies. Bureaucratic levels which fail to carry client requests upward, those that fail to coordinate information and resources, and those that fail to deliver resource

packages to clients are prime targets for the communication specialist's persuasive messages.

Although the role of the communication specialist cannot usefully be conceived of as a non-purposive communicator or reporter, the role does have potential to assist strongly in the creation and maintenance of development assistance projects and institutions with internal development support communication agencies.

If the institutional bureaucracy supporting media production and communication training agencies adopts developmental goals, then development support communication agencies can be allowed to function legitimately as agencies primarily serving the clients. Here, the communication specialist continually reminds the bureaucracy of its developmental goals, and helps to build media production facilities with the technology, skills, and resources to serve the client systems well.

Thus, the role of the communication specialist in development goes well beyond that of the media specialist or communication skills trainer. Furthermore, it goes beyond designing strategies for improving media production agencies to the gathering of information and the provision of services at the grass roots. The role is grounded in a profound commitment to client-centered development and communication theory which views people as active participants in a

continual effort to improve their lives within a dynamic cultural, physical, and economic environment. The role is also grounded on a concept of the communication support agency which functions primarily in the channel role described by Westley and MacLean, namely, as an agent for the audience in the extension of information and skills for the rural and urban poor.

Research on Development Support
Communication Should Continue

The climate of opinion both in academia and in professional agencies is attuned to further study of development support communication and its concomitant role for a communication specialist. Studies based on field experiences provide new data and new parameters for researchers and professionals. Akter Khan suggested that communication was the unifying area drawing together diverse activities to promote client-centered development at the Comilla Academy. This study suggests a structure for communication support agencies in client-centered development. The study also suggests a role for a specialist in communication to assist in planning these agencies and to protect their client-centered orientation within bureaucratic institutions concerned with social change.

However, further elaboration on development support communication and the role of the communication specialist

necessitates additional contributions from specific areas of research.

From the field of communication studies, the growing area of qualitative research offers potential for significant contributions. This study fulfilled some qualitative research criteria, mainly through construction of a context for the description and search for unifying principles in the vibrant activities of the communication support project. This study lacked the resources necessary to allow the researcher to stand back from the major discussions of project decisions and policies and observe. Participation was almost always as a primary decision maker.

If future research followed qualitative research guidelines closely, personnel trained in techniques of participant observation could beneficially explore these topics further.

Another unexploited research area studies the planning and functions of multi-dimensional communication strategies. Studies have discussed the comparative effects of various media as social catalysts, but the combined effects of a variety of media forms brought to bear on development constraints have been neglected. Research on major promotional campaigns and research on media strategies for elections could provide guidance in developing an appropriate research methodology for development studies.

The essential development feature of client system organization is another area for exploration. Network analysis techniques hold promise for a better understanding of groups and relations not only among themselves but also within institutions providing support. Analysis of client system relations should be oriented toward solving problems related to effective and equitable representation of client needs, rather than toward diffusion of innovations. Network analysis is a potent research tool for increasing knowledge of how client organizations represent their members and how problems are put into a form answerable by a development assistance institution.

Research from organizational communication is extremely relevant to development support communication, yet seldom are Third World agencies the topic of organizational communication research. USAID has done some work to adapt local planning models to enhance efficiency in local government and to enhance power within larger governmental structures.⁶ Also, the Guyana government's effort to insert communication into national planning has been explored systematically as have similar attempts on a smaller scale in other countries. Organizational communication research has the potential to lead to concrete programming proposals and training guidelines. Although institutions of the Third World have traditional structures, the bureaucratic, cultural, and economic environments in which they operate need further study.

Finally, development is insufficiently defined to be specified succinctly. Heuristic cross-cultural theory may not be possible or even desirable, but additional work on the operational and ideological components of national social system goals and strategies for change are needed, especially from the perspective of researchers within those systems. Such research is common in some areas of the Third World, particularly South America. The dynamics of national development occupy a crucial area of discussion and research, not only in the academies of the North, but, most importantly, in joint discussions among the nations of the Third World.

Additional research in these areas would not be unlike the present one. A substantial infusion of resources would facilitate context delineation of field projects and explanation of the constraints and potentials of a communication specialist role.

Conclusion

Based on a three year communication support project in the Third World, this study has demonstrated that mass communication support products can and do function in a complex manner. Because of their complex functions, they can be considered as components of planned efforts to provide development clients with information they can use to solve

problems, and also to change institutions so that they better serve these clients.

In addition, based on the limitations and accomplishments of the Ghana communication support project, the study has proposed a role for a communication specialist who would apply research from the study of communication and development to the massive problems of the Third World. While this study has provided a proposed outline for this specialist role, further refinement is necessary.

If development support communication and the role of the communication specialist are accepted as dynamic areas of study by academic researchers, the current problems of relevancy noted by members of the 1975 conference on communication and change will be significantly reduced. Development support communication and the role of the communication specialist in development can then become the pragmatic guide for meeting Daniel Lerner's challenge to begin earnestly applying what is known about communication in a manner consistent with the problems of our times.

Notes

1. Among the examples previously mentioned are the UNDP assisted communication in national planning effort in Guyana, the commitment of UNICEF to placing project support communication officers in its country offices, and the effort by the Ministry of Social Development, Sports, Youth, and Culture in Nigeria to establish, with UNICEF assistance, an national Development Support Communication unit.
2. As used at in this chapter "institution" refers to any organized group of government or non-government personnel whose purpose is to assist with rural or urban social change. These institutions would include national organizations and their subunits such as the Ghanaian Ministry of Agriculture and its departments; projects, such as the Fertilizer Use Project, and the National Rabbit Project; and programs such as URADEP.
3. "PSC and Advocacy: Communication at the Grass Roots and For the Grass Roots," Background paper prepared for the Project Support Communication Branch, UNICEF, (mimeo), p. 1.
4. "PSC and Advocacy," p. 1.
5. "PSC and Advocacy," p. 2.
6. Dennis M. Warren. "Periphery and Center: The Role of Communication Training for District and Regional Level Officials in Ghana's Decentralization Program," Paper prepared for Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association (October, 1979), Los Angeles, California.

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