DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION WITH RURAL MASSES

ABSTRACT

The decade 1975-85 has seen abundant rhetoric studies and plans on how communication satellites could solve the information and communication needs of rural India. For a number of reasons, however, the gap between what is possible for education and what is actually economically within reach has not been bridged. Rather the gap is widened by converting the T.V. media into a cinema theatre in every house or village, providing cheap entertainment.

COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Communication is a dynamic process which is more effective if it is participatory. Eliciting reaction to what has been said or written and providing the means for such reactions to be made known are essential parts of communication. Communication and media in India require urgent attention of a special kind to define and establish the role of development communication. Communication and media especially for rural men and women need to grow in such a way that these are appropriate to the social, scientific, and cultural patterns of our country. The mass media present us with great opportunities and great challenges Society can benefit from the potentially extensive reach of the media. Media, like any other institution in society, do not develop in a vacuum. They are a part of society and must reflect that society, and be responsible and responsive to its needs and goals, if they are to be relevant and durable.

RESEARCH ON THE APPROPRIATE MESSAGE TO BE COMMUNICATED SHOULD BE DONE

There are few documentaries showing the problems of society. Some of them are aimed at ... (1) better farming, (2) pesticides, (3) water shortage, waterlogging and problems of environment and energy. None of the video programmes shows any solution of problems. The woes of rural people are shown but not the work that these people should do in their local surroundings to win over the worst condition. Hence the first step in development communication is to do some research in development and prepare a message to be communicated. A solution to their problems has to be offered to them, their reactions to this solution have to be studied and the message of development altered as required.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

While observing the problems of rural people it was experienced that a tremendous amount of work has to be done to find a solution for the declining soil fertility and bad effects of eco-system destruction. It was thought that a thorough research has to be done on this subject with keeping in mind its multidisciplinary aspects, to achieve the
three goals of our agricultural equity, sustainability and stability. Achieving the sustainability itself is a very slow process, e.g. nearly 500 years are required to form topsoil layer of one inch by the process of natural farming. If the process is to be accelerated, some missing link should be found between sustainable agricultural development and augmentation of natural capital stock. Earthworm technology was seen to be this missing link.

**DEVELOPMENT BY HARBNESSING EARTHWORM TECHNOLOGY**

One major limitation of earthworm technology was that it was very difficult to introduce earthworms directly in soils foreign to them. Hence, a technology was developed to introduce earthworms in the soil foreign to them via the medium of earthworm treated compost i.e. vermicompost. It also acts as a biofertiliser. Simultaneously data were collected about the role of earthworms in top soil development and better yields and quality of crops. Earthworms were harnessed for disposing off any kind of agricultural biodegradable waste. They were also tried for livestock feed, aforestation. Fuel from biogas plant was obtained and a wormery was established by using biogas sludge.

**COMMUNICATION OF EARTHWORM TECHNOLOGY**

A number of video programmes on the soil developments by the use of earthworm technology were made and these were shown to the farmers. Later, their reactions were studied. The farmer is not a receptacle into which new agricultural technologies are poured. It was observed that the farmer is an active catalyst to drive the communication component with his own and his families’ needs, constraints, attitudes. He is really a link between researcher, planner and extensionist. The farmer along with his family members were encouraged to think and talk about the video programmes having specific messages of earthworm technology to solve their problems of productivity, stability, sustainability and equitability in rural living conditions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

(1) A significant increase in keeping quality, sugar content of fruits and healthiness of crops was obtained. The encouraging results concerning soils’ physical and chemical characteristics, water use efficiency were obtained.

(2) One thing was clearly observed that all farmers are not alike and their problems also differ from place to place, soil to soil, and even with change in other ecological conditions. Fortunately, the earthworm technology was tried on different soil types. Hence, the probable answers about augmentation of natural capital stock by harnessing earthworms were obtained depending on the different needs, problems and ecological conditions of the farmers. Hence, we could develop differentiated message strategies for different groups of farmers and can use
techniques such as message tone, characterisation and scheduling to reach important subgroups with more relative and persuasive information. It was realised that it is necessary to plan a comprehensive communication strategy which helps the farmer to deal with local problems as they are encountered, because farming is a cumulative process which is necessarily reactive to unpredictable events.

(3) A more important finding is that we need radio, audio cassettes, print, video cassettes, and T.V. to make an important useful programme. Effective communication is like a three legged stool. If you have one leg missing, you have an unstable foundation.

MAIN TOPICS INVESTIGATED WERE AS FOLLOWS

(1) 80% population of India being farmers by profession, they have to play an important role in sustainable development.

(2) In general, video programmes have more influence on stimulating the decision making process than any other media available.

(3) When the farmers were exposed to the eco-system destruction after seeing the video programmes, they have realised that they themselves have to rethink about their cultivation practices, many of them decided collectively to switch over to this new technology slowly but surely.

(4) This act of organising to achieve agro-ecological balance, may become an important experience for farmers. In this way they are learning to form bonds of mutual co-operation which may eventually form the basis for more ecological questions and answer method.

Such organisational spirit may have an inherent capacity to inhibit or deactivate those who will interfere with the speed of sustainable natural farming practices.

TYPICAL QUESTIONS ASKED BY FARMERS AFTER LECTURE AND AFTER SEEING THE VIDEO CASSETTE

Q. 1. Can the earthworm technology be applied to any kind of soil, climatic conditions?
Ans. 1. Yes, my experience over the last several years shows the universal applicability of this technology.

Q. 2. Are there any restrictions on the use of the vermi-culture?
Ans. 2. I have noticed no restrictions per se. Water is the only requirement which needs study. The interval between two successive drips or successive irrigations has to be varied to suit different climatic conditions such as temperature and natural precipitation. Any farmer can decide for himself the drip duration and the gap between two successive irrigations. I have been training the farmers in this respect through video cassettes and
lectures followed by discussion.

Q. 3. Do earthworms catch any disease?
Ans. 3. I have never observed earthworms catching any disease. If they are found on the surface of the soil, their predators such as birds, dogs, hens, cattle eat them. These animals become disease-free if fed on earthworms. Normally, earthworms come to the surface only at nights. During the daytime, they go down burrowing the soil and are protected from their predators.

Q. 4. Does this technology really provide sustainability of agriculture?
Ans. 4. Yes. Sustainability is achieved by increasing the number of earthworms in the soil and by the higher rate of top-soil formation than the rate of erosion. All the experiments at different places, with different soils and for different products have showed a remarkable sustainance against shocks, and the cost/benefit ratio improves rapidly making agriculture sustainable with environmental stability.