


Beltrán S., Luis Ramiro (2006) Excerpt from "Communication: Forgotten Tool of Nacional Development". In: Gumucio-Dagrón, Alfonso and Tufte, Thomas, eds. Communication and Social Change Anthology: historical and contemporary readings. South Orange, New Jersey. pp. 36-37.

COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE ANTHOLOGY: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY READINGS

Edited by Alfonso Gumucio-Dagrón and Thomas Tufte

BIBLIOTECA CENTRAL
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA BOLIVIANA SAN PABLO

CFSC

COMMUNICATION FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE
CONSORTIUM

Colecc. LR Beltrán
PP-AI-167

COMMUNICATION: FORGOTTEN TOOL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Luis Ramiro Beltrán

1967 In fact, it is possible to infer the level of a country's *general* development from its level of *communication* development. There can hardly be a well-developed country with poor communications. The correlation explains itself easily. Development implies interaction, massive mobilization, universal participation in decision making on matters of public interest and in the process of implementing national goals. And interaction, mobilization and participation cannot occur without communication.

Blocked Communication

Almost all underdeveloped countries show a pattern of blocked communication. Most obviously, lack of records and transportation limit communication. But the absence of opportunity for people to "talk" to each other, to get to know one another within the country, is perhaps more dramatic. Social relations are restricted to a few contacts within the immediate circle of acquaintances. People in one province do not know what is going on in the capital city or in the other provinces. Each small community regards the other as foreign. Indifference, suspicion and isolation prevail over mutual understanding and cooperation. Governments do not have adequate channels to transmit development messages to the population; field agents can reach only minimal numbers of people in a few regions. People have no way to express their wishes to the government and little opportunity to check the behavior of the official agencies. Indeed, in most cases, the majority do not even vote to form government. Save minor exceptions, mass media—where they exist at all—are actually elite media since they only reach the minority of urban dwellers.

Among the explanations for this are illiteracy, low buying power of the people, lack of roads and electrification, insufficient qualified communication personnel, and the high cost of installation and operation of communication equipment.

Given such characteristics, a true nation—an integrated social system comprising interacting members who freely share needs, goals, means, efforts and benefits—can hardly be thought to exist. And when some such articulation comes close to existing, when the country somehow approaches a form of national unity for development, that existence is tragically weak and precarious.

This reality is so self-evident that there should be little need for promoting the importance of communication in national development. Unfortunately, perhaps because communication—the "cobweb of society"—is so obvious that it can be taken for granted, few developing countries have cared to properly organize it in the service of development. It would seem they think communication is there, somehow automatically; nothing needs to be done to bring it about. *Talking is equated with persuading, and hearing with understanding and accepting.*

Such a serious misconception of communication—the fundamental social process and the art and science of engineering change in human behavior—has led most governments of the developing countries to neglect almost completely neglect communication in planning and implementing development. They may perceive communication development as a product of economic development but they fail to see it as an antecedent. Plans do attribute importance to the need for educating the masses. Policy makers do speak about the necessity for diffusion of technology and are increasingly coming to accept the notion that popular adult education as an investment for development. But, when it comes to action, virtually no one seems concerned with allocating funds specifically for communication development.

Development Hinges on Communication

Therefore, the global strategy for national development excludes the particular strategy for communication development that should be its main operational support and instrument. For it is only through people communicating (efficiently and effectively) that any development can occur. It is man who must change in order for things to be changed by him. And changing man—manipulating his social environment so as to modify, in multiple directions and ways, feelings, thoughts and behaviors of millions of distinct human beings to a point that they become autonomously innovative—is a far more difficult endeavor than changing the course of rivers, the composition of soils and the performance of plants and animals.

It follows that, as long as the development of organized communication is kept out of overall planning for change, the very success of national development is at stake.

Suggestions for Action

What can the developing countries do to correct this? There are, of course, no universal formulas. Yet, a few basic suggestions for action may prove useful.

- Incorporate communication development into the master national development plan so that it serves all other development activities.
- Include funds in the national budget to promote communication development in a proportion correspondent to the communication needs of other development projects.
- Promote, intensely and systematically, awareness in the public administration and among the entire population of the significance of communication improvement in the service of national development.
- Induce and help universities and other top-level educational institutions to establish, on a national scale, professional training in communication principles and techniques for specialists and technical field agents.

- Organize and foster research in communication so that planners have reliable information about *which* developmental messages, transmitted through *which* channels, are more likely to be effective with *which* audiences.

- Produce, in the language of the country, the essential literature needed for communication training.
- Provide the field workers with the communication aids (verbal, written and visual) that they must have to make their personal contacts effective.
- Use traditional modes of communication to spur innovation.
- Promote the growth and expansion of privately owned mass media so that they reach the rural audience.
- Establish communication institutions that combine mass media with interpersonal communication strategies, such as farm radio forums.

Beltrán, Luis Ramiro. "Communication: Forgotten Tool of National Development." In *International Agricultural Development*, Communications Issue, October 1967, No. 36. Reprinted with permission of the author.