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RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION: RELATIONSHIPS AND STRATEGIES

Excerpt from: Communication Strategies for Rural Development

By Luis Ramiro Beltrán

1974 The developed world has produced several major conceptions of the nature of national development. With a few exceptions, however, most of the prevailing conceptualizations—be they capitalist or socialist—tend to have common detectable elements to a degree that they may be subsumed into...the “classical materialistic model.”

The central features of that model can be summarized as follows: National development is fundamentally a process—spontaneous or induced—of economic growth; economic growth generates the material advancement or physical improvement of a country; material advancement, in turn, makes possible improvements in the general well-being of the population; material advancement producing well-being may by itself lead to social justice, cultural freedom, and political democracy. In light of those premises, the chief goals of development-seeking efforts according to the model are: to increase production of goods and services; to facilitate the widespread distribution of them; to expand their consumption; to save and invest at continuously increasing rates.

Consequently, increased financial investments and improved technological inputs, along with better marketing structures and techniques, become the key tools to attain these goals. ...

Model Has Many Faults

Development policies, strategies, plans and projects are usually patterned after such a philosophy of

man's life and societal progress. What is wrong with such a model, so long in practice in the world's most developed countries and eagerly adopted by so many underdeveloped ones? “Nothing”, many would say. “Almost everything”, a few would contend.¹ I tend to join the latter. In doing so, I would like to recruit some authoritative assistance. In support of my position, I will cite a few leading specialists.

Economist Robert Heilbroner contends “Economic development is not primarily an economic but a political and social process. Thus we deceive ourselves when we think of economic development in pallid terms of economics alone.”

Economist-development planner Roberto de Oliveira Campos provides a Latin American corroboration:

There is indeed the implicit assumption that the problem of development is primarily economic. In fact however it may well be said that crucial issues of Latin American development are *motivational* and *political* in nature. ...

In summary, the “classical materialistic model” of national development is objectionable on many serious grounds. It entails a dehumanized vision of progress which stems from the eminently mercantile mentality that rules much of life in the nations which have reached the highest levels of advancement. It equates having more with being better. It does indeed confuse means with ends, sacrificing the highest values of human beings—dignity, justice and freedom—to abundance and prosperity at any price ... for the privileged minorities. It wrongly regards as accessory and derivative the reorganization of society in terms of changes in the distribution of power and wealth as well as in the democratic expansion of social and cultural opportunities.

1 Among the studies analyzing the case of the Latin American country which has applied to a great extent the classical model, three are readily available: C. Furtado, *Análise do modelo brasileiro*, 2d. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1972), R. Ghioldi, et. al. *El modelo brasileño*, (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios, 1972), M. Melo Filho, *El desafío brasileño*, (Buenos Aires: Pomaire, 1972)

No wonder, then, that the efforts of the “First Decade of Development” have mostly brought further stagnation, increased concentration of income and of decision making and an acute shortage of food production to the majority of the so-called “developing” countries.

New Model Needed

It follows that a new conceptual model of national development is urgently required before it is too late. Certainly, I do not pretend to have one ready now. But my hope is that when such a model becomes finally available through the effort of highly qualified designers, it may be described ... somewhat as follows:

National development is a directed and widely participatory process of deep and accelerated socio-political change geared towards producing substantial changes in the economy, the technology, the ecology and the overall culture of a country, so that the moral and material advancement of the majority of its population can be obtained within conditions of generalized equality, dignity, justice and liberty.

This model would be a humanized, democratic, structural and integral conception of a nation's development based on a reverent vision of man's life and destiny. No matter how schematic it may yet be, I confess to be... a subscriber.

What Is Communication?

It must be acknowledged, once again, that also in the case of “communication” there are numerous and diverse conceptualizations of that process. Again too, however, some features will easily be found to be central to many of the varying definitions. And, just as in the case of the concept of “development”, the prevailing one of “communication” appears to have been born in the world's most advanced countries and then adopted, rather indiscriminately, by those not so advanced. The autocratic, elitist and materialistic characteristics of the classical “development” concept are not at all alien to what I should call the “classical mechanic-vertical model of communication.”

The model's key features can be synthesized in three premises: (1) social communication is a process of transmission of modes of thinking, feeling and behaving from one or more persons to another person or persons; (2) the paramount goal of communication is persuasion, so that the “transmitting” person, or persons, will obtain from the “receiving” person, or persons, given intended behaviors; and (3) two-way communication through “feedback” is important chiefly as a message-adjusting device enabling the “transmitter” to secure the performance of the expected response from the “receiver”.

Upper-Class Orientation

What is wrong with this model that we have embraced and put into practice for so long most everywhere in the world? Plenty. ... When observing, in every-day life, the consequences of the application of the classical communication model, one finds indications that it stems essentially from an upper-class orientation, a will of political domination and the interests of industrialists and merchants.

In fact, as the late C. Wright Mills once contended, in societies where the voice of individual and democratic groups does not count, the communication media facilitate a sort of “psychological illiteracy” in the service of subtle but strong manipulation of the people by power elites.

Mills saw the mass media as performing the following functions in the interest of those elites:

1. To tell the man in the mass who he is—give him identity.
2. To tell him what he wants to be—give him aspirations.
3. To tell him how to get to be that way—give him techniques.
4. To tell him how to feel that he is that way even when he is not—give him—escape.

Was he wrong or was he at least exaggerating?

What often takes place under the label of communication is little more than a dominating monologue in the interest of the starter of the process. Feedback is not employed to provide an opportunity for genuine dialogue. The receiver of the messages is passive and subdued...obeying.

Such a vertical, asymmetric and quasi-authoritarian social relationship constitutes, in my view, an undemocratic instance of communication. Those few who concentrate in their hands financial, cultural, social and political power concentrate also the message-emitting opportunities. And the many that are low in income, education, status and power are condemned to be only receivers ... if and when someone really cares to reach them. Indeed, as David K. Berlo asserts: "... nearly everything we do now is couched in terms of how a small number of people can get the rest of the people to do what the small number wants—whether it is in the interest of the large number or not."

Moral Implications

Is that what we wish to keep on doing as professional communicators? Are we no more than signal-generating technicians who could serve equally well any type of interests? Are we conscious enough to the fact that, while technically it may be the same to sell bread as to sell poison, ethically it is not? Can we indefinitely help sell dogmas, abuse and oppression to the masses? Are we in reality so ideologically aseptic—as perhaps dentists or carpenters can afford to be—that we do not care what we are helping someone to communicate for?

I resist the belief we are so. I prefer to think that what happens is that we are barely beginning to understand some disquieting moral implications of our profession. And I hope that, once we have found ourselves doing wrong, we will have the courage to stop it. Thus I join Berlo in feeling that:

We need now to concentrate on the functions of communication, on ways in which people use messages—not, as we have in the past, on the

effect of communication, on ways in which messages can use people.

In other words, just as in the case of development, we must first be able to build a new concept of communication—a humanized, non-elitist, democratic and non-mercantile model. It is no small challenge but I have faith that it will be met soon.

To stress just a few of the principal components of this sketchy attempt at reaching a new definition of communication, let me point out that it implies a horizontal social relationship based on genuine dialogue, involves a free and proportioned opportunity for persons to exert mutual influences, and denies that persuasion is the chief aim of the sociocultural transaction.

Development and Communication: Their Relation

At three levels of analysis, research has found substantive evidence in many countries of the world that development and communication are strongly correlated.

At the individual level, there are many factor-analytic studies—including two in Latin America—showing communication variables to be in a significant interplay with development variables in general.

At the village level, Rao⁹ found, in a comparative study of two Indian villages, clear correlations between communication and social, economic and political development. So did Frey¹⁰ in a survey of nearly 460 villages of Turkey.

At the national level, several multinational studies came up with similar correlations. One of the earliest was that of Lerner who found, in more than 50 countries, media participation highly correlated with urbanization (including industrialization), literacy and political participation. He also found that the degree of change in communication behavior appears to correlate significantly with other behavioral changes. An index of communication development was found by Cutright highly correlated with indices of political development, economic growth, education and

urbanization in more than 70 countries. A UNESCO study concentrated in the underdeveloped countries of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and South-east Asia, found a strong correlation between mass media factors and economic factors in general development. Similar findings were reported by, among others, Schramm and Carter for 100 countries and by Farace for more than 50 countries, as well as by Schrone and Deutschmann and McNelly.

Hence, as Fagen concludes: "Although the correlations themselves tell us nothing about causality, it is clear that the mass media have been both cause and effect, both mover and moved, in the complex interplay of factors which we call the modernization process."

It is, of course, useful to count on reliable evidence of such correlation. However, for the underdeveloped countries, what is most important is to find the specific circumstances contributing to make social communication an impactful stimulator and accelerator of national development.

Direction of Inquiries

Research exploring all major aspects of communication's contribution to development is not comprehensive yet, and it has not been sufficiently accompanied with inquiry in a critical reverse direction—the influence of the social structure on the communication process. Nevertheless, certain studies have led some researchers to formulate a series of plausible propositions on the roles of communication in development. Distinguished among these are the works of scholars such as Lerner, Schramm, Pye, Pool, Frey and Rao, along with the many studies pertaining to the diffusion of agricultural innovations school represented by researchers such as Rogers. To summarize in some detail the findings of all those researchers is a task outside the scope of this paper. Here it should be sufficient to say that the main prospectors of the relationship of interest appear convinced that the roles of communication in the service of development are numerous and of decisive influence. ... With few exceptions, they

seem to attribute to mass media so much and so great an ability to help generate national advancement. ...

Hoping that such judgment is wrong one cannot avoid going back to the crucial question: What kind of "communication" in the service of which type of "development?" A nation is not developed when minorities in it can afford to squander fortunes on superfluous articles when majorities can barely buy bread. A person is not modern just because he is led to feel an urge to enjoy washing machines, have a bigger car than his neighbor's, or vacation in Acapulco. That is the kind of "development" to which the "developing" countries have no reason to subscribe. And mercantilist and undemocratic persuasion is not the type of communication from which those countries may profit most.

I acknowledge with pleasure the existence of a promising correlation between communication and development in general. I also share the faith that the former may indeed contribute much to the latter—under given circumstances. ...

Latin America: Communication and Rural Development

What, in essence, is the nature of Latin America's overall communication system? What are the chief characteristics of the communication process in relation to the region's rural population? How do the system and process of communication appear to be related to the rural development process?²

A system of communication is a defined set of inter-related social entities—public, private, and mixed—specializing in serving as mediators among people participating in the communication process. The systems usually understood to be composed of three

2 The volume of data available today on this subject is more than one would suspect. Those interested in an extensive treatment of it may wish to see this author's "Communication in Latin America: Persuasion for Status Quo or for National Development" (Ph D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1970) and, for a relatively extensive summary, his *La Problemática de la Comunicación para el Desarrollo Rural en América Latina*, 1972, Buenos Aires, Argentina, AIBIDA, and also *El Sistema y el Proceso de Comunicación Social en Latinoamérica y su Relación con el Desarrollo Rural*, 1973, Cusco, Peru, UNESCO.

major subsystems: interpersonal, impersonal or massive, and a mixed one resulting from stable combinations of the former two.

Given the insufficient degree of integration among the three subsystems, Latin America's communication system can be taken as an imperfect one. In fact, while the interpersonal sub-system can be seen in operation throughout the whole society, it is characteristic of the rural segment and shows minimal connection with the other two sub-systems. On the other hand, the impersonal subsystem is characteristic of the situation in the urban sector. And the mixed sub-system is mostly, though minimally, operating in the rural society. Important as the interpersonal and mixed systems are, I shall concentrate on describing the impersonal one. ...

Mass Media Availability

In 1961 UNESCO set minimum desirable standards of mass media availability for each 100 inhabitants of the underdeveloped countries. They were the following: 10 newspaper copies, 5 radio receivers, 2 television receivers, and 2 cinema seats.

Latin America's figures for 1961 were: 7.4 newspaper copies, 9.8 radio receivers, 1.5 television receivers, and 3.5 cinema seats. The Latin American figures were, in the aggregate, higher than those for equivalent regions of Asia and Africa.

In 1971 the figures for Latin America had become the following: 7.5 newspaper copies, 11.3 radio receivers, 5.7 television receivers and 2.7 cinema seats.

The first survey showed that Latin America then had mass media availability levels which were either clearly above UNESCO's minimum standards or only a little below them.

The second survey showed also that half the total population was still left without access even to the most diffused medium, radio. Nevertheless, it is evident that the advancements in mass media availability have been, as a whole, impressive in this region in the last decade. However, before one jubilantly raises hands

to applaud, an important question must be posed: Available to whom?

Access to Mass Media Messages

Availability of mass media is not necessarily equal to access or exposure of people to messages. As a rule, the distribution of those messages in Latin America is uneven within groups of countries, within each country, and within each of the cities in them.

Research has found urban concentration of mass media messages to be particularly high in the larger cities, especially in the case of television and press; concentration is appreciably less acute for radio and somewhat less acute for the cinema. For the most part, mass media do not reach the masses in rural Latin America. Communication in this region is but one more privilege enjoyed by the ruling urban elite.

Within each city, a minority of the population has far more access to mass media messages than the majority. And, within the rural areas, even smaller minorities have the privilege of access to those messages.

In general, then, the distribution of mass communication opportunities in Latin America follows the steep pattern of stratification that characterized the socio-economic structure prevailing in the region. The higher the income, education and status, the higher the level of access to mass media messages. People in the intermediate brackets of the scale have intermediate level of access. And the great majority of the population—low class urbanities and the peasantry—have as low levels of access to communication as to food shelter and education.

The rural population's access to mass media messages reaches such extremely low levels that most peasants can be said to be virtually outside the communication system.

Selected from among several studies, a few illustrations should suffice to document the point. Take one channel: the press. And one country: Colombia. We find that 83 percent of the circulation of 800,000 daily

copies of 32 newspapers is found in the three largest cities—Bogota, Medellin and Cali. The difference goes to the rest of the cities and to the rural areas.

Of Mexico City's six largest newspapers' total daily circulation—665,000 copies—80 percent is sold within that city itself, the rest being distributed in all other cities and in rural areas. Moreover, the daily average of copies sold per one thousand inhabitants reaches as high as 160 in the large commercial farming states of the North while in the Southern subsistence agriculture states the figure is as low as 9.

Take another channel—radio which is supposed to reach “everybody” thanks to the transistor—and another country—Brazil—and you will find that the case is not very different from those of the press in Mexico and Colombia.

Let's move to Peru and find, with Mejía, some exposure figures for three channels in two small rural towns and two large farms (*haciendas*). None of the peasants (*peones*) in those haciendas saw movies or read newspapers and 85 percent did not listen to radio. But in the towns 20 percent of the independent small-land holders read newspapers, 50 percent listened to radio and 13 percent sometimes went to the movies. As this study, and those of Canizales and Myren in Mexico and of Blair in Brazil show, communication is indeed more markedly stratified in rural than in urban areas of Latin America. ...

Brazilian peasants living more than two hours from a large city acceptably endowed with mass media were once interviewed to find out their information level on matters which were often treated by those mass media. These were some of the results: 95 percent of the peasants did not know that coffee was the chief export product of their country; 80 percent of them had no meaning for the word “democracy”; and 48 percent did not know the name of the President of the Republic. Other studies in Brazil itself, as well as in Mexico and Chile, found comparable results, verifying the acute state of sub-information in which the peasantry lives.

Compare that situation again with the one prevailing in the cities. A study obtained mass media consumption data of a “sub-elite” (professionals with studies in foreign countries) sampled from 14 Latin American countries and contrasted them with those pertinent to an equivalent U.S. sample. The Latin Americans not only were found to have, in general, as good standards as their U.S. counterparts but fared better in figures for books and radio.

Lack of roads and electricity, poverty and illiteracy are often stressed as explanations for the lack of access of realities in this region to mass media messages. Those factors have, indeed, a limiting influence, but one may ask why it is, in the first place, that peasants are deprived of education, income and facilities such as roads and electricity. At any rate, those barriers are not always and necessarily adequate explanations. For, sometimes, even in the uncommon cases where peasant illiteracy is low and transportation and access to mass media is good, peasants say they do not buy newspapers or pay much attention to radio messages. This is precisely what Gutierrez and McNamara found in a Colombian village well linked to the country's second largest city. Could it be that peasants find nothing for them in those channels?

Content of Mass Media Messages

Within the classical model of development the Latin American peasants do not constitute a “public” as they are clearly marginal to the “market.” Concomitantly, within the classical model of communication, these peasants do not constitute an “audience” as little can be done to persuade them to buy—in terms of consumption.

In terms of production, however, peasants may, up to a point, be regarded as a “public” and an “audience” within those models. But the task of communicating with them is not directly or immediately lucrative. Therefore, the private mass media institutions leave it altogether to government rural education efforts.

Research already exists to demonstrate that the mass media are oriented, eminently and not accidentally, to the urban audiences that constitute the market. Therefore, sad as it may be, it is logical not to expect their content to include materials of interest for peasants—except in the cases of agricultural mass media or of farming sections of the general-audience media. ...

Gutierrez-Sanchez analyzed three months' content of the weekly agricultural pages of five Bogota dailies and sampled materials from a national weekly rural newspaper, measuring volumes for ten categories. He found that the dailies gave first priority to meetings and organizational activities of large farmers (ranked sixth by the weekly), while the weekly gave most emphasis to public programs to aid agriculture. For both the dailies and the weekly, two of the top three categories were national government programs and foreign trade, and crops. News of rural education needs and other peasant community programs were ranked lowest, along with fishing, by both the dailies and the weekly. ...

A more complex and recent study, also conducted in Colombia, corroborated those findings. Fifty one editions of farm pages in eight dailies were content-analyzed over a period of eight years. On a scale of seven content categories, land reform was found to be the last. And, with a slight tendency of regional newspapers to publish rural educational materials, the dailies showed an exclusive preference for purely informative and promotional items. Felstehausen found comparable results for radio in a region of Colombia.

Brazilian, Chilean and Mexican studies, including that of Ruanova on farm magazines, produced similar results. And Cordero/36 found that in Costa Rica, a country whose livelihood is eminently based on agriculture, the dailies assign minimal importance to it. In fact, his content analysis revealed that the categories of agriculture, animal husbandry, rural community development, land reform, and agricultural economy occupied intermediate and low places on the scale. The lowest categories were conservation of natural resources and reforestation. The first category

(occupying most of the space) in the farm supplements was commercial farm advertising.

This may be so not only in the commercial domain but also in the political sphere. It is something which communication research in Latin America has not yet empirically verified at the level of the rural society. There is, however, a very suggestive study conducted in Peru by Roca. He hypothesized that the interests of owners of daily newspapers in Lima influence content orientation in them, especially when such interest are threatened.

The researcher content-analyzed six dailies for the six-week period of 1963 during which peasant invasions of large farm states constituted a serious threat for the land-monopolizing interests in the country. Of the 391 items of news, editorials and advertisements analyzed, 290 were in favor of the large landowners, 39 for the peasants and the balance were neutral. News content, in particular, markedly favored the landlords.

While those results were not surprising, their importance was raised when the researcher also found that the ownership of three of the six dailies studied was clearly related to ownership of large farm states; and, as hypothesized, they accounted for 184 of the total of 290 items against the peasants. ...

Code of Mass Media Messages

We find here again the same situation: given that mass media are strongly urban-oriented, they codify their messages in styles corresponding to the urban audience. Thus, the rural population is ignored not only in terms of content but also in those of code. And this does not happen only in the case of private mass media but also in that of government-produced massive agricultural communication materials.

Perhaps the earliest scientific verification of that problem was that conducted by Spaulding/38 in Mexico and Costa Rica. He tested how understandable were the visual illustrations in a series of fundamental education booklets. He found that effectiveness was

dependent upon: (1) how well the booklets fit the intended audience's experience; (2) keeping the number of objects in each illustration to a minimum; (3) keeping also to a minimum the number of separate actions necessary to correct interpretation of the message; (4) using color realistically and functionally; and (5) portraying objects and inferred actions in a realistic and unambiguous way.

A later and more complex study in rural Brazil provided similar but richer evidence. This study probably constitutes a pioneer case of inquiry on the semantics and semiotics of non-verbal communication for rural development.

Comparable studies for radio, television and film messages are so far unavailable in Latin America. For press, however, there are several.

Using Spaulding's readability formula, Ruanova evaluated seven of Mexico's fourteen agricultural magazines and found them beyond the understanding of most of that country's farmers. Amaya analyzed a Spanish-language farm magazine by means of re-writing several articles in it and then testing the original and the simplified versions; she found the former located in the "extremely difficult" and "difficult" categories of comprehension. Comparable results were obtained by Magdub in measuring, mostly by the Cloze procedure, technical and extension agriculture publications and one grammar school textbook. And his analysis of 122 articles of the agricultural pages of four dailies and one rural weekly in Colombia, led Gutierrez-Sanchez to conclude "... that which may be of direct value in improving agriculture is beyond the comprehension of those who could best use the information."

Evidently, then, even in communication materials aimed at the rural audience, the code being used is one pertaining to urban culture and alien to the peasantry. Why? Is it accidental or deliberate?

Simmons and others have proposed, in the case of dailies, this explanation: "Even in developing nations, journalists seldom make great concessions in their

level of presentation for the poorly educated or otherwise culturally deprived." It is not only journalists, however, who seem to behave in that manner; writers, illustrators and other communicators in rural development government agencies also seem often unaware that they are actually writing, painting, photographing or speaking in terms understandable only by urbanites. For some analysts this is just another expression of the domination that rural people suffer under the imposition of the urban culture. Research has yet to go into verifying hypotheses as important as this one. ...

Communication Strategies for Rural Development

I can now venture into discussing strategies. First, let's consider the definitions:

A strategy is a behavioral design involving decisions on how to use power and resources to attain given goals through certain instrumental actions.

A national development strategy is a statement of collective goals and implementing procedures to effect given changes in man and nature's behavior in the direction of given kinds and levels of improvement and growth identified with a certain state and type of modernity.

A communication strategy is a set of decisions on who is to communicate what to whom, what for, when and how.

A developmental communication strategy is a set of decisions concerning communication behaviors directly instrumental to the attainment of a nation's development as conceived in the broader strategy.

Rural development³ is a subset of overall national development. "Rural communication" is a subset of communication in general. Therefore, strategies for each need to be defined separately here.

3 It implies far more than agricultural growth. We see rural development as "a process in which a nation's agriculture becomes a continually more productive and rationally organized component of an emerging modern industrial state with the changes in the social and political structure, productive processes and values that this implies."

The View From Inside

Strategic communication behavior, i.e., rational, organized, efficient, in the service of rural development is still yet more the exception than the rule. I do not know how true this may be in the totality of underdeveloped countries. But I feel quite sure that the assertion holds well for those of Latin America. These are some indicators of it:

1. As a rule, there are no overall yearly plans of communication in the service of rural development. (Initial attempts at formulating them have been recorded in Peru, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Argentina).⁴ In the absence of such plans, communication activities support rural development actions on an insufficient, erratic and unbalanced basis.
2. Sometimes rural communication organs tend to operate by themselves; that is, with little regard for the requisites of the population to be reached and without proper adjustment to institutional objectives and demands of field personnel.⁵
3. There is lack of coordination among the different organizations carrying developmental messages to the rural areas; duplication of efforts and even competitive rivalry are not necessarily strange phenomena.

4 The most comprehensive is probably that of Peru (Ministerio de Agricultura, "Plan Nacional de Comunicación Agraria, 1972", Peru) The Colombian attempt seems barely starting, and Argentina's efforts have been mostly at the level of extension projects. In a recent international meeting of experts a recommendation was approved in favor of the formulation of communication policies and plans in support of those of rural development. At a broader level, UNESCO has produced a basic guidance document for the formulation of overall communication policies for national development (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Report of the Meeting of Experts on Communication Policies and Planning*. Paris, France: UNESCO, 1972), and will conduct in July 1974 a Latin American experts meeting on the subject in Colombia.

5 The content of educational publications of the Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario for three years was found not to be " . . . in complete conformity with the priorities of the Ministry of Agriculture . . ." (A. R. and V. Alba Robayo and B. Novoa, *Análisis de Contenido de las Publicaciones Divulgativas del ICA y su relación con los planes del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1970* Bogotá, Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario) Similar findings have emerged in studies of farm pages in daily newspapers, and other media of agricultural communication.

4. Functional priorities are set in arbitrary manners. Characteristically, and virtually without exception, the production function is assigned the highest priority.⁶ The simplest inspection of operations, staff and budgets makes this evident. Most human and financial resources are spent in producing messages without a worry as to their utilization and actual effectiveness. Only minimal energy is assigned to the distribution and evaluation functions and practically no resources go to the research and training functions. The materialistic vision of development and of communication accounts for the expenditure of large sums in communication equipment, buildings and vehicles while basic non-hard-ware needs are grossly neglected.
5. Media selection is equally arbitrary. For instance, an unduly high proportion of production resources is spent in printed messages in flagrant contrast with the high indices of illiteracy prevailing in rural areas. Mass channels are often blindly preferred by rural communication specialists while extension agents exaggerate their preference for the impersonal ones.
6. Messages are geared almost exclusively to assisting the farmers with technological information for production purposes, thus disregarding the socio-cultural dimensions of the development effort. In addition, messages are couched in terms of the urban culture, as previously shown.
7. Political convenience and lack of comprehension of the nature of developmental communication often leads rural development agencies to spend much of their communication resources in public relations tasks. Important as those activities are for these institutions, they are also alien to the needs and interests of the peasantry.

6 An appraisal of communication planning in a rural development organization in Colombia, performed exclusively on the basis of production analysis, showed the following (1) more unprogrammed than programmed activities were conducted, (2) communication materials were required by the field project managers without adjustment to objectives, priorities, time or resources, (3) of all forms of communication utilized, publications showed the highest volume, and (4) the need for a system of control, evaluation and follow-up was made evident (Novoa y Vejarano, 1973).

There are several other similar shortcomings. But these suffice to indicate that, rigorously speaking, we cannot yet talk in Latin America of the existence of communication strategies for rural development. Improvisation and arbitrariness still take much precedence over planning and rationality.

If this view is accepted, then it should be evident that it is not possible to tell here what the actual contribution of communication strategies to rural development strategies might be—at least not in reference to Latin America. Why is that so?

First, let me put the blame on ourselves—the specialists in rural development communication. Our fault is, however, one of immaturity only. Young as our sub-discipline is, we have not grown yet to the level of strategists. For about twenty years, we remained content with being able practitioners of media handling and message production. Then, starting some ten years ago, a few of Latin America's "agricultural communication specialists" became social scientists and started looking critically at communication as a process. The conjunction of art and science in our profession has meant, no doubt, a net gain. But we still have to make a third major move upwards: to learn how to use optimally our art and our science in the service of human and democratic rural development.⁷

Faith and enthusiasm will not be sufficient for the success of such a novel endeavor. We must become knowledgeable in the nature of underdevelopment in our society so as to be able to contribute to its real development. And the latter is something that we may never be able to accomplish unless, in addition to mastering communication, we train ourselves in the infant art of democratic planning⁸ and apply it to our field.

The time available to do that is not ample. Social communication efficiently organized to help generate deep and accelerated societal change is the only alternative to abrupt and violent transformation to be fully useful to the attainment of their ends. For we have no ends of our own. Communication is indeed vital to the development of a nation. But it is only an instrument. It may be mighty but it is not magic: it cannot generate development by itself.

The View from Outside

Unfortunately, the importance of communication has not been properly understood yet either by political leaders or general development strategists. Most of them seem not to have a proper understanding of it. Even more so, they fail to perceive what communication can do to help them obtain development. Thus, our first practical duty is to attain successful communication with those decision-makers.

On the other hand, it is not sensible to expect communication specialists to grow to the stature of development communication strategists in situations where integral development strategies, strictly speaking, do not exist either. . . .

It is a rare event to find a country in this region in which rural development is given a top priority within the overall development strategy along with an adequate proportion of the national budget. And it is equally unusual to find a country in the area having a complete, solid, coherent and durable policy for rural development. In the absence of it, what can communication strategists do?

Low priority, ill-financed, contingent and partial rural development plans do exist in many Latin American countries. Many of them fail to involve systematically the totality of agricultural development agencies, particularly the mushrooming specialized autonomous ones. And some of those plans also fail to reach an acceptable degree of articulation with the overall development scheme. It is small wonder, then, that social communication is far from integrated to rural development. . . .

⁷ An insightful analysis of the evolution of the profession in Latin America has been done by Diaz-Bordenave (*New approaches to Communication Training for Developing Countries*, 1972 Baton Rouge, Louisiana)

⁸ A valuable contribution towards this end has been made by Carvalho (*Comunicacao e o Processo de Planejamento*, 1972 Brasilia, Ministerio de Agricultura) (Textos Tecnicos)

Looking Ahead

A general strategy of development rural communication cannot be formulated in a vacuum. It has to be derived from an overall rural development strategy and be subservient to it. Improvements of the formulation of the latter must be effected in the countries, therefore, as a prerequisite for designing the one on communication.

Let us be optimistic about the likelihood of those improvements since the region counts on a number of competent rural development experts and since development planning would appear to be starting, at long last, to take a direction more concerned with human beings than with input-output ratios. Let us, therefore, assume that we shall soon have in a country a sound general strategy for rural development. Will we, the communicators, be ready and able then to derive from it a sound general communication strategy?

I honestly believe that, once we are able to help at least one country to devise and successfully utilize the strategy in question, then we might, as true communication strategists, earn inclusion in propositions such as the following of economist-planner Roberto de Oliveira Campos:

Although there is no immediate danger that the economists will join the army of the unemployed, it is quite clear that they have left precious little that is new or unsaid on the mechanics of development. The floor must be given to social psychologists and the political scientists.

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