

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

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A number of definitions of development have been put forward during the last century. The essence is, that it is a process through which a society moves to acquire the capability of enhancing the quality of life of its people, primarily through the solution of its problems. (Schramm: 1964) Development is really a broad transformation of society. In Pakistan as witnessed by the speeches of its leaders the emphasis is on improvement, growth and change which in reality is development. Today it is increasingly being realised that national development does not only mean economic advancement, rather its final goals are the goals of existence itself, which are to provide men and women an opportunity to live fully human lives. (Schramm: 1964)

Each country must appraise the popular impact of new technologies, define goals and work towards it. In today's modern world, new communication and transport technology have made multiple contact possible and we have the means to get information about the remotest part of the world and of getting acquainted with people of different cultures near and far. In today's mass society, it is increasingly being realized that mass communication is fundamental to mass society.

Information and motivation are needed to change indifferent attitudes and harmful norms and customs. There is also the need to teach people new skills so that they become useful participatory members of the country. This can only be done when information reaches all. The majority of our people reside in rural areas. The position in developing countries usually is that information dries up, as it moves from national and state capitals towards the villages. The problem is further compounded when change is hoped to be brought about by handing out information to the masses telling them what they should do or not, instead of encouraging them to be a part of a programme in which they can express their needs—seek out information, discuss issues and arrive at common decision. Individuals and organisation interested in national development today recognize the need for providing information to all sections of society to ensure even and balanced national development (Schram: 1964).

Stress on adequate information to women becomes all the more important when one realises that, not only do they constitute more than half the population of the country, but in their hands lie the physical and mental health of their children, their menfolk and their future generations. Women play a vital role as home-makers. They are the first teachers and guides of their children. A very large percentage of women work in the fields as farmers also. It is unfortunate that more often than not women are also the least informed, the most isolated and the lesser educated sections of society. Fortunately the vital role that can be played by women not only in their homes, but in national development also, is being increasingly recognized all over the world. Kincaid and Ock Yum

gave the example of the Korean Village women, when the Governor saw the development work carried out by these women, he said: "even in heavy men's work, women can be effective. I think that I am one of the few Government Officials who recognize that women power is so strong" (Kincaid and Ock Yum: 1976) A University Professor commenting on the same project said: "Any Country that attaches importance to women's education is on the road to development".

The paramount requirement of change in any society, is that the people themselves must change. The teaching of new health habits, for example, requires in many cases the adoption of new attitudes. If human resources are to be mobilized, skill, training and attitude change has to go side by side. Frederick Harthism studied the manpower problems of seventy five countries (Schramm: 1974) and summed up his finding this way:

"The progress of a nation depends first and foremost on the progress of its people, unless it develops their spirits and human potentialities, it cannot develop much else materially, economically, politically or culturally. The basic problem of most of the underdeveloped countries is not a poverty of natural resources but the under development of their human resources. Hence their first task must be to build up their human capital. To put it in more human terms, that means improving the education, skills and hopefulness and thus the mental and physical health of their men, women, and children".

Management in a programme of national development is different from some other kinds of manage-

ment, because the essential part of it consist of dealing with innovation. The developer is constantly trying to make a change. He is dealing with people whom he wants to do something for perhaps the first time. He is dealing with a country, parts of which are used to living in the past although its policy is to live in the future. In short, the people must change before the nation can change, (Schramm: 1964). Where it is realized that the people themselves should want change, for change to come about, the Government also has a major responsibility. Efforts for development have to be done quickly but gradually enough so as to seriously disrupt the pattern of life in the towns and villages. Perhaps the most general way to describe what the greatly increased flow of information does in a developing nation is to say that it provides a climate for national development. (Schramm: 1964)

There are a number of avenues which lead to increase information. Among the direct are the mass media and the extension field officers of agriculture and health. The indirect facilities are the road, the railway, electricity, schools and other educational institutions.

Mass media is a broadner of horizons, an informer and persuader for change. (Schramm: 1964) It leads to the ethic for modernity. (Lerner: 1958) However, exposure of mass media among rural people especially, is usually very limited due to barriers of literacy, economic position, lack of electricity and the villagers own frame of reference. Most of the programmes are also urban-oriented. These problems lead a villager to select and perceive that information portion of which is of interest or of use to him and to ignore the other.

Isolation from information not only impedes development in the fields of health, education and so forth but also in market development and skill acquisition. To some extent, the introduction of the mass media such as the radio has opened up the rural areas to information, however, the handicap of these media is that they do not provide for the range of interactions necessary for two-way information exchange and rapid adjustment of information for local requirements and subsequent joint decision-making. Not only is mass media scarce for some people but there is also scarcity of the facilities that make it possible for a person to talk to any except those around them. Radio and talk of the city has awakened desires but it has not shown the inhabitants of remote villages how to behave or react in modernizing situations. Nor do they help them, in clearly guiding them in the achievement of their goals.

In a recently concluded study conducted by towards a doctoral degree, the role of communication in the development of two villages of District Dadu in Sindh, one of which was more developed and has more information facilities than the other was studied. Where it was clear that the lesser developed and more isolated village had a lesser flow of information, the author could not help being struck by the disparity in exposure to information channels between the men and women of the two villages. This was more so in the lesser developed village. While the men of this village could watch television and films on the video-cassette recorder, the majority of the women had never ever seen television. They could not read a newspaper nor was only newspaper ever read out to them. Very few of them had travelled farther than a

few kilometers from the village. The men on the other hand were far more mobile and exposed to information.

Most of the people of the rural villages get their information by word of mouth from networks of interpersonal channels. It is for these reasons that the hotel or tea shop gatherings, the opinion leaders, the story tellers, the traditional sayings and proverbs, the religious words, and poetry are a very important link in the chain of communication. More than this the attitude and value brought into the chain of communication had the most important impact and direct bearing on communication patterns. The source of information is nearly as important as the communication itself. (Rogers: 1976) A traditional and even transational societies relate easily to oral communication networks they are most effective for change purposes. The importance of local and interpersonal communication as compared to mass channels, for motivation and education compaigns cannot be over-looked. The combined use of mass media and face to face contact can lead to more successful compaigns as they deal not so much with the media material than with the psychology of the audience. In the effort to bring about change, instead of depending on one or two media, combination and coordination between the great channels of development information that is the media of the school, the extension field staff, the interpersonal network and so forth has proved to be most beneficial.

Emphasis on education is essential. Development of education and literacy in a country has such a close relationship to media development, that it is impossible to separate the two. This is not only because one can

aid the other but because of the effect of education on the information seeking and information giving patterns of people (Schramm: 1964). Through literacy a woman gains a tool for learning. She develops the habit of learning and thus keeps on acquiring information that is useful to her in hundreds of ways throughout life. Not only that due to the store of knowledge she has acquired, she becomes a dispenser of knowledge. She become a source of information for friends, relatives and children.

In the lesser developed village of the writers study, Shah Awais Karni, education for girls was not popular. In spite of that a girl had recently studied upto the Class-V level. On the other hand in the more modern village, Allah Bachayo Shoro, forty five girls attended primary school at the time of collection of the data.

In the more developed village, it was found that the children's exposure to education and television leads to flow of information to their mothers also. Thus, according to the writer, adequate stress on nutrition, hygiene and sanitation education in the text books of schools is vitally necessary. In this way not only does the younger generation get trained, but the strong interpersonal contacts lead to increase in information of their mothers also.

The girls in the more isolated village societies, generally spend nearly all their times in their houses with occasional visits to relatives. The idea itself of young girls acquiring education is frowned upon in many rural societies. Some of the villagers, who would not mind their girls getting educated, fear village norms and thus do not allow them to go out of the house for education. Ques-

tioning revealed that many would "allow" education if it was provided at their door step. In such circumstances efforts to increase the literacy rate would have to take into consideration such attitudes and norms. The writer believes that educating the girls and women turns them into future responsible women who ardently desire education for their children, girls as well as boys.

The researcher has proposed a Government or NGO sponsored scheme in the above mentioned study, whereby the services of 'Ustaniees' (lady teachers who teach the Quran) could be availed of. They should be chosen from the same village or if not available there, from nearby villages. Four to five trained. Ustaniees' in the village could easily move from house to house providing religious guidance, promoting literacy and general education as a first step and languages and general educational information as a second step. Such Ustaniees could guide girls individually or in groups of four and five in their houses. In this way correct religious guidance would reach the villages and the literacy rate as well as the information level would rise. Quranic teaching and other education, provided at home would not be against village norms. In fact, the villagers, parents as well as children, would welcome the opportunity for girls to be taught the Holy Quran as this is considered the correct thing for girls to do. In this manner, future mothers could be taught hygiene, nutritional information and so forth.

One other interesting fact that writer observed during data collection for the study was that although the voting list showed all the women of Shoro - the more modernizing village, as house-wives yet they were in real-

ity innovating entrepreneurs also. They kept livestock, and sold the milk gained from its nearby city of Kotri. In some cases this money exceeded their agricultural income. This money enabled them to achieve better living standards. A number of them saved for the future welfare of their children.

In village Karni, the women mainly toiled in the fields, as inadequate information did not allow them to take advantage of the opportunities available or to seek out new avenues. Obviously a specialized type of information tailored to local needs and conditions is needed for both the villages. Here communication can be of immense aid to development. If the women of Karni are provided information which helps them become better farmers and the women of Shoro are provided information which help them in their entrepreneurship, obviously they themselves, their children and their country would benefit. Similarly developmental messages provided through schools and face to face contact would be of aid in national development.

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