Towards a Definition of Development Communication

"I am a lay person. To me, communication means transport facilities such as aeroplanes, ships, trains, cars, buses, postal and telegraph services. While I am yet to grasp the meaning of 'communication' there has been a sudden spurt in the use of a terminology like development communication, which is somewhat broad and perhaps ambiguous. I am at a loss to decipher and any efforts to get at the real meaning have in fact created more confusion than clarification of my thinking." This observation was made by a very knowledgeable and experienced person during one of my recent visits to an Asian country. I was caught unawares at this direct but basic query, but after a little reflection, it dawned on me that since it is basic, we need to try and find out a satisfactory parameter of what is and what is not 'development communication'. To do that, let me briefly discuss the two components of development communication, namely 'development' and 'communication'.

DEVELOPMENT

Development has today become a catch-word and its discussion seems to be the order of the day. It has assumed the status of a 'king pin' and provides an acid test for the people. But what exactly, one would like to know, is development. It may be easier for me to pinpoint 'what development is not' rather than to define development. Some of the terms used interchangeably either consciously or unconsciously are change, growth, progress, modernisation and development. A change refers to a state of movement in a given situation either at the same time or at two or more different points in time. It reflects not only a positive or favourable side of the movement (physical and/or mental) but also the negative and unfavourable side as well. There can be changes without any development. If so, can change and development be synonymous? Development stands for all that is good, positive and favourable, it vouchsafes for all the pulses and no minuses. The terms which are very often used interchangeably are 'growth' and 'development'. A careful look would, however, reveal the glaring differences between the two. A tree might have grown in size, but has it developed the capacity to bear fruits as well?; can a growth in physique and size of a man reflect his development of the qualities of head and heart?; can a growth in the structure of an organisation indicate improvement in its efficiency and productivity?

The obvious answer would be no. Nevertheless, if growth is the result of some conscious and deliberate planning and executed efforts, it will assume the traits of development. "While growth implies spontaneity and naturalness, development subsumes direction, pace, kind, quality, extent and control of growth. This implies that for development, spontaneity of growth has to be planned, guided, directed and stimulated". If this premise is accepted, then we get into the whole hog of development being an objective, a programme, a movement and a process. Considered carefully, development can be

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a combination of all these and/or any one or two or three of these factors. Whatever the
nuances of these differences, a common sense approach would view ‘development’ first
as a goal, as an objective to be accomplished. But the attainment of the objective(s)
would entail a systematic approach, thus giving it the character of a ‘process’. This also
indicates that as development is a process of movement from a state of dissatisfaction to
a state of satisfaction, it is dynamic and not static.

While the debate whether development is an objective, a movement, a programme,
and a process is unending, development is increasingly used for ‘national development’,
especially in the third world countries. The yardstick for development, however, has yet
to be refined and validated for various reasons, most importantly, the conceptual differ-
ences. Scholars such as Rostow, Milikan, Chenery, Galbraith, and Rodan have stressed the
importance of economic impact in accelerating the pace of development (see Lerner,
1967:310). However, Robert Heilbroner (1963), Rogers and Svenning (1969), Lucian Pye
(1963) and others, view development as an all embracing concept, encompassing econo-
ic, social, cultural, educational, political aspects of society. The latter concept seems to
have been better received because development cannot and must not be viewed as an
economic entity alone (it may be a prime mover) but as a sum total of all round, balanced
and planned growth.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is at the root of all human activities. Human beings share know-
ledge, information and experience, and thus understand, persuade, convert or control
their fellows through communication. As stressed rightly by Everett Kleinjans, Chancellor
of the East-West Centre, Honolulu, “Communication is such a potential part of living, like
breathing, that we are usually unconscious that we are communicating or unaware of
what we are in fact communicating” (1972). Like development, communication too, has
been subjected to various conceptualisations. However, the basic tenets of communi-
cation are:

(a) communication is a process for transmission of ideas, thoughts, feelings,
behaviour from one person to another;

(b) communication is persuasive and seeks to obtain desirable response to what
is being transmitted;

(c) communication is a two-way process both vertically and horizontally in a
spirit of ‘give and take’ or ‘send and receive’.

Communication is a field of study which has come a long way to attain the status
of a science. Furthermore, it cuts across many disciplines. Because of this advantage, the
science of communication views an individual, a society or a nation in its totality,
refraining thereby from a piecemeal or fragmented view.

Mover and Moved Relationship

Granted that communication has come to stay as a multi-disciplinary science, how
about its relationship with development per se? At this stage, I would like to quote
Wilbur Schramm (1967) when he echoes the concern as “communication is asked to help
survey a new environment, raise people’s aspirations, guide and control a dynamic process,
teach new skills, and socialise citizens to a new and efficient society that is still only in