INFORMATION FLOW PATTERNS
IN VILLAGES OF RURAL MALAYSIA

THE RATIONALE

Because there are two schools of thought as to where emphasis should be placed in national communication development, communication research in developing countries is likely to reflect one or the other of the two basic approaches. Advocates of Development Support Communication tend to use sharply focussed studies aimed at analysing the communication components of a specific developmental change programme. Most of the 60 research studies recently reported by the Department of Development Communication at University of the Philippines, fall into this category.\(^2\)

In contrast, believers in the Communication Policy Planning approach, as exemplified by the regional cooperative workshop sponsored in December, 1975, by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (Singapore), tend to stress the importance of national base-line media data as basis for national system planning and international comparisons. Emphasis, in this case, is upon generalizable measures of who reads, watches and listens to what messages.

In multi-racial countries of Southeast Asia, it is particularly tempting to view the media as a system which, programmed with appropriate messages, can bring about national unity. What is viewed with alarm in some developed societies as “mass homogenization of thought” (Crutchfield, 1963: 208) would be welcomed as a means of protecting the sometimes fragile consensus which secures civil peace. But in such a society it is more than usually hazardous to assume that mass media will produce a uniform and predictable pattern of response. Even in a society which can regulate content of the mass media, it is gross oversimplification to assume that people will develop like bacteria immersed in a nutritive broth of information provided by the experimenter. The variables of education, culture, credibility, access, ideology and socio-economic status can all be expected to fluctuate over a wider range than in Western societies.

Because of these variations and because of the established importance of interpersonal communication in determining development attitudes (see Katz, 1960, and Lazarsfeld and Menzel, 1963), it was assumed that a conventional media use-survey based

1. Special credit is due the multi-racial, multi-lingual group of students who did the field work on which this study is based. No single person could have done it. They are: Asmah Othman, Che Dir Ibrahim, Ibrahim Hassan, Wan Othman bin Haji Wan Ahmad, Shanda Kesavapillay, Viji Manikam, Chew Swee Leng, and Susan Phang.

2. Samonte, Virginia, "Development Communication Research at Los Banos," in Juan F. Jamais, Readings in Development Communication, University of the Philippines, Los Banos, 1975. Examples of the research are: Arejola, "Evaluation of the Sugar Cane School-on-the-Air," and Bueno, "The Role of Mass Media in the Adoption of 2,4-D in Two Laguna Barrios."
on a national probability sample would not be very useful in predicting communication-related behaviour. Section-to-section and group-to-group variations in Malaysia are such that it was assumed national norms would not mean much. It was, therefore, decided that purposive sampling of key populations would be most productive of useful information for the guidance of development planners.

THE METHOD

For these reasons, this study is based on six Malaysian communities widely scattered over West Malaysia and representing, roughly in proportion to their rural population numbers, three racial groups -- Malays, Chinese and Indians.Occupationally the villages chosen represent the work most typical of these groups: padi planting, rubber tapping and fishing. Communities chosen were:

**Malay Villages**
- Kampong Pahi, Kelantan
- Kampong Banggol Petani, Tumpat, Kelantan
- Kampong Terolong, Pahang
- Tanjong Ipoh, Negri Sembilan

**Indian Villages**
- Bukit Selurong, Kulim, Kedah, a rubber estate village

**Chinese Villages**
- Gertak Sanggul, Penang Island, a fishing village

Because the study was concerned with charting the flow of information through the community, it was necessary to consider both mass and interpersonal channels and to trace the information flow from the mass media through the minds and mouths of local carriers to its ultimate destination. This process is difficult to describe in abstract terms. It was therefore decided to base the study on extended interviews covering mass media availability and use, but to add to the interview schedule items on community information sources and to develop a separate questionnaire for persons who might emerge as opinion leaders. The aim was to plot the flow of ideas among leaders, peers and passive receivers. The goal was not statistical tabulation but a broad base of community information which could be used to describe the dynamics of local attitude formation. The questionnaires were pre-tested and revised before the study began.

SAMPLING

Within the chosen communities, selection of households was by various random methods. In some communities neither mapping nor orderly community organization were available to help draw samples so ingenuity was used to secure representativeness -- in some cases cluster sampling, in some a random areal design and in some random selections from an official list of population. Twenty households were chosen in each community. Though sub-samples of this size would not support detailed statistical distinctions between groups, they provided the researcher with a fund of data which, supplemented by the experience of living in the village for some days, made it possible for him (or her) to describe the important features of community information flow.

Interviewers were Malaysians of Indian, Malay or Chinese ancestry. The racial