UNIT 7 MASS COMMUNICATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Contents

7.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Define the concept of rural development;
- Evaluate the multiple dimensions of rural development;
- Examine the role of communication in rural development; and
- List different schemes for rural development through ICT.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In India, the relationship between mass communication and rural development has been multifaceted. Over the past few decades, there has been a significant change in understanding the concepts like 'mass communication' and 'rural development'. In the initial stages, mass communication meant television, radio and cinema replacing the traditional mass media that included village theatres and travelling storytellers. In recent years, communication has taken a new shape through the massive concentration of internet in various ICT platforms. Rural development has always been referred to the plans, programmes and policies undertaken for the development of rural areas. It has been assessed through development in the field of agriculture, small scale and cottage industries, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry, rural trade, local administration and building up of the social and economic infrastructure. Everett M Rogers (1969) emphasized that development needs to be conceptualized in terms of equal distribution of goods hinting towards the responsibilities of a welfare state. The shift from a welfare state to a neo-liberal state directed our attention to the transfer of

power from public to private sectors. In this Unit, we would explore how media as a means of rural development moves within a continuum of welfarism and neo-liberalism. It would also help us understand how there is a change in the policies, budget allocation and programmes for rural development.

7.2 UNDERSTANDING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

We make use of the term 'rural development' in our everyday conversations. It is essential to know the possible meanings of the term as well as its applications. It is generally understood as the plans and policies designed for a sustainable growth and improvement in the lives of rural people, especially those who are poor and belong to the marginalized sections of the society. One needs to move beyond this understanding and without losing its core aspect, should also take into account its multidimensionality. As K. Singh (2009) observes, rural development can be conceptualized as four things:

i) a process,

ii) a phenomenon,

iii) a strategy and

iv) a discipline.

- As a process, rural development implies the temporal engagement of individuals and communities to achieve certain standards of improvements in their lives.
- As a phenomenon, rural development refers to the outcome due to the interaction between various technological, economic and socio-cultural factors that worked together to bring about such desired results.
- As a strategy, rural development can be understood to be a carefully designed measure to achieve social and economic well-being of the rural poor.
- As a discipline, rural development is multidisciplinary as it takes into account the theoretical and conceptual frameworks from social, agricultural, behavioural and management sciences.

7.3 TRAJECTORY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

In post-independence era, rural development was caught between two models – Gandhian model of self-sufficiency and the Nehruvian model of industrialization. Gandhi's vision calling for the welfare of all was conceptualized as 'Sarvodaya'. His model emphasized on production for own consumption and local use rather than the purpose of making profit. The Technocratic model, on the other hand relied heavily on industrialization and approached agricultural development through the rampant usage of modern science and technology. In 1952, the Community Development Programme

(CDP) integrated Gandhian notion of organic and sustainable development and Nehru's vision of industrial technology. The approach was to reinforce the co-operation between the state and its citizens with an aim to promote social welfare and justice. It culminated with the establishment of small and manageable administrative units called 'Blocks' to bring about socio-economic development in rural areas. However, the ability of CPD in improving the rural economy took a back seat due to less local participation, limited human and financial resources and bureaucratization. In 1957, the Balwantrai Mehta Committee realized that rural development can be achieved by incorporating institutions that are functioning at the grassroot level and looking after the local governance like the panchayats, which would be beneficial for implementation of rural development programmes. It rejuvenated the civic, political and economic life guided by the principle of rural development and self-governance.

The year 1965 witnessed a distinctive approach with an aim to increase agricultural production through an Intensive Agricultural Area Programme. It advocated for massive usage of fertilisers, pesticides, technical infrastructure and other agricultural machineries. This was followed by what was known as the 'target-sector approach' that was based on concentration of efforts in selected areas to bring about rural development. However, it was observed that the benefits of rural development programme mostly remained confined to those who owned large tracts of land. Therefore, during the seventies the agricultural policy was oriented to ensure that the benefits of rural development programmes trickled down to the weaker sections and backward areas. Rural development expanded its meaning beyond agriculture and a National Programme for Minimum Needs was initiated to facilitate the basic requirements of the villagers like education, health, hygiene, clean drinking water, nutritional diet, roads, electricity, and provision of homes to the rural landless. A provision for intensive child development was also undertaken recognizing that women and children are the most affected and vulnerable group and as such require special attention. The desired outcomes of such efforts were short lived as they mostly remained as adhoc measures that did not contribute to generation and growth in income.

The failure of several such programmes eventually made the government adopt a holistic approach — the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) — that envisaged growth and equal distribution of agricultural output in the rural areas. Under this approach, the development of agro-based rural industries received utmost importance. It also aimed at establishment and development of health and educational infrastructure and services and provision of civic amenities. An awareness was created about the family planning measures. The overall concern was to ensure minimum state intervention and maximum local participation and self-reliance. The sixth plan document was the turning point in Indian rural development due to its focus on allocation of resources on an inter-sectoral basis. It gave an impetus for the growth of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. All such economic activities

like horticulture, animal husbandry, fishery, forestry, which affect rural family life were included for planning and development. The community development programmes including the IRD emphasized on the usage of science and technology for the benefit of all. It requires a definite and suitable appropriation of technology for rural areas. Rural technology was identified for establishing structural and functional connections between agro-based industries and agricultural technology, which changed the social organizations and consumption patterns of the rural masses.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Write your answer in the space provided

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Indicate if the following statements are true or false.

a) The Gandhian model of rural development focused on technology. ( )

b) Blocks are small administrative units created through CDP. ( )

c) Community Development Programme is a combination of Gandhi and Nehru's vision of rural development. ( )

2) What are the four ways in which rural development can be conceptualized?

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3) In what ways rural development extends beyond agricultural development?

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7.4 COMMUNICATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Communication is a social process that includes not only the flow of information but also the circulation of knowledge, ideas and thoughts that needs to be internalized for the benefit of the human society. It is through communication that individuals learn about new ideas and become cognizant of the changes taking place around them. The first five-year plan realized the importance of communication in all national development programmes. According to S.C. Dube (1964), development has ushered in rural India due to establishment of different channels of communication. It has facilitated development in areas such as economic growth, socio-religious conditions and government's community development programmes. In their study, Arvind Singhal and Everett M Rogers (2000) found that television as a means of communication brought about attitudinal changes among women who felt

the need to exercise their freedom of choice to limit their family size. They cite the example of "Hum Log", a Hindi television soap operabroadcasted in Doordarshan that left a remarkable impact in the minds of the audience. However, one should also note the functioning of different kinds of media in different strata of the society. For example, S.C. Sharma (1987) in his comparative study between two different villages in Rajasthan about the effectiveness of media in rural development found that mass media favours the upper echelons of the society whereas traditional media like posters and exhibitions were more popular among the lower strata of society.

Apart from the mass communication, the effectiveness of communication in rural development has also to be understood through other channels of communication. Everett M Rogers (1974), for example, argued that a combination of mass media and interpersonal channels can bring about the potential for reaching the goals of rural development. Mass media channels, according to him, would include newspapers, magazines, films, radio and television that has a wider coverage and larger audience. On the other hand, Interpersonal channels, refer to face-to-face interaction between two or more individuals who may be family members, neighbours, peer groups, religious or community leaders and teachers. According to him, three things need to be taken into consideration to bring about effectiveness of communication in development:

- **Wide Exposure**: We can measure the impact of mass media by examining the pattern of its circulation and the span of attention it receives from the rural audience.
- **Relevance of the message**: The media message should be in the format of infotainment and relevant to the needs of the rural non-elite audiences. The gap between the makers and the receivers of the programme should be minimized in order to ensure effective communication.
- **Credibility of the Content**: Credibility implies a degree of trust that the audience bestows to a communication source or channel through his/her competence. A high degree of government control will lead to propagandist nature of advertising to persuade people. The governments, should therefore, make judicious use of media as an active promoter of development activities and as an integral tool in their development campaigns.

He believed in the power of media forums to bring about effective communication in rural development. At this stage, it is essential for us to understand what is a media forum and how does it function for rural development. Media forums can be understood as small groups of individuals who conduct meeting on a regular basis to discuss the contents of the programme. He gives an example of Indian radio forums which had a greater impact due to combination of media and interpersonal communication channels. He attributes the following reasons for the success of media forums in rural development:

- There is regular attendance and participation by the individual members in these forums. The participation may be on the basis of voluntary or due to peer pressure and social expectations.
- The group dynamics in these forums causes an attitudinal and behavioral change when the individuals are in groups.
- The group decisions are unanimously accepted by all the members involved in making the decision.
- The feedback that emerges through discussion in these forums is given to the broadcaster who immediately acts upon it and ultimately leads to greater efficiencies.

The traditional mass media has a wider reach and considered to be more trustworthy by the villagers. For example, communication channels such as folk theatre, travelling storytellers, balladeers and poets are an integral part of rural culture and the messages they convey has a greater value in the eyes of the villagers and as such they are effective tools for rural development.

7.5 MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

The usage of means of communication to change or improve the way of living of the individual members of the society has generally been understood as development communication. According to Everett M Rogers, "Development communication refers to the uses to which communication are put in order to further development." It can be understood as a process of efficient management to look after the planning and implementation of developmental programmes. There are two primary roles of development communication:

i) **transforming role** wherein communication is an agent of social change resulting in a higher quality of life.

ii) **socializing role** wherein audiences are expected to internalize and imbibe the established values of the society.

Development communication, thus, seeks to provide a platform for social change through innovations with a focus on changing the standards of living of the individual members of the society.

According to Wilbur Schramm, the media performs three distinctive functions in development:

a) to inform – The media should provide correct and impartial information about the social, economic, and political development. It should also make the people aware about the hindrances to the development process.

b) to instruct – Media should instruct people and educate them about basic skills that would help them in the long run to improve their standard of living. It would, in a way, increase the rate of media literacy as well.

c) to participate – Discussions and debates in the media would create awareness among the people about the current issues, developmental policies of the government and would encourage a voluntary participation from the citizens of the country.

In India, media was considered to be a significant element in development communication and radio was the first medium to be used for this purpose. The potential of radio to have a wider audience reach was tapped by the government. Various universities, especially agricultural universities and other educational institutes carried the development communication experiment through their extension networks under the aegis of international organisations like the United Nations. Community radio was an excellent outcome of this experiment. Several NGOs and educational institutions procured the license to run community radio stations in rural areas to broadcast information and messages on rural development. One of the advantages of the community radio was the involvement of local community in running these radio stations. It encouraged the participation of villagers and as such local problems related to agriculture and their solutions were also discussed. All India Radio became the flagbearer in the process of creating multiple radio programmes related to agriculture, irrigation, adult literacy, women and legal rights and thereby implementing the communication strategy adopted by the government that was essential for rural development.

Apart from radio, television also acted as a potential medium for development communication. In 1967, Doordarshan, the only state-controlled television channel, launched Krishi Darshan Programme to popularize the modern method in agriculture. The importance of television for development communication can be evaluated through its socially relevant programmes that aims to promote community development and formal education. Satellite communication technology was utilized in order to reach a large number of audience spread over the remote corners of the country. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) utilized the space technology for education and development through various projects like Educational TV (ETV), Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) and country wide classroom (CWC) project. All these programmes were designed to impart educational training, and general knowledge and awareness among the rural poor. SITE, for example, was an experiment undertaken by the government to create awareness about development programmes through the satellite communication to six rural clusters spread over six states – Rajasthan, Karnataka, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. It was a massive project as it covered a total of 2330 villages of 20 districts of these six states. It aimed to improve the rural primary education, agriculture, health, hygiene, family planning and national integration. The success of the SITE project was evaluated through the follow up studies. It showed how a continuous exposure to television in general, and developmental messages in languages understood by the people, in particular, widened the vision of the villagers to a large extent. In the subsequent years, Kheda Communication Project (KCP)

was launched in 1975 with the idea of 'limited rebroadcast' wherein 607 community television sets were installed in 443 villages of Kheda district of Gujarat. The villagers were exposed to one hour television programmes on a daily basis that focused mainly on the problems of the rural poor. Evaluation of Kheda project revealed that the villagers, particularly the women in the village gained knowledge from television programmes of Doordarshan and space application centres, which generated a sense of equality and self-confidence among them.

The government took cognizance of education as a vital instrument for social transformation and as such Indian National Satellite (INSAT) was launched to provide Educational TV (ETV), to cater to the educational needs of the primary school children in the above-mentioned six states. It proved beneficial for University Grants Commission (UGC) for initiating a similar format for higher education through the countrywide classroom programme. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) also made use of INSAT for distance education programmes. EDUSAT is another such effort that concentrates on facilitating community participation, teachers' training and curriculum-based teaching. It strengthened student interaction through web-based learning, virtual laboratory, interactive training, online examination and admission.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Write your answer in the space provided

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Indicate if the following statements are true or false.

a) The 1st five year plan emphasized on communication in development. ( )

b) The combination of media and Interpersonal channels of communication are useful for rural development. ( )

c) If communication changes the living standard of the people, it is known as development communication. TRUE OR FALSE ( )

2) According to Rogers, what were the three things for effective communication in rural development?

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3) What are the two significant roles of development communication?

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4) What is the role of media forum in rural development?

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7.6 ICT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The era of new media technologies, especially the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) gave a boost to the mechanism of bringing rural transformation. According to Michiels and Van Crowder (2001) ICTs refer to "a range of electronic technologies which when converged in new configurations are flexible, adaptable, enabling and capable of transforming organisations and redefining social relations". They further add that there is a rapid change in the range of technologies and "there is a convergence between the new technologies and conventional media" (2001:8). The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution has led to the phenomenal growth in areas such as e-governance, e-literacy, e-commerce and online transactions. Various ICT projects were undertaken by the government such as e-choupal, TARA Haat, and Gyandoot. These projects have empowered the Indian rural communities and have made them self-dependent, self-reliant and given them an opportunity to lead a life with dignity. With the introduction of websites by several independent media houses, new media has been identified as an active tool for development communication. One of the advantages of ICT is its ability to pass quick information about various services such as health awareness, education, agro-business and employment. The usage of ICT for rural development has ushered multiple benefits in the form of poverty reduction, knowledge dissemination, women's empowerment, transparency in business, increased productivity and better health care practices. The importance of ICT can be evaluated through observations made by Kenneth (2002) who observed that ICTs imply the success of the Indian software industry that has developed mechanism to solve the problems associated with poverty and underdevelopment in rural India.

E-governance facilitates, reinforces, and promotes sustainable inclusive growth. It makes use of the ICT for planning and implementation of government programmes and also monitors the progress and drawbacks involved in this process. E-governance is carried out through an effective Management Information System (MIS). It helps in getting information and reports of development activities undertaken at the Block level. Another innovative step initiated by several states is the creation of State Wide Area Networks (SWAN). It helps the villagers to access electronically the services of district administration, co-operative union, state and central government departments. One of the major success of ICT application in rural

development is the computerization of land records. Since land is a valuable asset in rural areas, their revision and updation through computer aided softwares has proved more fruitful for the villagers. The state government of Karnataka started the Bhoomi project where age-old handwritten land records were computerized. The Computerization of Land Records (CoLR) became a centrally sponsored scheme of the government of India in 1988-89.The main objective of a computerised database of land records is to reduce the work load involved in manually maintaining the records and eliminates every possible chance of manipulation in the land records. The farmers were largely benefitted by the CoLR as it created a land management information system through which they could get direct access to all necessary records and information regarding their property, free from human arbitrations.

A significant measure developed through the usage of ICT is the coming up of precision agriculture. It refers to the application of specific technologies in agriculture to improve the quantity and quality of agricultural production. The computer and satellite technologies are used by farmers for improving agricultural yields and protecting the environment. It also makes use of e-commerce facilities for marketing and sale of the agricultural products through internet without being exploited by the middle-men. Precision agriculture, as the name suggests, is quite helpful for the farmers to obtain more specific information about agricultural resources through ICTs and other technologies. This helps them to identify and analyse the suitability of the soil for cultivation. It also allows them to manage accordingly the growing up of suitable crops for sustainability and profitability, keeping in view protection of the environment. Precision agriculture makes use of advanced technology, namely the GIS, GPS, remote sensing and many others such advanced applications. The Geographical Information Systems (GIS) is used for mapping the area, analysing its suitability for production and taking measures to provide any kind of remedy to agricultural problems. The Global Positioning System (GPS) helps to locate the suitable geographical conditions that suits for specific agricultural practices like growing up particular kinds of crops according to the nature of the soil of that specific region. The objective is not only providing agricultural inputs but also to observe the agricultural outputs. It, therefore, makes use of an application that monitor and records the agricultural production and creates a database for crop management.

The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation in collaboration with TCIL, a Government of India company initiated the Kisan Call Centre (KCC). It functions to address different agriculture related queries from the farmers and the solution is given in the local language for a better communication. In case the problem demands a high level of expertise, it is referred to the agricultural universities and state departments to provide instant solutions to the farmers through the mobile phone. The concentration of mobile phone usage in the villages has increased, which makes it easier for them to get real time solutions to their queries in their native language.

ICT in rural development did not remain confined to agriculture rather expanded its scope in maintaining e-governance in rural areas. The government of India brought out a national e-governance plan in the year 2006. The Government approved Common Services Centers (CSC) whose function was to deliver public as well as private services to the rural masses. The CSC provided content and services through video and voice calls. The rural needs in the areas of education, e-governance, telemedicine, health, etc. were catered to by these centres. There was entry of private players in the CSC scheme through the PPP (Private-Public Partnership) model who were responsible for implementing the scheme in different states in the country.

E-medicine is another boon of ICTs in rural areas where the patients in a remote village can have access to the city doctor electronically or digitally and can treat his/her ailments. It has improved the quality of health care in rural India. It is through telemedicine that even the rural doctors get medical advice on different diseases and mechanisms to control them.

The traditional practice in villages to sit under a peepal tree by the village elders to discuss the problems of the village and trying to find their solutions has also taken over by the ICTs. The new practice is the coming up of an E-Choupal, adigital rural forum, where the villagers discuss issues related to agriculture, market prices of agricultural products, better farming practices, usage of good yielding seed variety and fertilisers or any other such issues that will be helpful for the community. The following table highlights some of the major adoptions of the ICT for rural development in different parts of the country:

Another remarkable usage of technology is the functioning of ICT kiosks through which the villagers can generate revenue by providing services in the field of education, science, talk shows, and computer education. The operators at the kiosk should be qualified enough to handle the technology properly else all such efforts will be wasted. Therefore, significant capacity building efforts are required to ensure sustainability. In this regard, the government has roped in private to provide training to the kiosk operators and to ensure rapid development and cost-effective solutions.

There are lots of initiatives taken by the government and non-governmental organizations in partnership with the local community members to create a roadmap for a sustainable rural development in India. The Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions (SRISTI) facilitates the usage of ICT to identify and encourage the grassroot inventors and rural entrepreneurs to conserve the nature and bio-diversity with an aim to develop sustainable eco-friendly solutions to local problems. Apart from environment and agriculture, ICTs and GIS technology is also used for HIV/AIDS intervention and awareness campaign among the villagers in Karnataka. Community Access to Sustainable Health (CASH) investigate the potentiality of the information technology in bringing about positive changes in rural healthcare through an economically sustainable or

viable manner. The projects based on PPP model acts as an intermediary between the private and public sectors. For example, the Raita Mitra Kendra, in North Karnataka, based on PPP model provides fertilisers, seeds, pesticides and other agricultural tools at subsidized rates. Similarly, in Maharashtra, the Warna Wired Village Project caters to the needs of the farmers by providing information about cultivation of cash crops, marketing of agricultural products, control of pests, and regulation of the prices of the produce.

All these benefits of usage of ICT in rural development, however, cannot sideline the fact that much usage of technology strengthens the process of centralization. It should also be noted that the schemes having less state intervention and more market oriented approaches would tilt the benefit to the few elites and leave a majority of rural population in the trap of debt and poverty. The Gandhian vision of self-sufficiency with emphasis on small-scale and cottage industries has been lost with the massive usage of technological advancements. It has widened the inequalities in the farming sector because there is a cultural gap between technological changes and the knowledge required to operate these technologies. Therefore, there is a need to bridge the digital divide between the rich and the poor by encouraging more of community participation involving rural people who are the actual beneficiaries of rural development programmes.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Write your answer in the space provided.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Indicate if the following statements are true or false.
   a) E-Choupals are rural courts that decides marital disputes. (T/F)
   b) ICT has bridged the gap between rich and poor. (T/F)
   c) Telemedicine is useful for both villagers and rural doctors. (T/F)
2) What are the benefits of computerization of land records?

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3) What is the function of SWAN in e-governance?

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4) How is GPS helpful in precision agriculture?

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7.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we understood the varied meanings of the term 'rural development'. Initially it was confined to agriculture only but later on moved to other economic activities that are essential for rural livelihood like fishery, forestry, animal husbandry, etc. Gradually, it moved further to include development in education, health, road and transportation, hygiene, women and child welfare.

We also learnt how rural development in India was caught between the different ideals of development as propagated by Gandhi and Nehru. Both of their perspectives on rural development were combined for the first time in the shape of Community Development Programmes where equal weightage was given to indigenous as well as modern scientific methods.

The scope of rural development grew with the implementation of means of communication such as newspaper, radio, television and cinema. We observed the functioning of a welfare state that carried out the responsibility of utilizing mass communication to bring social change in rural areas in the country. There were several initiatives undertaken by the government by the usage of both mass media channels as well as traditional media channels.

We also covered the different schemes for rural development that got an impetus through the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). There has been failure and success of these schemes yet they gave a direction to understand local needs and to involve more of community or local participation and less state intervention. It also helped us to understand how media technologies can be properly utilized for ushering development in rural India.

7.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) False b) True c) True

2) Rural development can be conceptualized as a process, a phenomena, a strategy and a discipline.

3) Rural development takes into account a holistic approach and tries to fulfill the basic needs of the villagers like education, health, road and transportation, drinking water, etc and as such extends beyond agricultural development.

Check Your Progress 2

1) a) True b) True c) True

2) According to Rogers – wide exposure, relevance of the media message and credibility of the media content are three essential things for effective communication in rural development.

3) Development communication performs two roles – transforming role and socializing role.

4) Media forums are quite effective in rural development as it makes use of both media and interpersonal communication channels. The members of this forum participate voluntarily and accept the group decisions unanimously and their feedback is sent immediately to the broadcaster, who acts upon it and modify the content of the programme as per the local needs of the community.

Check Your Progress 3

1) a) False, b) False, c) True

2) The benefit of computerized land records is that it becomes easily accessible whenever the farmers need them. It also reduces the work load involved in manually managing the land records and also prevents any kind of manipulation in the land records.

3) The State Wide Area Networks (SWAN) helps to connect the villagers with the government bodies and agencies.

4) The Global Positioning System (GPS) helps in mapping the land area and determine its suitability for cultivation and to provide solutions for any kind of agricultural problems.