
UNIT 13 COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

Structure

- 13.0 Aims and Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Communication Support for Rural Development
- 13.3 Problems in Communication Encountered in Rural Development
- 13.4 Characteristics of Support Communication
- 13.5 Philosophy and Scope of Support Communication
- 13.6 Communication Strategy
- 13.7 Approach to Communication Planning and Design
- 13.8 Planning of a Communication Strategy
 - 13.8.1 Communication Planning
 - 13.8.2 Management Planning
 - 13.8.3 Manpower Training
 - 13.8.4 Implementation
 - 13.8.5 Summative Evaluation
- 13.9 Communication Support
- 13.10 Case Studies on Successful Initiatives Applying Communication Support
 - 13.10.1 Chhatera Experiment
 - 13.10.2 Radio Mewat
- 13.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.12 Suggested Readings
- 13.13 Check Your Progress

13.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

After reading the Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the role of communication support in rural development;
- Identify the problems in communication encountered in rural development;
- Know about the characteristics of support communication;
- Discuss the philosophy and scope of support communication; and
- Learn about the approaches to communication planning and design.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The practice of communication support in the broad context of rural development could be understood as a multi-sectoral process in which the information is shared about developmental agendas requiring planned

actions. It is a planned process to link the policymakers, beneficiaries and implementors, and donors in development. The communication support is complemented with an effective feedback mechanism to provide proper direction to the intervention. The benefit associated with the support system is that it necessitates the planning bodies and implementing agencies to provide an exact blueprint of their aims and objectives in the development and the provision of opportunities for the beneficiaries to participate in the developmental process.

13.2 COMMUNICATION SUPPORT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Communication is mostly understood as a linear process resulting in exchanging ideas and information, acquiring knowledge, or resulting in persuasion. However, communication also contains a shared meaning and is influenced by the cultural, political and economic contexts making it interwoven and dependent on each other. Development is a gradual process through which the conditions of society are improved. At the intersection of communication in rural development and development support communication lies the communication support that involves the strategic use of communication in the complex web of social situations to bring sustainable development.

The rural development processes in developing countries mostly revolve around rural people's needs to improve their socio-economic status. The necessary interventions put to use are the technological advancements and the input support for using the technologies. While these are helpful in the development context, they are not alone sufficient to drive the desired progress.

The last decades' developmental efforts have started to focus more on the other important factors like human capacity development and access to relevant information, knowledge, and services (Acunzo, 2014).

The primary cause of any developmental process's failure is mainly attributed to two reasons: ineffective communication and lack of participation from the stakeholders in the process. The technical information available to the developmental workers is mostly in complex language requiring greater comprehension. Thus, it involves communication planning for an effective understanding of the development workers with helpful support in processing messages relevant to media selected for communication.

13.3 PROBLEMS IN COMMUNICATION ENCOUNTERED IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The developmental programmes in India lack a well-planned and systematic communication support system. This results in different problems in rural development of varying magnitude. The major problems in communication encountered in rural development could be attributed to the following factors:

- a) **Diverse audiences:** The villages in India are very diverse in terms of culture, languages, customs, and traditions. One fit-for-all strategy is not always applicable in such environments. As such, the communication needs to be custom designed for the audience.
- b) **Positivity bias:** There is a tendency among the developmental staff working on the ground to report positive information about the target groups. This leads to insufficient feedback from the ground leading to improper implementation of the planned interventions.
- c) **Low ratio of extension workers:** The extension workers working on the ground are less in number, and also, they are not good communicators. The technical education needs to be complemented with efficient communication ability to influence the rural clientele. The importance of clear and effective communication mostly lacks in the knowledge domain.
- d) **Lack of planned approach:** The various rural development projects in agriculture, education, health and family planning, nutrition, etc. are implemented by agencies independently with limited possibilities for linkage and collaboration. This results in the inefficient working of communication support strategy.
- e) **Media reach and exposure:** The reach of media in the last two decades could not be discounted, but the spread is still deficient in many villages. Internet reach and connectivity are still demanding. Only a limited number of people are exposed to information through social media and other mainstream media channels like television and print media.

13.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

The support communication is characterized by several components, which are briefly discussed below:

- a) **Reach and development at micro-level:** The primary aim of support communication is to reach the grassroots level to the smallest unit of the society.
- b) **Deals with target-oriented developmental objectives:** The problems pertain to the particular scenario and need targeted solutions in the same context.
- c) **Working with multiple variables at the same time:** The working at grassroots level involves working with several factors at the same time, which influences the communication process. The factors need to be studied carefully before making any critical decision since any casual assessment could interfere with the selected goals.

13.5 PHILOSOPHY AND SCOPE OF SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

The philosophy and scope of support communication are concerned with the following aspects:

- a) The support communication focus is centered around the latest efforts and technologies to influence change in the selected area.
- b) It has roots in the participatory communication process for educating rural people.
- c) The aim is to target the audience for achieving the underlined goals of change and development.
- d) It works interactively with the identified community to create awareness.
- e) The philosophy is concerned about motivating the audience with the use of all means of communication.

13.6 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Communication Strategy is developed to:

- enhance the level of understanding of the project through the whole developmental process. Also, the way in which the key information is presented to the target audience/ stakeholders of the project through the use of effective communication tools is explained through the strategy.
- provide continuous communication of affairs pertaining to the project, ensure implementation and impart updates on the project to the concerned.
- ensure a system for eliciting feedback and provide a mechanism to act on it.
- identification of suitable measures for the implementation of the strategy along with the budgeting requirements.

13.7 APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION PLANNING AND DESIGN

The following factors must be kept in mind before the implementation of a comprehensive communication approach in rural development:

- a) Need assessment/information gathering: The key developmental priorities should be established using field surveys, community consensus, interviews, and focused group discussions with field workers and subject matter specialists. Along with it, the assessment of media channels available to the target audience should also be considered to ascertain the availability of technological inputs at the disposal of the audience.
- b) Decision-making/development of strategy: The needs are to be

prioritized to select the most important one. The project objectives, identification of target groups, baseline survey to understand knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) of the audience, the setting of specific communication objectives, multi-media mix, and message design strategies need to be established.

- c) Implementation: The drawing of an action plan, production and testing of field test samples of media materials, revision and finalization of media materials, training of field staff in content and use of materials, and monitoring needs to be established.
- d) Evaluation: The small-scale field evaluations should be carried out at strategic points during the process to get an idea of the changes required. This would enable the successful launch of the communication process in a full-fledged manner in the near future.

The successful planning of communication strategy in rural development requires the support of baseline data to determine the most feasible, practical, and cost-effective approach. The communication plan involves the integration of strategic planning and management planning. Strategy planning deals with the problem and how communication is used to solve the problem. Management planning is concerned with the action required for the implementation of the strategy.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

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

- 1) Explain the need of communication support in rural development.

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- 2) What are the factors to be considered for effective communication planning and design.

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13.8 PLANNING OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Communication is a continuous activity in any organization which serves the community and is connected to it. The overall purpose, the audience of the media, messages and channels may keep on changing, but the overall goal to

maintain relationships with the members of the community is always intact. Thus, the communication plan is revised in accordance with the needs of the community throughout the existence of the institution.

Communication strategy is a holistic plan for ensuring the successful functioning of all the components of the project. Planning provides a path for the fulfilment of the objectives set for the project. In order to develop an effective plan, the following questions need to be answered:

- The purpose of communication with the community?
- Who do you want to communicate?
- What do you want to communicate?
- How do you want to communicate?
- Whom should be contacted for the use and distribution of the messages?

The answers to the above questions would constitute the action plan for the successful communication with the audience. The rest of the communication plan involves the

- Implementation of the action plan
- Evaluation and assessment of the communication efforts and suitable adaptation.

The communication plan is mostly a working document containing further specifics of each approach presented in the Communication Strategy. For instance, if state-wide presentations were to be given, the exact date, time, place, the presenter (s), delivery method and list of attendees would be recorded in the communication plan rather than communication strategy, as these specifics are mostly subject to change.

An Example of Project Communication Strategy Action Plan

Target Audience/ Stakeholder Group	Aim	Communication Tools	Action taken by?	When?	Costs involved?
The identification of target audience by examining: Who is the initiative/ project going to benefit? What are the main stakeholders, both internal and external?	What do you plan to convey to the group of stakeholders? What are the key points that group of stakeholders need to consider and act on?	For the stakeholder(s) classes, which communication methods/ tools are the most appropriate? For example: electronic, oral, pictorial, written, etc.	Who will be responsible for the implementation of each action?	When does the action have to be implemented?	What are the costs linked to each action?

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

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

1) Explain the importance of planning in formulation of an effective communication strategy?

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13.8.1 Communication Planning

Principles of Strategic Communication Planning

Strategic Communication Planning has been described as the coherence and/or coordination of actions, images, and words to achieve a desired effect.

The principles of strategic communication planning are:

a) The hierarchy of messages should be organized to maintain the consistency of the presentation.

The principle of consistency of messages in the presentation represents the information to be communicated organized in a hierarchy. The messages which are on the top are the most important and are fewer in number. The messages appearing lower in the hierarchy should run in order and should elaborate the above messages. The category of the messages is:

The main message: The central idea should be conveyed clearly to the audience. It is the crisp one-sentence story of the main message.

Primary messages: These messages follow the main message but are fewer in number. Primary messages help in the bifurcation of the message content into different parts for the ease in communication.

Secondary messages: These are the ideas which needs to be communicated to the audience. It could be omitted if not found to be useful without effecting the consistency of the message flow.

Tertiary messages: These messages are good for communication to the audience, but might be skipped considering the limitations of space and budgetary requirements.

b) Use of a common attribute of the subject to provide a flow.

This principle mainly uses the time and place component to provide a sequence to the subject matter. Time places the subject matter in the prior time frame and provides a connection between the two events. A

story could be created by passing through time and place component and creating an interrelationship between the two.

- c) Proper ordering of the concepts so that the former leads to the understanding of the latter.

The underlying principle related to this criterion is based on ordering in which the understanding of one concept leads to the other. In this principle, the entire subject matter is divided into a series of concepts in succession for better illustration of the idea.

- d) Provide a notable introduction and ending.

The principle is based on providing importance to the start and end of the subject matter. These are the first and the last points that are observed by the audience. The introduction provides an overview to the audience on what is expected from the subject, while the conclusion provides the summary to whatever has been described previously.

- e) Communication using various representations and media channels.

How you express a concept is a representation, and what you communicate it with is a medium. For example, one can explain how an Automated Teller Machine (ATM) functions with the help of a working model or live demonstration etc. In this way, the illustrations with the help of videos, text and images, and physical model could be effective for successful communication.

- f) Enable various levels of participation and comprehension.

The various degree of interest in the audience is compensated by this principle. Different part of the content is imbibed in different stages so there should be enough information on the topic to keep the audience engaged. Also, there is a need for a summary for understanding the most important facts at a glance.

13.8.2 Management Planning

An effective management planning process includes the evaluation of long-term objectives set by the organization. This necessarily requires the efficient scheduling and coordination of a large number of communication activities. The planning personnel is responsible for arranging the communication activities in a sequential way, estimate the time and resources required for each activity, and keep a constant vigil on the schedule as the programme progresses. The schedule so developed should be proportionate with the time set for the project and the resources should be used optimally. Given the diverse nature of the project, it is sometimes difficult to plan it effectively, but it is necessary to hold someone accountable for the work. There are three scheduling techniques.

- a) *Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT)*

PERT is a scheduling technique for the flow of tasks in the project along

with the estimation of time required for the completion. This technique is useful to represent the dependence of one task on the other. In order to schedule a project using PERT, the activities need to be defined along with their arrangement in an orderly fashion with milestones to be achieved. Proper understanding of the possibilities concerning the flow of project resources helps the management to achieve the most efficient and useful project path.

b) *The monthly work plan*

A monthly work plan is a one-month work plan which is used at a team level or a project level. The team member of the project can do the individual monthly work plan. The project coordinator or manager then consolidates the individual work plans and prepares a project monthly work plan.

c) *Critical Path Method*

The critical path method (CPM) is helpful in understanding the longest and shortest possible timeline for the project. With CPM, the critical tasks can be marked and the one which could be easily handled could be identified. The estimate on how long each task may require is calculated along with the addition of milestones and deliverables to the project.

13.8.3 Manpower Training

Upon designing the communication strategy, the implementing personnel needs to be trained to execute the planned activities. The implementing personnel should be trained taking into consideration the context of the training, culture systems and techniques so as to utilize them in their future work.

13.8.4 Implementation

At the stage of implementation, the communication strategy comes to life. The implementing personnel involved should be appraised of the task to be performed and the problems encountered during the process. The monitoring of the activities should be performed along with effective problem solving to facilitate the implementation process.

13.8.5 Summative Evaluation

The summative evaluation is conducted at the end of the communication process to measure the overall functioning of the communication strategy. It also leads to the evaluation of the communication activities. The overall objectives of summative evaluation are:

- a) analyze the process of implementation, with a focus on the participation of each member of the process.
- b) identify the impact or changes that have occurred due to the communication process

- c) identification of problems and constraints encountered during the process
- d) Utilize the feedback obtained for policy formulation for the future projects.

Program evaluation is thus performed at the end of the course to know the extent to which the objectives previously fixed have been accomplished. It also indicates the degree to which the participants have mastered the course content.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

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

- 1) Briefly describe the principles of strategic communication planning.

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- 2) Explain the importance of summative evaluation in the communication process.

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13.9 COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

Communication support could be defined as the process used by the organization to convey information and communication resources for the achievement of the goals. Communication in day-to-day life takes many forms and the communication resources mostly used are communication materials and media, equipment, facilities, money and manpower etc. The different aspects of communication impacted are speech, language and/or social communication skills.

Communication support is broadly a unit of development organization whose function is smoothen the process of communication by offering services such as technical writing, editing services, copyediting, audio-visual production, printing, graphics arts, information management and retrieval etc. The various components of the communication support services can be explained as:

Technical writing: It is an audience-centered means of communication that documents the process and provides the reader with a clear and easy access to information. The technical writer writes the documents in specific formats using explicit information for clear understanding of the readers.

Editing services: Editing involves making revisions to the core content for improving the accuracy of the language, structure and accuracy. It also involves the checking for grammatical mistakes and spell-check.

Photography: Photography is the art or process of image production using slides, movie production, or photo production.

Visual and audio-video production: The development and production of visual and audio-video component such as slide-tape presentations, films, television programmes, and other teaching aids.

Information management and retrieval: This is important for retrieving the research studies and technical information and further disseminating the information.

Graphic arts: The graphic arts cover a broad range of visual artistic information produced mostly on a two-dimensional surface for the easy representation of the content.

Printing: Printing helps to produce a large number of copies quickly for the dissemination of information.

Organization of Development Support Communication

The linkage between the development communication support strategies and different welfare programmes need to be established for proper implementation of the intervention. In that case, it is essential to organize the tasks to be achieved in a structured fashion in the organization. The United Nations has implemented the development support communication in all the developmental programmes following a structured intervention:

Development Support Communication Unit (DSCU)

The development support communication unit in case of communication planning and support services could be divided into three parts:

- a) **Programme section:** This section is engaged in development of a plan in consultation with the support staff of the organization. The selection of information tools for the dissemination of the message, selection of media, script designing and monitoring and evaluation is catered by the programme section.
- b) **Production section:** The photography, printing, graphical design, audio/video recording, mass production, storage and maintenance of the communication material is taken care by the production section.
- c) **Distribution section:** The inventory, storage and distribution of the internal and external media along with the library of the media is maintained by the distribution section.

The communication support staff from the three sections should work in collaboration with each other in accordance with the objectives of the developmental organization.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

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

1) Mention the three essential sections of development support communication unit.

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13.10 CASE STUDIES ON SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES APPLYING COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

The developmental communication strategy and policies have experienced a widespread change since the 1950s. The development communication developed as a branch of agricultural communications which includes areas such as health, education, housing etc. All of these components require a communication component, thus providing importance to the development communication context. During the 1950s and 1960s, the researches on communication and development was conducted on the third world/developing countries for meeting the policy objectives of the western countries.

Communication support in development communication is described as the use of communication for the purpose of national development. The founding fathers of development communication felt the need for better communication of the economic policies affecting the growth and development of the country. In developing countries which are mostly traditional and depend upon the rural sector, the access to media is found to be low because of low internet connectivity, low disposable income levels and low literacy rate. The access to communication channels and the participation of people in the developmental programme furthers the development networks. The effectiveness of the communication channels surrounding the information is also responsible for the proper working of the developmental initiatives.

13.10.1 Chhatera Experiment

The development journalism was experimented in India during the 1960s and 1970s. The noteworthy rural development work in this regard was performed

by Mr. B. George Verghese, the editor of the Hindustan Times in highlighting the profile of the audience, the problems and prospects associated with it at frequent intervals. He brought forward the struggles associated in the rural context like the need for food and water in the community through the Chhatera experiment. Chhatera is a village situated at a distance of 25 miles from Delhi, in Haryana. The first story on development journalism from the village was published on 23rd February 1969. The story was about the death of a villager because of the collapse of an old bridge. The story soon became a national story and the developmental initiatives started flowing in the village with the construction of a new bridge in place of the old. Also, there were regular visits by the developmental workers, private companies and government officials in the village. The facilities of bus transport, branch of nationalised bank was established soon. The bank provided a new opportunity for the villagers to apply for loans for the purchase of livestock, agricultural implements, irrigation facilities etc.

The news covering the development of the village was further published in the newspaper to provide actual information on the poverty prevailing in the villages to the masses. The newspaper also published fortnightly reports on the development of the village which was further studied by the developmental scholars as a case study. The project on the village was further conceived by the editor. Such project was thought to provide further insights on development communication to other countries of the world. The success of the Chhatera experiment was widespread extending to different parts of the country. The developmental journalism was further extended to the adjoining villages of Chhatera namely, Majra and Barota in 1972. In case of Majra village, the weaving community formed a cooperative society for better business opportunities. They were oriented on business development skills by the members of the civil society and the governmental organizations, providing them the necessary support for exporting their product. In the latter village, a nurse school was established by the newspaper Hindustan times and Yuvak Kalyan Sabha to educate the students from the village. The school was also provided with a mobile library for the ease of the students. The newspaper continued to have a weekly column on developmental experiments conducted in the villages.

13.10.2 Radio Mewat

Radio Mewat is a community radio operated by an NGO in Mewat district, Haryana. Mewat is one of the most backward districts in the country in terms of media penetration, but the high mobile phone penetration has led it to a potential radio listening audience base. It started in the year 2010 broadcasting for 14 hours in a day and reaching a radius of 25 km. area. Although the district is located at a distance of just 45 km. from the popular economic hub, Gurgaon, still the development activity was lacking because of constant resistance from the local community. The programming of the radio is dependent on needs and issues felt by the community. Thus, the

content of the radio was conceived with the active participation of the community. The majority of the content (over 90 %) aired on the radio was particular to the region.

The radio played a role in improving the quality of life of the audience by acting as a platform to provide education (both formal and non-formal) to the members of the community. The areas such as health, financial inclusion, agriculture and rural development was considered as an important gateway. The live telephone programme to get the problems regarding health addressed by the doctors sitting in the radio studios was very popular. The radio is also helping in improving local governance by connecting the local police with the common people directly. The police make important announcements like reports on local crime, status of pending police cases, traffic control, *khaps* etc. for increasing the connect among the people. Further, the programmes on the working of panchayati raj institutions, various schemes and initiatives of the government provide knowledge.

The radio is acting as a bridge to connect the community and the local administration. The radio has been successful in creating trust and confidence among the community members which could be assessed on seeing the participation of the local people in the programmes offered. The open-door policy of the radio station has enabled the residents of the district to come forward and provide a voice to the issues faced by them.

13.11 LET US SUM UP

Communication support is essential for the important information to be conveyed through the appropriate medium to the right people. To increase the efficiency of the rural development initiatives, it is essential that the stakeholders are sharing a common understanding. Without complete information, it is difficult to successfully accomplish the tasks associated with the initiative. It is further complemented with an effective feedback mechanism to provide a direction to the change process.

The approach to communication planning and design comprises of comprehensive need assessment surveys to identify the current status and interventions desired, the development of a successful strategy for the change process, implementation of the plan and an evaluation to judge the overall merit of the intervention with the help of some set standards or pre-determined criteria. The planning of a communication strategy is necessary to ensure the holistic working of all the components of the intervention. The communication strategy should be developed in a way to ascertain the consistency of the messages in an order. The designing of messages.

The principle of consistency of messages in the presentation represents the information to be communicated organized in a hierarchy. The messages which are on the top are the most important and are fewer in number. The messages appearing lower in the hierarchy should run in order and should

elaborate the above messages. The messages appearing lower in order should provide an explanation to the messages appearing higher in order. The management planning is also an essential component for the achievement of long-term goals of the organization. It requires the efficient scheduling and coordination of the planning activities. The commonly used scheduling techniques are Programme Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT), the monthly work plan and the critical path method. The summative evaluation of the activities at the end of the programme is also essential to measure the overall functioning of the planned interventions.

The communication support services in an organisation to convey necessary information for the achievement of goals could be attributed to the editing services, technical writing, photography, visual and audio-video production, graphic arts etc. The different sections of the development support communication are the programme section, production section and the distribution section which is engaged in successful planning and implementation of the developmental initiatives. The communication support staff from the three sections should work in collaboration with each other in accordance with the objectives of the developmental organization.

The noteworthy case studies on successful communication support initiatives in context of rural development are Chhatera experiment. This pioneering work in rural development was performed by Mr. B. George Verghese, the editor of Hindustan Times newspaper to highlight the problems of rural audience among the urban elite. The experiment was very successful resulting in lots of developmental programmes in the village. It provided a new context to the developmental communication intervention throughout the country. The Radio Mewat is another development intervention in terms of the role of radio for improving the quality of life of the members of the community.

13.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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13.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The need of communication support in rural development is essential to improve the socio-economic needs of the rural people. The necessary interventions are necessary for the development of the rural society and effective implementation of the developmental programmes.
- 2) The factors essential for effective communication planning and design are need assessment/ information gathering, decision making strategy, implementation and evaluation.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The planning process is essential for an effective communication strategy to ensure the successful working of various components of the project. This is important to answer the questions in relation to the successful implementation of the project on the ground.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The principles of strategic communication planning is essential to understand the hierarchy of the messages along with creation of a common flow between them. The ordering of the concepts is also essential to establish a flow between the different components. The notable introduction and editing along with the communication at various levels of participation and comprehension also needs to be considered.
- 2) The summative evaluation in communication process is essential to assess the results of the programme and the development achieved during a particular period of time.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) The three essential sections of development support communication unit are the programme section, production section and the distribution section.

