

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION POLICIES

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The paper urges the need for communication policies to guide the development of strategies based upon interdisciplinary research and nationally identified needs. It draws upon recent programme activities in UNESCO for the formulation of guidelines in collaboration with internationally experienced and recognized communicators.

## The Role of Communication

No society can exist without communication. In the contemporary world, communication media, because of their rapid growth and deep penetration, assume a new qualitative role. They have established themselves as an essential instrument for society to organize itself, side by side with political and administrative institutions and channels. Communication media are today part of the "government" of society, government being understood not only as the executive but as an instrument for democratic participation in public affairs.

Mere preoccupation with material production is not sufficient to attain the economic targets, much less the desired quality of life. Equal attention needs to be paid to the human factor, the knowledge, attitudes and way of life of men. It is not possible to formulate valid policies and planning for political participation and the organization of production, for education and training, without adequate communication policies.

In the productivity field itself, especially in the highly industrialized nations, a shift from the production and distribution of energy to that of information is noticeable. A constantly increasing share of the gross national product is devoted to activities, which depend essentially on availability of a communication infrastructure. Industries of communication, information handling, processing and transforming show a rapid growth. Even the less developed countries are far more information-oriented in the organization of their development processes than were European nations at the time when they had reached a comparable level of development and nation-building.

Communication exerts a profound impact on society both through its nature and through its content. A call upon communication media to promote national development and integration may trigger off a later demand to remodel the development process itself. The ability of the audiences to voice their reactions and views through feed back channels which may go all the way from correspondence, visits to audience groups and recordings in local communities to the use of improved communication technology, can generate demands for revision of economic and political decisions.

The need for policies

Failure to take a global view of communication, to examine present and future communication policies and translate these policies, where appropriate, into strategic and operational plans is bound to lead to wastage and stagnation.

Communication policies are sets of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems. Their orientation is fundamental and long-range significance. Emanating from political ideologies, the social and economic conditions of the country and the values on which they are based, and taking into account the country's foreign links, constraints and commitments, they strive to relate these to the needs and opportunities of communication.

The search is not for a single policy, but for different policies suited to the specific conditions of each society and the needs of its citizens, which offer alternatives and opportunities to communication among the many components of society. Communication dries at its root when it ceases to convey the stress and flow of human interaction.

The all encompassing nature of communication policies implies that every organized activity of mankind is in some way involved in communication policies though in many cases these will not be explicitly stated. Even in those areas of public service such as health, education and social welfare, where governments traditionally take major responsibilities, there is little recognition of the potential for more effective use of communication, nor of the significance of the large body of existing communication policy and regulation developed elsewhere in the government.

Also the boundaries between the different media are everywhere in the process of being dismantled. Media systems are becoming complex organic entities where not only the volume and content of information being carried should be of public interest, but the very organization and structure of the systems should be considered. The outcome should be a communication system, which can compete with other systems for public and private resources and can demonstrate efficiency in their use.

The basic requirements of communication policies, as formulated by a Unesco workshop grouping 22 specialists from a wide range of communication activities - broadcasting management production and training, public and private enterprise, press, extension work in rural development, education, government administration, mass communication research, economics and librarianship are:

- The values which determine the structure of communication systems and guide their operation, and their relationship to the values which underly the nature, functions and needs of societies;
- The systems of communication, their structures and operation, at all inter-related national levels, and including their international involvements; and
- The output of these systems and their impact and social functions.

Derived as they must be from overall national policies, particularly those relative to development, the communication policies are instruments built by rational linking the sets of data on the policies and on the system, that affects the communication process. The task of the policy-maker is to formulate these policies at the macro-level. The task of the development planner is to formulate them at the intermediate level. The task of the communication specialist is to formulate them at the micro-level. But this latter expert must provide assistance to the other two levels throughout the entire process.

### Strategies and Planning

Beyond policies are strategies, which determine the parameters of shorter-range operation planning. Operational plans are generally once more broken down into particular budgetary periods, these being the tools for the operational implementation of plans.

The most recent trends in the production and educational use of media emphasize the positive advantages of a "systems" approach, which is characterized by:

- (a) A precise formulation of the objectives and outcome (preferably in behavioural terms):

- (b) A statement of the way in which the attainment of these objectives may be realized through the use of different communication systems;
- (c) A breakdown of this process into steps, in which different media are employed, singly and in concert, at different points within the sequence;
- (d) An account of the utilization process demanded of this use of media, and
- (e) A procedure for the testing and evaluation of the composite model.

The role of the economist is crucial though confined. He should be capable not only of evaluating the policy alternatives presented to him by others, but of widening the range of alternative methods of achieving a given social objective. He is also expected to define the cost and benefit implications of various sets of objectives and to trace least-cost strategies for policy-makers, given the full range of feasible options.

The social scientist can make an essential contribution to the formulation of communication policies by supplying both quantifiable and non-quantifiable information on the structure of society as well as on the content and impact of the messages relayed by the system.

Research and evaluation of communication serves the following purposes: it supplies basic data and general findings to policy-makers, it helps planners to elaborate alternatives for policy-makers, it contributes to examine the communication processes in the whole of the social life by elucidating the basic laws and principles of social-human communication, and it evaluates the results and impact of communication activities and feeds back information to the system.

#### Co-ordinated National Action

The International Panel of Consultants on Communication Research, which advised Unesco in 1971 on its mass communication research programme recommended the constitution of Communication Policy Councils as a basis for formulation of national policies. Such a council is likely to be the first opportunity for a meeting of minds among all concerned and the gathering of information from the many fields involved. Since the task is not to hammer out one particular strategy but to explore the field from different points of

view it will be necessary to present alternative approaches to solving communication problems, a design process which can only be effective when undertaken by multidisciplinary teams. It might have the following functions:

- (a) To promote coherent, rational and comprehensive analysis of existing policies and controls and of national communication objectives, identification of the rights, interests, obligations and interdependence of various communication institutions within society;
- (b) To enhance greater efficiency in the application and expenditure of frequently limited socio-economic and physical resources by setting priorities and reducing internal contradictions;
- (c) To safeguard the rights and interests of various sectors involved in communication enterprises by providing a forum for continued discussion and clarification;
- (d) To provide a framework for anticipating changes in media technology assessing their value for promoting national and international goals and revealing their possible harmful effects;
- (e) To identify important international communication issues which are constraints on national policy and to perform a look-out function to foresee important technological innovations on the international scene, which may be important as quantum jumps in national communication planning;
- (f) To ensure national compatibility with international norms and standards;
- (g) To enable the nation to speak consistently and coherently at international discussions of communication matters and to recommend appropriate action.

#### Recruitment and Training

Since effective solutions can only be developed on individual context basis, managements of communication organizations should be encouraged to appreciate the need for flexibility and maximum sensitivity in recruitment. Policy formulation and planning efforts in this regard should among other lead the individual to awareness of:

- (a) The nature and role of communication in society;
- (b) The importance to the communication practitioner of a background as broad as possible and not wedded strictly to any single discipline or interest - academic or otherwise;

- (c) The need of the communicator to remain actively tuned to the life and pulse of his society regardless of his or her personal educational or economic advancement.
- (d) The desirability of a technical aptitude.

Professional training institutions may be defined and structured either in terms of the various disciplines of communication such as television, radio, press, film, individualized modern media, traditional media, etc. or as a single communication training institution encompassing the whole range. The choice will depend on the total communication industry in a country. Training institutions at a national level should have competence to train staff at least at basic and intermediate levels. Desirably they should have competence to train at advanced level too. They should be able to accommodate performers, field workers, executives, managers, planners, policy formulators and trainers.

#### External Assistance

In dealing with the relationship between donor and recipient countries and institutions as far as external assistance is concerned, it seems that there are four main areas of need on the part of the recipient which makes external assistance essential; these are:

- (1) Lack of available human resources:
  - (a) In determining communication needs and planning;
  - (b) In implementation;
  - (c) In staffing communication institutions and facilities;
- (2) And scarce capital resources.

#### International Inter-Action

Social communication does not only take place within a country, but links domestic communication with communication which originates or is disseminated beyond national boundaries. (Satellite communication, foreign broadcasting, affiliation with world or regional news agencies, import of programmes, placement of foreign advertising, sale of equipment, as well as the entire field of international norms and regulations which affect technical standards, legal provisions and other matters more than national dimensions.)

The flow of communication across national boundaries assumes particular importance in an era in which technology fosters the ever wider dissemination of programmes and in which increasing costs and greater production resources stimulate concentration of production in relatively few centres in different parts of the world. To maintain the two-way flow of communication under these dimensions and to assure cultural identity in the face of world-wide distribution of entertainment and information is an issue of particular poignancy in the contemporary world.

A starting point for policies and planning for individual systems of communication is an assessment of scope, that is the people it is designed to serve. Some systems may be only national in scope but most will have world-wide or regional as well as sub-national dimensions. Within national policies, or side by side with them, they may be equally relevant to specific segments of the population (particular geographical areas, or people who share ethnic, linguistic, occupational or other characteristics). A purely national approach to communication policies may prove to be detrimental to meeting the many communication needs of different parts of the population or insufficient in meeting expectations created through influence from extra-national systems. In this connection it is equally important to consider who is presently left outside existing communication policies. The non audiences may be as significant as the presumed audiences.

Communication policies and planning within a country cannot be formulated or implemented without constant reference to international involvements.

In the first place, States are called upon to frame their national policies with due regard to a number of widely accepted international agreements and standards, for example:

- (1) Charter of the United Nations
- (2) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- (3) United Nations General Assembly Resolution 110(II) of 3 November 1947 condemning propoganda designed or likely to provoke or encourage any threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression
- (4) The Outer Space Treaty of 1967
- (5) The International Telecommunication Convention and its Radio regulations;



- (6) The Universal Copyright Convention; the Bern Convention; the Rome Convention on Neighbouring Rights;
- (7) The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs;
- (8) The Unesco Agreements on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural materials.

Secondly, countries are vitally concerned with desirable or undesirable communication with other countries, the outward and inward flow of information.

Most countries have external broadcasting and public relation services which pose essential questions concerning their objectives, control and financial resources. The inward flow of information requires attention to such matters as the sources and quality of news reports, the import of films and the impact of foreign television, whether through recorded programmes or direct transmissions. There is today a serious imbalance in the international flow of news and information particularly with regard to the less developed countries of the world. The establishment of proper structures and policies at the national, regional and international levels are important objectives of national communication policies.

Thirdly, there are specific areas which have a direct impact on communication and require constant attention by export services. Particular attention is drawn to:

- The importance of tariffs, postal and transmission rates which have a direct influence on the free flow of information and are of economic significance to the country;
- International norms and standards which affect the transfer of equipment and programmes;
- Issues concerning copyright and performers rights which have a direct bearing on the transferability of productions;
- Flow of information and data from one country to another;
- The international allocation of broadcast frequencies, and the use of satellite communication.

Since broadcast satellites will soon be available for the transmission of programmes directly to community receivers, and may eventually also aim broadcasts at individual home receivers, decisions are required on whether a domestic satellite system is needed for this purpose or whether cooperation with other countries is necessary or desirable to establish a regional or sub-regional system sharing the hardware, and possibly even engaging in joint-programming.

National or regional requirements for radio communication frequencies must be determined in order to obtain assignments at the appropriate International Telecommunications Union Conference for satellite broadcasting.

Pursuit of policies in the general interest requires representation at international meetings and regulatory bodies by different agencies of government. It also involves international relations by the communication enterprises themselves and the professions engaged in communication who are grouped in a number of regional and international organizations and associations.

The issue is also of relevance to external assistance. Foreign aid in the communication field is frequently offered and accepted without due regard to the role of communication in society, its social functions and the need for consistent policies and planning. A country cannot usefully benefit from such outside assistance unless it has defined its own communication strategy.

The level of international relations therefore brings into the field of communication policies and planning not only those ministries directly involved in communication technology and activities, but also Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Cultural and Legal Affairs, as well as authorities in charge of science and technology.

Total involvement

To safeguard the human right <sup>(1)</sup> to communicate within and across national frontiers is not possible without public policies to this end. This is particularly important in an era in which technology and financial considerations bring about an even greater concentration of communication enterprises and require that they be viewed at the national and world scale at the same time. Not only is there concentration of individual media, but there are important cross-media concentrations, where a single enterprise controls broadcasting, press, recordings and other communication activities. Issues raised recently with respect to cable television, which on the face of it seemed an obvious field for unregulated multiple enterprises, are an example of how the need for policies - also at the international level - impresses themselves even on societies which traditionally sought to limit public responsibility and intervention in communication. To protect small and medium size business, to make public access to media possible and to permit the service of communication for socially desirable purposes, calls for public policies and planning alike.

Implementation of communication policies and practices requires joint action among all those involved in the social, economic, scientific, educational and foreign affairs of a country. Their role should not be conceived as a superpower set up to control the media. They can be successful only in constant contact and consultation with the communicators and the citizens whose direct participation in the formulation and implementation of communication policies is vital. Nothing will more effectively frustrate and distort the flow of communication than lack of respect for the nature and needs of communication itself.

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(<sup>1</sup>) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this  
"right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to  
"seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media  
"and regardless of frontiers."