

Electronic Media and Rural Development in Assam: An Impact Study of Agriculture and Health Programmes of All India Radio and Doordarshan in Kamrup Rural District

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Abstract

Electronic Media is one of the most powerful, influential and attractive mass media these days. A manual for news agency reporters brought out by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) defines development as ‘The removal of poverty, the lessening of disparity between regions and classes, the building up of technological infrastructure, modernisation of society through shedding feudalism, tribalism and superstitions, the gradual achievement of economic self reliance. In very simple terms, Rural Development refers to the development of the rural areas and raising the standard of life of the rural masses.. Improvement in health, education, drinking water, energy supply, sanitation and housing coupled with attitudinal changes also facilitates their social development. Rural Communication and Agriculture Communication are often confused to be synonymous, but in reality Agriculture Communication is not the whole of Rural Communication, although it constitutes the heart of it. Agriculture Communication stands for the process by which we try to disseminate the research findings to the farmers and teach them regarding how to apply them in practice. Thus, it is the utmost responsibility of the society to transfer these research findings and other development aspects to the farmers in villages. Electronic media, both television and radio with their Farm Broadcasts, can really prove to be catalytic agents in the process of agriculture communication, and thereby, agriculture development in the villages. The two Public Service Broadcasters, i.e. All India Radio and Doordarshan can play a pivotal role in this context. Again, ‘Health Communication’, an integral part of rural communication, stands for dissemination of information regarding health related issues such as various health related schemes taken up by the government and various ministries like the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to the masses across the country by means of both mass media and traditional and folk media. Health Communication incorporates the various health related programmes like ‘Swasthya Bharat’ of Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati and ‘Dr. Online’ and ‘Nidan’ of All India Radio(AIR), Guwahati. The central objective of the study is to examine how best the potential of Radio and Television can be utilised for developing the rural base of Assam in terms of enhanced agricultural productivity and improved health status in Kamrup Rural and in the village Satdola and some adjoining ones under Hajo Police station. This research paper aims at examining the Farm and Health broadcasts of AIR, Guwahati and DDK, Guwahati in this regard also the actual development needs of the masses in the survey area.

Key Words: Media, Electronic Media (Radio and Television), Development, Rural Development (Agriculture Development and Health Development), Public Service Broadcasts (Farm Broadcasts and Health Broadcasts).

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem:

Concept of Development:

A manual for news agency reporters brought out by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) defines development as 'The removal of poverty, the lessening of disparity between regions and classes, the building up of technological infrastructure, modernisation of society through shedding feudalism, tribalism and superstitions, the gradual achievement of economic self reliance (Ganesh:83). It implies that development is not just restricted to the mere upliftment of the economic status of a nation, but involves a whole gamut of issues relevant to the well being of a group of individuals and the society at large. The term development has been interpreted in several ways by sociologists, economists, development planners etc. To some it means modernisation, to others it means social change and to some others it means enhancing the quality of life or sustainable development. Development is a complex of social, cultural attitudes and economic changes for which we should strive for the fulfilment of the basic needs of the people (Todaro). Thus, development encompasses economic, social, political, cultural and educational aspects of the society and it is the sum total of all round, balanced and planned growth

During the late 1940s and 1950s, most development thinkers stated that the problem of underdevelopment or backwardness could be solved by a more or less mechanical application of the economic and political systems of the West to the third world countries and they assumed that the difference was of degree and not of kind. This resulted in the 'Modernisation and Growth Theory of Development' which saw development as a unilinear, evolutionary process and defined the state of underdevelopment in terms of observable quantita-

tive differences between the so called poor and rich countries on the one level, and the traditional and modern societies on the other hand (Servaes et. al. 31). Thus, there have been different understandings given to the word 'Development'.

Concept of Rural Development:

In very simple terms, Rural Development refers to the development of the rural areas and raising the standard of life of the rural masses. The eighth five year plan gave a comprehensive definition of the term Rural Development: 'Rural Development implies both the economic development of people as well as greater social transformation, increased participation of the people in the rural development process, decentralisation of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit with better prospects for economic development. Improvement in health, education, drinking water, energy supply, sanitation and housing coupled with attitudinal changes also facilitates their social development' (Gupta, V.S., 2000). Different scholars view the concept differently. The concept of rural development has two components, i.e. rural and development, in which rural denotes area which is characterised by a non urban lifestyle, occupational structure, social organisation and settlement pattern, whereas development means qualitative as well as quantitative socio-economic change, not only relative but also subjective change (Jain, M., 2011). Rural development can be defined as a process of enabling the villagers to fulfil their needs especially social, physical, economic and intellectual. The aim of rural development is to better the conditions of the villagers to enable them to be self reliant and self confident for improving their conditions at their own initiations. It stands for desired change in economic, social, technological and natural atmosphere of a rural community. Ac-

According to Copp, 'Rural Development is a process through collective efforts are aimed at improving the well being, self realisation of people living outside the urbanised areas. It implies not only the total change in the present agriculture techniques but also a change in the living and thinking habits, a redistribution of agrarian property, a remodelling of the village structures and a reorganisation of the present method of cultivation. The question of sanitation, water, rural education, community development, agriculture credit and so on are in reality, the specific aspects of the area of rural development and modernisation of rural life(Jain,M.,2011).In a nutshell, the primary goal of rural development is to provide an opportunity to the masses of low income population residing in the rural areas on self sustaining basis.

Concept of Agriculture and Health Communication:

The concepts of Rural Communication and Agriculture Communication are often confused to be synonymous, but in reality the Agriculture Communication is not the whole of Rural Communication, although it constitutes the heart of the process of Rural Communication. In simple terms, the term Agriculture Communication stands for the process by which we try to disseminate the research findings to the farmers and teach them regarding how to apply them in practice. The fact is that the agriculture universities, veterinary colleges in almost every state of the country as well as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) based in Delhi have been carrying out the diverse research activities in the field of agriculture and veterinary for the last several decades. For example the researchers in these institutions may be engaged in finding out high yielding variety seeds for better productivity, seeds which may grow even in very adverse conditions, livestock and poultry which may yield better quantity of milk, meat etc. But the problem is how to make such knowledge to be available to the farmers and the other villagers who may actually be benefitted by these findings. These findings are meant for

the farmers residing in the remote and rural areas of the country who are mostly illiterates, underprivileged, devoid of any proper and effective information for taking up something innovative in their profession. Apart from that the farmers in the remote villages of the country are mostly oblivious about the development schemes taken by the government from time to time. Thus, it is the utmost responsibility of the society to transfer these research findings and other development aspects to the farmers in the remote and rural areas of the country. This is the basic concept of 'Agriculture Communication' where mass media can play a big part. Especially, electronic media, both television and radio with their Farm Broadcasts, can really prove to be catalytic agents in the process of agriculture communication, and thereby, agriculture development in the villages of the country. The two Public Service Broadcasters, i.e. All India Radio and Doordarshan can play a pivotal role in this context.

Again, the term 'Health Communication' stands for dissemination of information regarding health related issues such as various health related schemes taken up by the government as well as various ministries like the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to the masses across the country by means of both mass media and traditional and folk media. The projects such as National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the various programmes can be promoted amongst the rural masses by means of puppetry, streetplay and also by the various mass media. In short, health communication connotes the dissemination of information for the improvement and safety of the health of the masses across the country. It may be about the tips on cleanliness drives, safe maternity practices, vaccination and immunisation, treatment of diseases, malnutrition of child, infant mortality, family planning etc. The concept of Health Communication incorporates the various health related programmes like 'Swasthya Bharat' of Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati and some other health broadcasts like 'Dr. Online' and 'Nidan'

of All India Radio(AIR), Guwahati. So, in short, the health communication means to disseminate informations to the masses across the country for the improvement and safety of their health and this category of communication is particularly useful for the rural masses and so, Health Communication is an integral part of Rural Communication.

Concept of Electronic Media:

Electronic Media is one of the most powerful, influential and attractive mass media and it is considered as the most flourishing industry in the world these days. In other words, electronic media help the audience to access the content in the form that has audio and visual and what is transmitted from a single point can be accessed at several points. In other words, electronic media combines text, graphics, sound, video etc. into a single message. Although most of the new media are in the form of digital media, but electronic media can be both in digital and analogue format. In simple terms, the Electronic Media stands for those media which are operated upon electronically.

Now what is Public Service Broadcaster? Prior to that we have to know the meaning of the term Broadcasting. According to the section 2 (c) of the Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act,1990, 'Broadcasting means the dissemination of any form of communication like signs, signals, writing, pictures, images and sounds of all kinds by transmission of electromagnetic waves through cables intended to be received by the general public either directly or indirectly through the medium of relay stations and all its grammatical variations and cognate expressions shall be construed accordingly' (Aggarwal & Gupta,2002). The term Public Service Broadcaster stands for All India Radio(AIR) and Doordarshan (DD) which are under Prasar Bharati(Broadcasting Corporation of India) and they have to broadcast those programmes which are meant to serve the masses and to develop the society to the optimum possible level. The Public Service Broadcasting is

any broadcasting for the benefit of the public and not primarily for profit. The Public Service Broadcasters whose role in Rural Development in Assam is the topic of this study, are the non profit making media entities which are to follow the Prasar Bharati Codes and Guidelines.

So,in a nutshell, it can be stated that both All India Radio(AIR) and Doordarshan (DD) are playing the role of two catalytic agents in India for the development of the social, economic, cultural, science & technology, rural, agriculture, health, human resources and other relevant aspects.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The central objective of the study is to examine how best the potential of Radio and Television can be exploited and utilised for developing the rural base of Assam. The specific objectives of the study are-

a) To examine whether the Agriculture and Health Programmes of All India Radio (AIR), Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra (DDK), Guwahati are useful and valuable for the farmers and the general rural masses in Kamrup Rural in Assam;

b) To identify the development needs of the people in terms of agriculture and health in the survey areas in Kamrup Rural in Assam and to examine whether the Agriculture and Health Programmes of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati are catering to these development needs of the people in the survey areas;

c) To examine whether there is need for improvement in the quality as well as increase in the number of the Agriculture and Health Programmes of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati on the basis of the response of the respondents in the survey areas;

d) To explore the extent of popularity of these programmes amongst the rural people in the survey areas in Kamrup Rural in Assam;

e) To analyse the critical parameters of response regarding these programmes in the survey areas in Kamrup Rural in Assam.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Electronic Media is playing an effective role in improving the Agriculture and Health sectors in the rural areas of Assam.

H2: Radio is playing a more proactive role in improving the Agriculture and Health sectors in the rural areas of Assam.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

India is a country with over 1 billion population and 70% of its population are still residing in the rural areas where the predominant occupation is agriculture. So, electronic media can play a vital role in case of rural development. This study will be an in depth research on the impact of the Agriculture and Health programmes of All India Radio (AIR), Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra (DDK), Guwahati on the rural masses in Assam in the last two decades and this study is confined to Kamrup Rural where the reach of radio and television has been there during the period of the study and also the two Public Service Broadcasters, i.e. All India Radio and Doordarshan are very much accessible to the people belonging to various age groups, caste, religion, economic and educational background in the selected survey areas in Kamrup Rural. The scope of this study will be limited to the Farm and Health programmes meant for the farmers and the general rural masses of the selected villages in Kamrup Rural. This study, however, excludes the other development programmes such as educational programmes, youth programmes, programmes related to consumer awareness etc. broadcast by All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati apart from the Agriculture and Health Programmes. Within the scope of this study will be the various Farm Broadcasts of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati such as Farm Hint programmes, Programmes on seasonal crops, programmes on vegetable crop husbandry, field crop husbandry, fruit and plantation crops, poultry farming, dairy, pisciculture, horticulture, rainwater harvesting etc.

Again, amongst the health programmes, the awareness programmes on cleanliness drives, vaccination and immunisation, safe maternity practices, various diseases and their treatment, rural women, child health, family planning etc. will be within the scope of the study. The farm broadcasts of Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati *Krishi Darshan* and health broadcasts such as *Ayushman Bharat* have been taken for the study. And from the AIR, Guwahati, the programmes such as *Dr. Online*, *Nidan*, *Krishi Jagat* etc. have been taken for the study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Over the years and particularly so during the preceding two decades, India had developed a fairly extensive electronic media infrastructure and this penetration of Radio and Television has begun into the rural areas across the country. This penetration has been in Assam also during this period.

Radio is supposed to be a perfect medium of rural development as it is a friendly medium for the poor and illiterate or the lowly educated rural masses who can grab the teachings of radio quite easily. Television is also not lagging far behind in this regard. Its importance as a medium of rural development is particularly vast in a developing country like India where the reach of print media is not very wide to the rural areas and so Television with its visual appeal can really benefit the rural masses to a great extent. Again India is a country with an agrarian and rural economy where the predominant occupation is agriculture and 70% of the population are still residing in the rural areas. The development of a country like India vastly depends on the rural development factor, especially the development of the agriculture and health sectors and in this regard the electronic media have got a big role to play. In Assam also the All India Radio and Doordarshan started their journeys in the years 1948 and 1980 respectively. The All India Radio, Guwahati was started in 1948 as the Shillong-Guwahati Station which was shifted from Shillong to Guwahati in

1953 and the Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati was started in the year 1982. Since then various rural development programmes are being broadcast by these two public service broadcasters. So, this study will highlight all these aspects of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati and also will make an analysis of the viewers' and listeners' opinion and thereafter, their feedback will get evaluated. Although the Agriculture and Health programmes of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati mean a lot for the purpose of rural development in Assam, but very little has been studied so far in this regard. So, this study will throw some light on the various aspects of the Farm and Health broadcasts of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati and a good assessment about the quality of these programmes will be made by means of this study and also the response of the rural target audiences about the Farm and Health programmes of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati will be examined by means of this research comprehensively. Assam is a state which is still very much lagging behind in terms of agriculture and health status in comparison to many other states of the country. The state is not self sufficient in terms of agriculture productivity even in the 21st century and the farmers are still mostly unaware about the advanced methods of agriculture such as mechanical tilling, use of various modern fertilizers, insecticides, pesticides on crops, high yielding varieties of seeds, captive breeding, rain water harvesting and many more issues related to the development of the farming sector. Similarly, the proper development of a society depends to a large extent on the improvement of the health sector. In this regard also the state of Assam is very much lagging behind especially in the rural areas. The infant mortality rate is very high in the state especially in the villages where the illiteracy rate is very high. Apart from that in terms of safe maternity practices, child health, nutrition level, awareness about the various ailments and their treat-

ments and many other aspects related to the health sector the rural base of Assam is woefully lagging behind even in the 21st century. It is pathetic to know that even in the 21st century, in many villages of Assam, the practice of taking the pregnant women to the so called village *Dhais* instead of a doctor is very much prevalent. So it is utmost need of the hour to eradicate these sorts of unsafe and unhygienic maternity practices from the rural societies of Assam. So in this context, the electronic media especially the Public Service Broadcasters have a big role to play by means of the Farm and Health Broadcasts. So, this study will be able to highlight these important aspects of these programmes and will examine whether in the truest sense of the term the Farm and Health programmes of All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati have been successful or not in bringing rural development in Assam and what the rural audiences think in this regard.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the study has been an explanatory methodology because in this study the relationship between the electronic media & rural development has been studied and also the exploratory study has been done to know the reaction of the respondent farmers and the other rural masses in the survey areas in Kamrup Rural in Assam. Again the research has been based on both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The public opinion survey of the farmers and the general rural masses has been quantitative, i.e. structured in nature and the observation regarding the changes in the Agriculture and Health sectors in the survey areas in Kamrup Rural has been qualitative, i.e. unstructured in nature. The random sampling method has been adopted for this study and out of the universe in the survey areas the samples have been selected randomly.

And the various sources of data collection used in this research are both the Primary and Secondary data collection sources or tools.

In the primary data collection process, the interview method has been adopted extensively. Here, the survey of the viewers' and listeners' opinion has been done by circulating the questionnaires amongst the respondent farmers and the other rural masses in the survey areas. In addition, prominent persons from the fields of mass media, medical science, agriculture science and some other related fields will be interviewed during the course of the study. Again for the collection of secondary data, the researcher has visited different libraries and has used internet as a source extensively, especially for the purpose of literature review. Because the researcher has browsed the websites of various universities of the country to search for the relevant literatures for the study. More so, visits to All India Radio, Guwahati and Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati have been a part of the study so far. Apart from that other media houses including some other divisions of All India Radio and Doordarshan have to be visited during the future course of this study.

SURVEY AREA

The survey has been confined to the villages nearby Hajo in Kamrup Rural in Assam. The various villages to be coming under the purview of the study are Satdola, Tokradia, Boromboi, Kulhati, Bagta, Bhoma, Kalitakuchi etc. and during the future course of the study the number of these villages may increase. The number of farmers in these villages is very high and are using the various aspects of agriculture which have been mentioned in the scope of the study. More so, the literacy rate is still not very high in these villages. The health status is also not very sound in these villages, i.e. the problems like malnutrition especially amongst the children, lack safe maternity practices, minimum awareness about the health schemes taken up by the government and also about the cleanliness drives, relatively less knowledge about the need of immunisation and vaccination etc. are very much prevalent in these villages. That is why there is enough scope of such a research in these villages in Kamrup Rural in Assam.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

The general analysis and interpretation of the study is that the farmers and the general rural masses in the survey area have been greatly benefitted by means of them Farm and Health broadcasts of AIR, Guwahati and DDK, Guwahati. After the field survey so far it has come to notice that apart from improved agricultural practices and enhanced agricultural productivity, the health status of the people has also come to be improved. The health problems like malnutrition amongst the children, infant mortality rate, unsafe maternity practices have come down considerably in the survey area. Also the masses have come to know about the various schemes of development taken up by the government and also about the cleanliness drives, immunization and vaccination drives of the govt. Similarly the more advanced farm practices such as use of mechanical tilling, use of scientific fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides etc. have been adopted by the farmers in the survey area. More so, the aspects such as captive breeding, animal husbandry, vegetable crop husbandry, poultry farming, dairy farming, etc have been learnt immensely by the respondents in the survey area. More so majority of the respondents have opined that radio farm and health broadcasts have been more beneficial for them in comparison to the television programees. They have opined that the advantages of radio such as lack of electricity barrier, cost effectiveness, ability to listen while working on the paddy fields, simplicity in language and style of presentation etc have contributed to more impact of radio as rural medium in comparison to television in the survey area. However, television also found to be effective in terms of bringing development in the survey area amongst a few of the respondents.

Both hypotheses taken for the study have got tested positive.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A total of **107** samples were taken out

of the total population in the survey area. Amongst them the male female ratio was 60: 40. Out of these 107 samples taken by means of random sampling technique, 95 % are of the view that the Farm and Health broadcasts of AIR, Guwahati and DDK, Guwahati have proved to be beneficial for them and majority of the respondents were of the opinion that Radio is a more convenient mode of communication for them regarding the agricultural and health programmes. These majority of the respondents were found to be very much inclined towards the farm and health broadcasts of AIR and DDK, Guwahati. Although radio had the upper hand in this regard owing to its simplicity and intimacy. Particularly the female respondents were found to be more inclined towards radio as a medium of development. Because they stated that the programmes of AIR could provide a intimate touch in comparison to the programmes of DDK, Guwahati.

So, in a nutshell, it can be summed up by stating that the farm and health broadcasts of both AIR and DDK, Guwahati could produce the desired changes in the survey areas of Kamrup Rural taken for the study.

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