

Preface and Acknowledgement

With an ever-increasing task of a government committed to the goals of modernization and development, the need for public relations and communication between public officials and citizens becomes more urgent. The growing recognition of the power of public opinion, the imperative of a democratic government to report to its citizens and the need for enlisting citizens' participation and support for the cause of development and good administration necessitate the practice of public relations in government and administration now-a-days. In order to obtain compliance with administrative policies and evoke citizens' cooperation and participation in the process of development, administration has to make every effort for identifying the goals and objectives of administration with those of its citizens.' In the United States, the public relations function has been established much earlier in government than in any other field of practice although with less effectiveness. In contrast to government practice in the United States, the British

government has placed more emphasis on public opinion research to guide its programmes. The value of public opinion survey as a means of making government responsive to the views of its citizens is also recognized in Canada with the establishment of government public relations machinery in that country in the year of 1970. In India, the practice of public relations at the governmental level - Central or State - is yet to be recognized.

The practice of public relations, which is a continuous and problem-solving process, involves four basic steps ; fact finding and feedback; planning and programming; action and communication; and evaluation. The third step - action and communication - is the main thrust in any public relations programme. Public relations involve the skilful use of the art of communication in the interest of informing the people and influencing public opinion. The advancements and innovations in communication technology have made it the nerve centre in the process of development. Since the mid-seventies, in the Third World Countries, most of the development strategies are aimed at enriching the quality of life of the rural poor. In the new conceptualization of rural development, the new function of communication has been conceptualized as enlisting more and more participation in the development-process on a co-equal basis of knowledge-sharing. Thus, in the eighties, the role of communication has been viewed as fundamentally two-way, interactive and

participatory at all levels.

In India, both at the centre and in almost all the states, there are elaborate arrangements for the dissemination of government information. At the centre, there is the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which is entrusted with the task of giving effective media exposure to all the activities of government, particularly in the developmental arena. The Ministry makes use of both the mass media and the indigenous channels of communication to reach the people with the messages of development, and tries to persuade the rural people by way of creating awareness among them to change their attitudes and behaviour and follow the directed course of action. In West Bengal, there is the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs which discharges functions of a similar nature. These are essentially downward communication flows from the government agencies to the citizens, and are highly prescriptive. However, along with this one-way, top down communication approach, some scanty and piecemeal efforts are being made for introducing an alternative bottom-up communication approach that will make participation real and less directed by the government agencies. The experiment with Radio Rural Forums is a case in point.

Agriculture and Health constitute two important areas of activity where the execution of every programme aimed at improving the quality of life of the rural people requires

a climate of belief among whom the programme is to be executed and for the creation of this climate of belief, effective communications between the government agencies and the target groups are the vital prerequisites. In West Bengal, apart from the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, the Department of Agriculture, as well as the Department of Health and Family Welfare, have their own arrangements for the dissemination of information to specific audiences and target groups. The departments make use of different media of mass communication along with providing extension services to those among whom the programmes are to be executed. The successful execution of the programmes depends on the working of the process of communication among the target groups. The present study is an attempt to examine first the structural arrangements of the communication networks both at the centre and in the state of West Bengal for the dissemination of information among the rural people and, secondly, the working and effectiveness of the process of communication among the villagers in selected areas of government activity, e.g, agriculture and health.

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