

# Participatory Communication in Valleys of Manipur: A Yet to Leap for Sustainable Development

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**Abstract:** *Participatory Communication is one stage of the inevitable changes of communication which turns out the rational of sustainable development. The idea of participation and participatory communication came forth as early as 80s but still many developing and less developed nations hardly take the advantages of it. The importance of public participation seems intentionally ignored or whether public is deprived and mislead which in return stops them to empower themselves. This is the situation in many rural areas of the country. Moreover in the state of Manipur, through which Trans Asia Highway is passing, people in the rural are still fighting against socio-economic constrain, insecure life, unemployment, poverty etc. Looking reasonably into the matter, the study on participatory communication was set out during 2015-16 in Manipur valley where development is at the outset and the transition from traditional to modern would be undeniable. The study reasonably reveals the resonance between affordability, usage and responsibility of media and where public stands whether to participate for sustainable development or to moil against poverty is a big perplexity. Yet another issue is public's trust in Government's plans and programmes and its implementation. As such people in the state had already experienced the debile functioning of the development projects, now they become more prone to participation in development issues. This study reveals the way how they participate and where media stands for a sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Participatory Communication, sustainable development, flagship programmes, media usage and media responsibility

## 1. Introduction

Communication is such a term which have been rigorously defined by several media scholars since decades back reasonably to go at par with the socio-demography of the region and as well to encompass the functions of media or mass media. The term is commonly accepted as a process for which the media is the hub and of course before the invention of media or mass media, the process already exist with human civilization to share or exchange any kind of information, idea or knowledge. This process went through several embodiments in need of time giving birth to mass communication, development communication, development support communication and so forth to adhere with functions of communication. Participatory Communication, which has been recently come into picture in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was pulled ahead to development communication. The later is defined as the study of social change brought by the application of communication research, theory and technology (Rogers, 1976). In another definition development communication is defined as human communication linked to a society's transformation from a state of poverty to one of dynamic socio-economic growth (Quebral, 1972). In both the statements they mentioned about social change through communication, which remains within the apprenticed of theoretical framework. Though development communication decentralized and systematized the idea of modernization theory externalizing the Western values and ideas disseminated by western media to transform the less developed nations (Lerner, 1958), it hardly discussed about latitudinal participation from grassroots level for social change.

The notion of participatory study emerged only when Paulo Freire (1980s), a Brazilinn adult educator, hands on to participatory model which make into a whole the concepts

of cultural identities of local communities and of democratization and participation at all levels – international, national, local and individual. It points to a strategy largely giving forth from the traditional 'receivers'. In an influential statement, the World Bank Learning Group on Participation defined participation as a 'process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them'. From this perspective, participation could be seen in the level of consultation or decision making in all phases of a project cycle, from needs assessment, to appraisal, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. Participatory Communication possesses the notion of liberation perspective as according to Paulo Freire, 'it is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every man. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone–nor can he say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their word'.

Political participation has been defined in broad or narrow terms by different authors depending on the approach of inquiry. The classic study of political participation by Nie and Verba (1972) defines it as 'those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the action they take'. A broader definition is provided by Parry, Mosley and Day (1992) who define it as 'taking part in the process of formation, passage and implementation of public policies'. In the social and community spheres, however, we have seen the development of a number of broader participatory methods for appraisal, planning, monitoring large institutions, training and awareness building. Greater emphasis here has been on the importance of participation not only to hold others accountable, but also as a self-development process, starting with the articulation of grassroots needs and priorities, and building popular form

of organization. Participation has included the realm of knowledge and direct action, not only the realm of representation and accountability. Participation or the participatory process is a person's active involvement in interaction, dialog, sharing, consensual decision-making and action-taking. Participatory communication is the foundation of this process. Empowering people around the globe to express themselves, develop their human potential, and begin to seize opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty and became a person valuable to the self and the community, has been the ultimate outcome of the participation process. Keeping in mind the ethnography and cultural aspects contribution of indigenous based knowledge in planning, implementation of projects and decision making is a necessary part in public participation. Partnership between localized indigenous knowledge and expert knowledge used to develop a new knowledge that helps in making project design, implementation and evaluations.

## 2. Public participation for social development

The notion of public participation in development is very constructive and suggestive when we look into it, but the transparency and extend of participation by the public is hard to explain. The idea is complex and difficult to facilitate in the real world of development. It is not simply a matter of studying about the co-relation between stake holders and policy makers, and disseminating the idea of involvement of people at grass-roots level, but must be conceived as process methodology that involves people in an interactive way and making communication resources accessible to them directly.

In the late 1980s, development communication practitioners started looking into the promise of new communication technologies in bringing about rural development. During the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the development theorists and practitioners stressed and visualized that development can be achieved by modernization. Lerner (1958) stressed on individual modernization whereas Rogers (1960) stressed on modernization at the social system level. The paramount paradigm was knowledge transfer from developed countries to developing countries. The myth of the power of the mass media to transfer knowledge alone was turned to media and communication research. Roger (1960) suggested that social innovations were necessary for material innovations. The major task was to run development projects for health, housing, employment, food, education etc. so as to provide a quality-life to majority of the people. In 1980s and 1990s the notion of development began to focus on providing basic minimum needs to all and eradication of poverty. The clear routes and explanation of how and why should they participate, must be shown to them. Although the top-down strategies have subjugated for a long time within rural areas in development process, people still value their indigenous

knowledge and know they must be a part of the development dialog.

The current concept of development, which increasingly emphasizes "public's participation," has put the earlier development concepts obsolete and it is extremely required to rethink the existing theories. Integration of modern, traditional and alternative communication systems and technologies could conceptually benefit through the utilization of useful new models of participatory communication. No development stakeholders can stick to privilege knowledge, privilege information, and power-over models, but must embrace practices of sharing knowledge, information and power. But issues arises itself when the participation policy turns to operational at the grass roots level of being extreme difficulty in translating and implementing that extends to operationally inadequate development communicator, lack of interpersonal trust and allegiance, differences in socio-cultural perspectives and lack of commitment to sustainability. Nair and White (1994) framed a perspective for economic development basically focuses on culture and its expectations of indigenous people they call *cultural renewal*, defined as "a dynamic process of goal-oriented cultural and structural change facilitated by pro-active indigenous communication transactions amongst local people." It is a process whereby the cultural heritage and practices are shared, evaluated and modified to understand the importance of recognizing ethnic diversity and lives in harmony among anonymous. This perspective seeks to activate a horizontal communication process empowering the deprived lives. Participatory communication for development is looking forward to bring a structural change and sharing of power and resources, which if proficient would result in cultural renewal and de-legitimization of cultural exploitation.

## 3. Socio-demography of study site

Manipur is an isolated hill-girth charming state in Northeastern India having a geographical area of about 22,327 sq.km. 90 percent of the total geographical area is covered by hills and the remaining one-tenth of the total area of the state, housed the four valley districts viz. Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur. Jiribam, a sub-Division of Imphal East District is also a valley in the west beyond the pale of hill ranges bordering the Cachar District of Assam. The State shares 502 km long border with the adjacent states of Nagaland to the north, Cachar District of Assam to the west and Chin Hills (Myanmar) and Mizoram to the south and south-west, and 352 km long international border with (Burma) Myanmar to the south-east. The altitude of the State varies from 790m to 2020m above the mean sea level. The State has a salubrious and sub-tropical temperate climate. According to 2011 Census the population of the state is 2.57 million of which 63.55 percent i.e., 1.63 million resides in valley districts.

**Population Profile of Manipur**

District/State		Population (2011 Census)			
		Male	Female	Sex ratio Per 1000 male	Total
Valley Districts	Imphal East	226094	230019	1017	456113
	Imphal West	255054	262938	1031	517992
	Bishnupur	118782	118617	999	237399
	Thoubal	210845	211323	1002	422168
Hill Districts	Chandel	74579	69603	933	144182
	Churachandpur	138820	135323	975	274143
	Senapati	98908	94836	959	193744*
	Tamenglong	72371	68280	943	140651
	Ukhrul	94718	89280	943	183998
Manipur		12,90,171	12,80,219	992	25,70,390

\*Excluding Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-divisions of Senapati District

Source: *Economic Survey Manipur 2012-2013, Directorate of Economic & Statistics, Government of Manipur: Imphal*

Working habit of people in Manipur (45.09 percent) is comparatively high among the North East States and significantly high than that of all India rate (39.79) accordingly 2011 Census. The capital city, Imphal, has a population of about 271,000 and has almost all the facilities of a modern city. Meliorating the socio-economic standard of weaker sections of the society is one of the most attend to objectives of development planning. A number of development projects are sponsored by the government and implement in the state as do in other states of the Country to uplift the living standard of the rural population of Manipur. Participation is one such tool without which neither people will empowered themselves nor can development policies be implemented successfully. This tool absolves the notion of social upliftment basically designed for rural development as well for urban dwellers who are considered socially deprived or underprivileged.

#### 4. Obligation of media

Bridging the gap between haves and have-nots in practical was rather dysfunctional because of media opportunities and media access limitations, which turns out to be an obstacle towards participation. The effectiveness of participatory communication depends on the type and kind of audience, development bureaucracy, interpretation of media practitioners and the media itself. Laxmana Rao (1963) also suggested that communication was a prime mover in the development process supported by his study of two villages in India: *Kothooru*, a village on the verge of modernization, and *Pathooru*, a village isolated and steeped in traditional customs and beliefs. A recent study in the year 2013 at Thangalawai, a village in Bishnupur district, it came to light that newspaper plays an incomparable role in mobilizing people to participate in development scheme like

MGNREGS. Here, the fact that oozes out is disapproval of Paul Lazarsfeld's Opinion Leader as the eye opener of MGNREGS was not the Pradhan or any Gram Panchayats but the local newspapers.

The role and responsibility of media has to do much with socio-demography of the region, such as the affordability and usage of media which further inclines towards income, expenditure and selective exposure to media. In rural Manipur the rate of unemployment is imperatively high though the people has the working habit in unorganized sector too and has monthly family income of Rs. 12,000 and above which is quite sufficient for a family of 4 to 6 members. No family was found extremely poor during the study and most of them were found to be cultivator. Media in Manipur are convincingly helping out the people irrespective of caste, status, income or any social division while performing their responsibility and if truth be told they are the watchdog of society. Social media like "whatsApp" is the fastest and most effective new media technology like "facebook" and "twitter" to disseminate news, to aware about natural and man-made calamities, to crusade the government for socio-economic turmoil and many more. With the evolution of new technology in information and communication sector, media are now converging, for instance, Smart phone which has the facility to read e-books, e-newspapers, e-publications; read maps; listen to radio; watch TV programmes, movies, songs; book flight and train ticket; book hotel; online shopping etc., beyond its basic principle of phone call and text message. With all these reason, the younger generation is keeping themselves away from print materials-newspapers, magazines, books, and TV now a day. Nevertheless the population of those who listen to radio is still significant in rural Manipur.

**Cross tabulation: Family member \* Monthly Income**

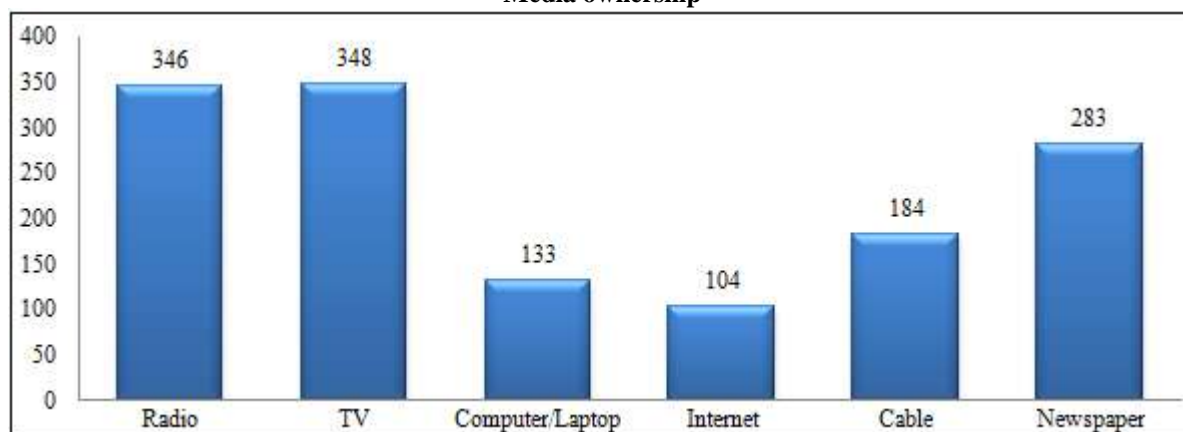
		Respondents' monthly household Income				Total
		Upto Rs 3000	Rs 3000 to Rs 6000	Rs 6000 to Rs 12000	Above Rs 12000	
Number of family member	upto 3	1	10	12	27	50
	4 - 6	8	44	69	154	275
	7 and above	2	11	14	48	75
Total		11	65	95	229	400

## 5. Ownership, accessibility and usage of media

The affordability or the ownership of media is not the primary issue of the study but the usage and exposure to them. Of course people can ignore if not control totally the content in newspaper and programme of radio, but in case of TV/Satellite TV people has the liberty to change the channel. Such adeptness tend people to incline towards entertainment channels in most cases and for those who cannot afford Satellite TV, CD/DVD players supplement the need of people through watching movies, songs, dramas etc. The study drew some inferences regarding the media

consumption habit of the respondents in valley districts of Manipur. Among the media consumers government employees were at the top in consumption of media for information purposes (97 percent). The certainty of the finding was that the government employees have broader accessibility to media as they are sound in their social status and were easily affordable to the available sources of information. Whereas cultivators and dependants consume media for information and education at low percentage instead they prefer entertainment through audio-visual media.

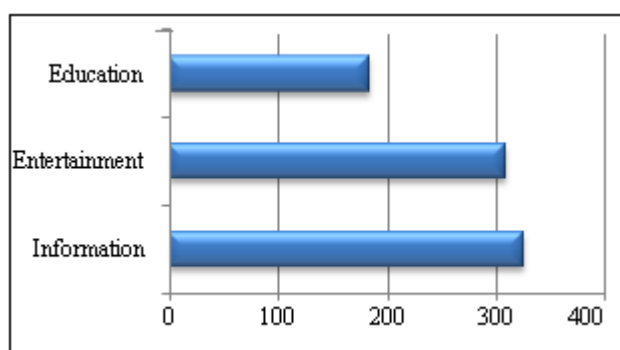
**Media ownership**



Regarding educational programme or social awareness programme all the other strata of the society except government employee are lagging behind in their preference. These inferences draw a notion that those who were in business activities and physical work consume media to entertain themselves to please from their daily burdensome activities. This may slower the development progress of the state because only one section in the society cannot uplift the status of the whole society. Contributions from different section are highly responsible to the cause and the up-to date information must be at top priority to do so.

government initiations for social upliftment. Radio turns out to be the best medium to disseminate government-sponsored development projects but the gap between the projects and public has been widen more if not the poor governance deprived the provisions. Information or awareness about such development based issues is not the only requisite for a sustainable development, in accession to it, people need a proper guidance, instruction and motivation from knowledgeable person or opinion leader. About 70 percent of rural masses depend to opinion leader to get the benefits of development projects moreover they have the tendency to share such knowledge within the folk.

## 6. Reason of Media consumption



TV, Radio and Newspaper became a common media in day to day life and every family own one, two or all of them. What is more important than owning a media is the accessibility. The numbers of channels provided for TV or the radio signal must be accessible to the people and such infrastructures must be within the affordability of the people. These stipulations must be in hand and are the pathway through which people can passably participate in

Among the development projects, public participate most in National Rural Health Mission and National Social Assistance Programme followed by Integrated Child Development Services. These are the projects where people can participate without much effort as such local government agencies are readily available for such projects. Though most of the people were found satisfactory in few projects they can never compromise the way how media disseminate the information about the projects. For a sustainable development taking into whole, participation in other numerous projects is the foundation of all where people can share their prerequisite knowledge, discuss among themselves, involve in planning and decision making and maximum effort on execution of the projects. And even they are ready for it to revise if any lacunas existed. The thought and potential bear by the people to participate are still fresh and resilient.

## 7. Conclusion

The enthusiastic study on participatory communication in certain aspect of social development went through



perceiving cognition and pertinent information at hand. The study highlights media habits of the valley inhabitants of Manipur and their acquaintances to mass media and its contents which is the foundation of a democratic set up that gain through various media and is the reflection of government's action plan and implementation for a sustainable development. Today the mass media, new media and precisely even the local media intervene with the governance and drive for a revolutionary change towards a sustainable development, including political participation, educational activity, economic system and cultural attaché with the potential of having an influential role in the lives of the people as they are pervasively accessible and attended to by society irrespective of age, gender, religion and income.

The study reinstates the necessity of beingness of opinion leader during the process of information dissemination which delineates the valid existence of Two Step Flow Theory, an excerpt from Personal Influence Theory (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudel, 1948) in communication theories. Traditional forms of communication still preserve its significance with time and space as such the prevailing situations of lack of infrastructure, poverty, illiteracy and accessibility hold back the rural people from being to be a participant in the information rich society. The State is in transition from a traditional society to a modern one, and the question is whether public participation are on a par with the transition and if so, how successfully are they participated for the cause of sustainable development? Participation is encouraged for a society to be well being that energize the passing of traditional society. The intensity of pursuing public to participation for sustainable development is meager, no doubt, but the responsive attitude of the audiences is intrinsically weak – hence the fundamental principle of the media's obligation to fulfill public interest, which also lies at the basis of public response.

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