

Communication and Rural Development in Swaziland

by Peter O. Nwosu and Eronini Megwa*

Abstract

This paper critically examines the role of communication in agricultural and rural development in the Kingdom of Swaziland, a small but strategically located country in Southern Africa. The paper discusses the contributions of the government of Swaziland in communication planning for development, **but** contends that the major flaw in the current approach to development communication in Swaziland has been the undue attention given to the **source** of development communication and development programmes, rather **than the recipients**. The paper then proposes a need-based integrative model of communication that recognizes the importance of recipient participation in the planning, dissemination and diffusion of development programmes.

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La Communication et le Développement Rural au Swaziland

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Résumé

Cette étude procède à un examen critique de la communication dans les domaines de l'agriculture et du développement rural au Royaume du Swaziland. Selon cette étude, le défaut principal de l'approche actuelle à la communication dans le domaine du développement au Royaume du Swaziland réside dans l'attention excessive que l'on prête à la source de la communication dans le domaine du développement plutôt qu'aux récepteurs de cette information. L'étude prône un modèle intégratif de communication axé sur le besoin qui reconnaîtrait l'importance de la participation du récepteur à la planification, la dissemination et la diffusion des programmes de développement.

Introduction

Agriculture remains the leading sector of the economy of the Kingdom of Swaziland, supporting over 70% of the country's population (Swaziland Anniversary Review, 1988). Statistics show that the impressive economic growth record of the kingdom between 1971 and 1981 was brought about by agriculture (USAID, 1981). In fact, real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew approximately 4.7% per year during the period.

Agricultural activities in Swaziland have included the production of sugar cane, tobacco, pineapple, a variety of citrus fruits, and timber on large estates and Individual Tenure Farms (ITF). There also has been a great deal of subsistence farming involving such crops as maize, pumpkins, groundnuts, beans and sweet potatoes on Swazi Nation Land farms. In recent years, however, agricultural productivity has been on the decline. Also on the decline are incomes of small-scale farmers who constitute more than half the population of Swaziland, and cultivate 60% of the total land area.

A decline in agricultural output and income level has potential implications for food production and the continuing economic growth of Swaziland. A number of studies, especially those from multilateral agencies such as the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID), have identified key constraints to increasing productivity and income levels of small-scale farmers in Swaziland. Among these constraints is the lack of research recommendations relevant to the farming contexts of Swazi farmers. According to USAID (1981), research carried out in Swaziland

...has been more attuned to the needs of larger private farms. A new focus to identify and address the problems actually faced by the homesteads with limited cropland is an absolute necessity if farming is to become economically attractive and capable of absorbing the large numbers of people coming into the labor force (USAID, 1981, p. 2).

A second major constraint to agricultural productivity in Swaziland is the absence of an effective communication system to disseminate information to farmers, particularly farmers with limited cropland. "The information section of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives," notes the USAID, "is incapable of translating research findings into a form useable by extension staff and understandable by

the farmers on a large scale."

The Swazi government recognizes these constraints and, through a joint programme with the USAID, is addressing the issue of inadequate and irrelevant research. Through the same programme, the Swazi government is also revamping the Information Section of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives to make it more effective in disseminating information to small-scale farmers.

Unfortunately, this genuine effort relies heavily on the traditional communication-extension model which, because of its mechanistic and unidimensional orientation, has tended to negate the input and needs of the intended recipients of development information (Swaziland small-scale farmers) while promoting those of the initiators and generators of the information (government and development agencies). The implication is that the problem of reaching small-scale farmers, who constitute a significant percentage of the farming population in Swaziland, will remain for much longer.

This paper critically examines the role of communication in rural development in Swaziland, particularly as it relates to agriculture, and suggests a need-based integrative model of communication. This model is country-specific and situation-realistic, and recognizes the importance of recipient participation in the planning, dissemination and diffusion of development programmes in Swaziland, particularly, in the rural areas where a large number of the clientele resides. It also accords a significant role to indigenous modes of communication in the development process.

The proposed model, girded by the dualism of Swazi culture, provides a theoretical and methodological framework for the effective use of communication in serving the needs of Swazi farmers, and ultimately increasing agricultural and rural development in Swaziland.

Criticisms and Responses

The interest in communication as a critical instrument of transformation dates back to the European Civil War (World War II), when communication, especially the broadcast media, was used for persuasion, propaganda and psychological warfare. Lessons learned about communication during the war were later used in many different settings to respond to a wide variety of needs, especially advertising, social marketing, and diffusion of innovations. The marketing model and the traditional extension model that were used in the U.S. after

the war drew substantially from the experiences of the war (Bordenave, 1977).

Since the 1950s, scholarly work on the relationship between communication and development has continued. Lerner's pioneering work, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), Roger's *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962), and Schramm's *Mass Media and National Development* (1964), among others, marked a watershed in intellectual conceptions on the role of communication in the development process. The works of these scholars, which suggest that development is essentially a process of changing attitudes, became the dominant paradigm guiding planning for communication and development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In the view of these scholars, individuals in developing nations are "highly traditional" and generally "unresponsive" to technological innovation. Any development strategy must, therefore, attempt to effect necessary changes (using communication) in the latent structure of the individuals' attitudes, changes that are capable of producing what Pool (1963) calls "self-sustaining movement toward modernization."

Since the 1970s, however, there has emerged a "revisionist paradigm" highly critical of the theoretical assumptions inherent in these works (See Havens, 1972; Bordenave, 1976; Golding, 1974; Beltran, 1976; Inayatullah, 1976). The revisionist paradigm has sought to overturn the assumptions of the dominant paradigm.

Most of the criticisms of revisionist scholars have centered on the failure of the dominant paradigm to recognize contextual (i.e. political, social, and cultural) differences between the developed and the developing nations. Certainly these differences have tremendous implications, given resource or technological considerations, for the implementation of any theoretical framework on communication and development.

What is equally noticeable in the dominant paradigm is the absence of any recognition of the different notions of "development" from one society to another. Goulet (1971) acknowledges that the word "development" is difficult to understand because human beings view identical realities from different perspectives. In his view, the very idea of development is a matter of lifestyles and ought to depend on the answers one gives to two questions: what is the good life? What is the good society?

Another criticism of the old paradigm has centered on the concept of dependency where the classical models of communication and development have, through the importation of western media

technologies and programmes, heightened the dependency of the developing nations on the industrialized West. Schiller (1969) and Harrison (1981) suggest that the import of western concepts and programming in many countries has not, in general, aided economic development. Prestige media, such as television, are very expensive to maintain and mainly serve small urban elites rather than large peasant populations. As Schiller observes,

Impoverished as they are, many developing states are able to afford new communication complexes only by accepting communication packages which tie their [media] systems to foreign programming and financial sponsorship (Schiller, 1969, p. 111).

According to Schiller (1969), once a developing nation gets mired in this situation, its media structure becomes a vehicle with a structure and trait generally irrelevant, if not injurious, to its development orientation.

While many critical studies focus on dismantling earlier concepts of communication and development, they fail to provide any plausible theory or framework on how communication should be utilized in the development process. Clearly, there is no such thing as a universal development communication paradigm. Communication paradigms are culture- and country-specific and situation-realistic. Accordingly, this paper will attempt to provide a framework that may serve the development needs of Swaziland, taking into account the contextual realities in the country. It is anticipated that this framework, which borrows from a systems approach and the concept of dialectic logic, may provide a basis for the effective use of the media of communications in programmes of change, particularly agricultural change, in Swaziland.

As currently constituted, the system of development communication in Swaziland appears inadequate for meeting this challenge. It is clear from Figure 1 that there are four basic parts which constitute the communication systems in Swaziland. These are the Central Media Services, Central Program Development and Liaison, the Ministry and the Field Level. At the top is the Central Media Services which are responsible for disseminating both public information and development communication information. The Center for Rural Broadcasting and Information (CRBI) is not an independent agency as the model seems to suggest, but a unit of the radio wing of the media services. The center serves the development communications units throughout the government ministries and departments by

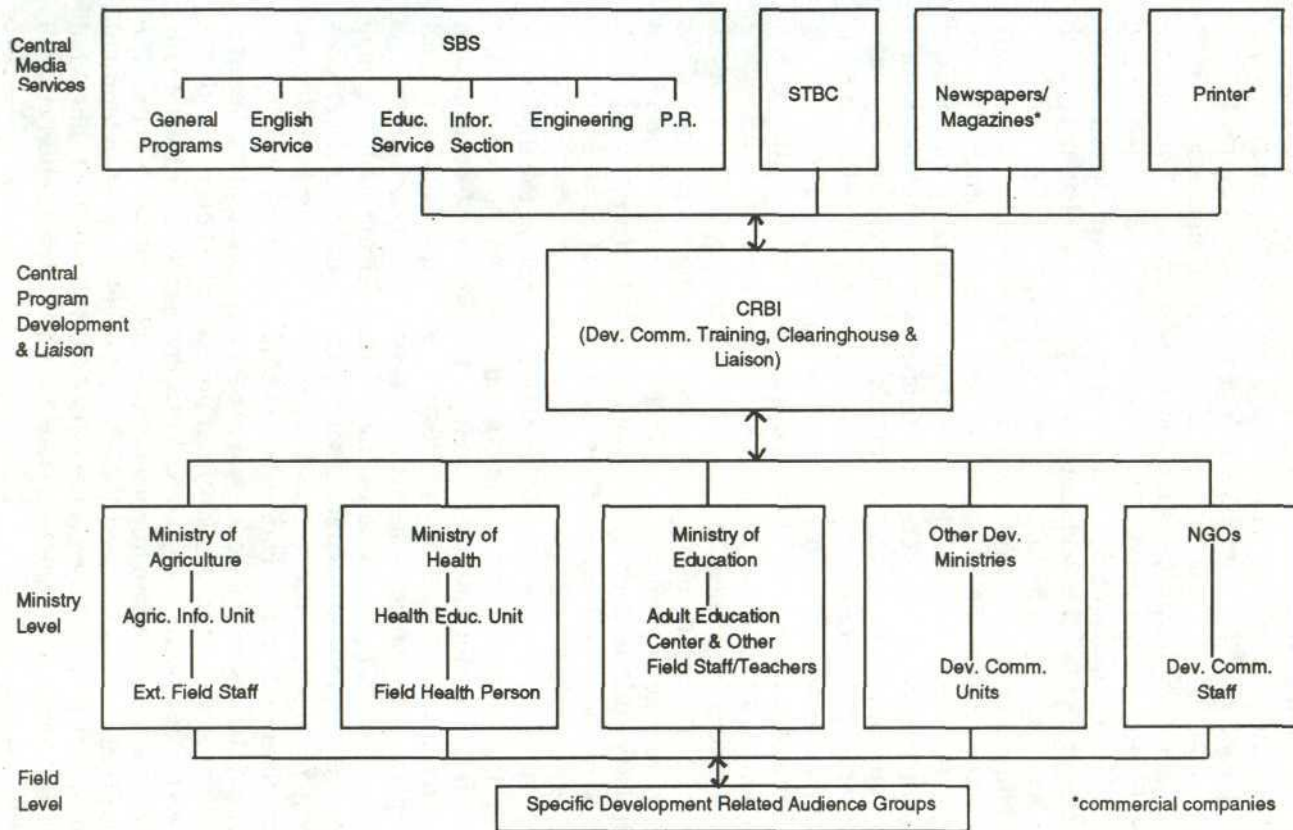


Figure 1: Current Swaziland information/communications system.

providing training to their staff. It also serves as a clearinghouse for materials and techniques, and a liaison between the ministries and the media services. The ministries include those of Agriculture, Health, and Education, some government departments, and several non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross. Through the Center for Rural Broadcasting, the above-mentioned ministries and departments disseminate information to specific development-related audience groups at the field level. It is at this level that program implementation generally takes place.

While this model of communication and development may have served the needs of the Swazi government, it seems inadequate for meeting the basic information needs of the rural population in Swaziland (Nwosu, 1990). The model appears to have adopted a one-way, top-down approach in developing, disseminating and implementing development programmes. The so-called specific development-related audience groups, i.e. the intended recipients of development information (farmers included), make little if any fundamental contribution in programme development either at the Media Services level, the CRBI level, or the Ministry level. However, this participation is limited to a uni-directional approach, which deals with programme implementation. Programme content is decided at the Ministry and the Media Services levels based on a relatively small group of opinions and perspectives as to what the rural population needs or wants to know.

It is, therefore, the contention of this study that the flaw in the current approach to communication and development in Swaziland has been the undue attention given to the source of development communication and development programmes and a complete neglect of recipients of development communication and information. As Bordenave (1977, p. 21) remarks, "merely transferring content from a knowledgeable and authoritative source to a passive receiver does nothing to promote the receiver's growth as a person with an autonomous and critical conscience capable of contributing to and influencing his society." Accordingly, we suggest a shift in the analysis of development communication from an exclusive concern with the source-side of development to a broader concern that deals not only with the source but, more importantly, recipient considerations. The assumption of this need-based approach to development communication is that the people must be involved in deciding what these needs are from the design stage to the implementation stage of the programme.

Conceptual Framework: A Need-Based Integrative Model

The concept of a "need-based integrative model" proposed in this study suggests that communication must be seen as an integral part of the whole, not separate from it. In addition, it suggests that communication and the various aspects of development are interrelated which helps in the pooling of resources toward achieving established goals. In fact, one of the advantages of the integrative model is that it systemically reveals the relationships between the various aspects of development programs.

From a development point of view, therefore, a communication programme becomes a goal-establishing activity within a system because those responsible for the activity, either at the national, regional, local, or project level, formulate a set of objectives which they can alter as the programme proceeds. They can also choose and adapt the means of achieving these objectives (Bordenave, 1977, p. 20) within the framework of a clear and specific policy on development communication. Such policy takes into account the importance of coordination in development programmes. It also establishes a monitoring and evaluation culture as an essential component of programmes of change in a country. A monitoring and evaluation culture tells the country or the project where it is going, how far it is going, what problems are impeding the movement, and how this problem can be surmounted and the goal attained.

The proposed new approach for communication and development in Swaziland will support the existing tradition-extension-communication mode by tapping the unexplored potentials of the rural populace (intended recipients of development programs) and indigenous media. Its focus will be the large numbers of rural dwellers who constitute more than half of the population in the country.

An interesting element of this approach is that it does not radically alter the existing communication equilibrium in Swaziland. Rather, it suggests ways by which existing resources may be effectively maximized to achieve optimal productivity. The need-based integrative model recognizes the relevance of traditional modes of communication – a missing component in programmes of change in Swaziland – and thus makes provision for further research into these media, and their possible syncretization with modern media. It is the conception of this paper that the dualistic nature of African societies – i.e. the traditional social relationships alongside a new set of relationships [or what has been referred to as modernity] – makes it imperative that appropriate

indigenous delivery systems be incorporated into planned programmes of change.

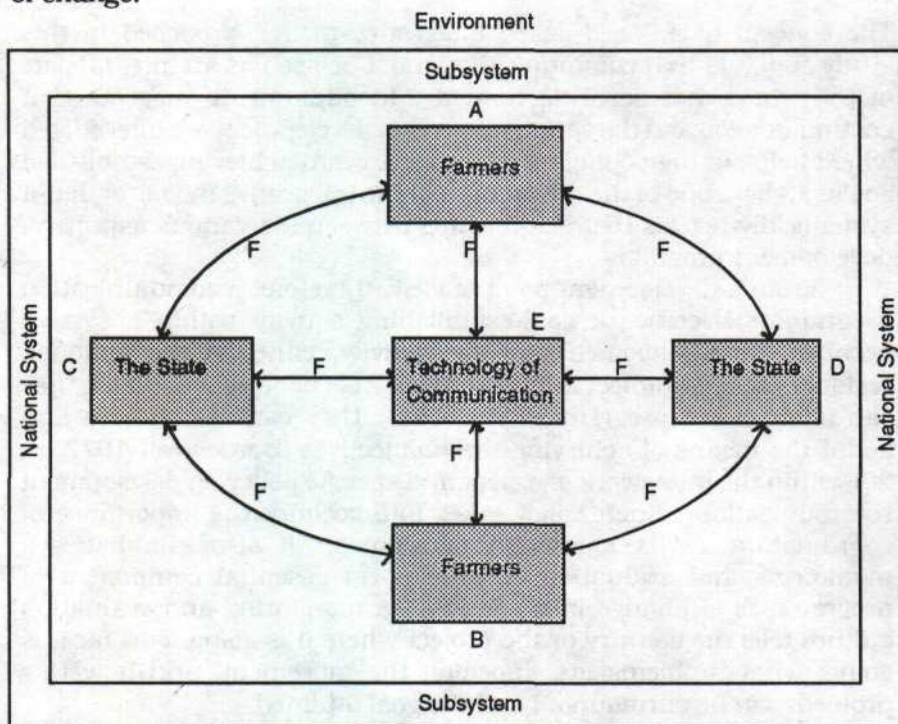


Figure 2: A need-based integrative model.

Inherent in the integrative model is the concept of need, feedback and participation. As its name implies, the need-based integrative model operates on the fundamental premise that development programmes must be based on the needs of the people, who must in turn be involved in deciding what these needs are from the design stage of the projects. The integrative model also recognizes that the people are active participants, not only in programme planning, but also in programme implementation. Feedback serves as a corrective device that keeps development programmes working toward established goals.

Finally, the concept of dialectical understandings or logic, on which the integrative model is also based, allows one to get a holistic perspective on a subject, as with the systems approach. The only difference between the two is in their methodological orientation. While

the systems perspective tends to adopt the traditional empirical approach, the dialectical logic resembles a qualitative analytical tool allowing the researcher a further understanding of the relationship between theory and reality. The systems approach and the dialectical logic provide a solid framework for conceptualizing the role and functions of the communications media in agricultural and rural change in Swaziland, as well as the responsibilities of the various agencies engaged in rural social change.

One of the fundamental fallacies of the dominant paradigm is its assumption that the individual is incompetent or is incapable of making good decisions without some external support or prodding. Often, development planners, particularly those operating from the dominant paradigm perspective, erroneously assume that information provided to individuals generally meet their needs. However, we strongly believe that there is a discrepancy between the "words" of government officials and their "deeds". More and more, there seems to be a deep gulf between the information needs of farmers and what government officials sometimes think farmers need.

This model, based on the concept of systems, emphasizes the fact that development institutions are subsystems within larger systems. Therefore, their goals must be consistent with and support the goals of larger systems (Bordenave, 1977). Conversely, for effective functioning of the entire system, the goals of larger systems must reflect the needs of programmes and institutions at the subsystems level.

The model encompasses four key variables: the people (farmers); technologies of communication; the government; and communication. Each of these variables is dependent upon the other for the effective functioning of the model (Fig. 2). "Farmers level A" of development communication programmes in this model is the input level. It constitutes the central component of the model because farmers provide the input from their point of view in terms of need identification and establishment of priorities.

At the "State level D," the state (government), depending on which government agency is involved, participates and assists in the identification of these needs. Farm programmes disseminated through the "Technology of Communication level E" are based on the needs of the farmers. It is at the "Farmers level B" (output level) that programme implementation is effected. The delineation of farmers into two levels in the model does not indicate two different farmers' groups. Instead, it is intended to portray the dualistic participatory approach inherent

in the need-based integrative model. This approach stresses active participation of farmers not only in the implementation stage but also in programme initiation and planning.

At the "State level D," government, through an independent agency, performs monitoring, evaluation, and coordinating functions. What is recommended here is the creation of an independent Swazi Council on Communications (SCC). The Council will act as an overseer, specify performance indicators for the communications media based on the needs of the rural population, monitor media performance and ensure that media performance is consistent with stated objectives of national food policy. The Council will also liaise with government agencies and parastatals (at State level D) and ensure that suggested programmes are in line with the needs of the rural population. One may argue that there are existing institutions in Swaziland such as the National Association for Development Program Producers (NADPP) which coordinate the activities of development communication units in the ministries and department. While this is so, these institutions have essentially performed their roles, in an informal, ad hoc basis. Moreover, they do not have authority to compel the institutions that are not meeting expectations of national policy to perform their duties.

What is needed, therefore, is a formal agency, such as the one we propose, which will assume that responsibility. The suggestion for an independent council, which is guided by our assumption and is reflected in the need-based integrative model, is that if programmes at the systems level do not meet clear and immediate needs of the citizenry at the subsystem level, then the possibility for programme failure increases.

The role of communication as a fourth variable in a need-based integrative model is crucial. There is constant communication (F) at the different levels that constitute the model. As the livewire of the process, communication supplies information from one level of the system to the other. It facilitates interchange and feedback among the other three variables of the system in an integrated manner that "triggers corrective mechanisms that keep the system working toward its established goal" (Bordenave, 1977, p. 19). Therefore, the selection of appropriate communication technologies or strategies to assist in the actualization of national objectives and priorities is crucial. Communication technology could consist of mass media, small media, the traditional extension-communication model, and indigenous modes of communication. What is important is that the selection of communication technology or strategy must take into account the

social environment under which the technology or strategy will be used.

We should note that, while a particular communication technology or strategy may be effective in reaching a particular target audience, it may not necessarily be effective in reaching another audience group. Therefore, it is eminently important to vary communication strategies or formats to suit particular audiences and social environments.

In designing a need-based integrative model of communication and agricultural development in Swaziland, we were guided by six main questions. First, what are the basic information needs of the majority of the farmers in Swaziland? Second, how does one go about identifying those needs? Third, what appropriate technology exists in the communication marketplace to assist in meeting these needs? Fourth, how much of its scarce resources should Swaziland be willing to invest in the technology? Fifth, what functions should be assigned to the communications media? Finally, how should these functions be monitored and evaluated to ensure that communication activities meet national agricultural objectives and priorities?

Essentially, the most crucial element in a need-based model is a clear identification of national priorities that will meet the basic or minimum needs of the people. Given the agricultural situation in Swaziland, the first element of a need-based integrative model is a clear identification of the basic information needs of farmers in the country. Currently in Swaziland, the state, through its agencies, decides what these needs are. There is little or no clear effort to involve the people in programme or need identification.

The need-based integrative model that is proposed here attempts to address the question: if one decides on a needs analysis, how does one go about identifying these needs?

A Need-Based Methodological Perspective: Q-Surv

There are several approaches to need identification or analysis, such as survey research and face-to-face interview. However, the one that holds most promise for development purposes, and adequately operationalizes the proposed need-based integrative model of communication proposed here is Q-Surv, a combination of Q-method and survey technique.

As a methodology that is grounded in phenomenology, Q-Surv provides a powerful framework for need identification and analysis.

Its strength lies in its ability to recognize the inherent goodness of end-users (recipients), and to carry the people along in the analysis of public policies for communication and change. Another strength is its in-built mechanism to identify, from the perspective of the beneficiaries of public policies and programmes, what their priorities and needs are.

Q-methodology offers a unique approach for determining the specific needs and value orientation of the farmers. Through this methodology, a researcher can assess or appraise a given situation in terms of attitudes and opinions, clarify complex issues, and produce results that allow communication and agricultural professionals to evaluate themselves subjectively.

The advantage of using Q-Surv for operationalizing a need-based model of development communication rests in the fact that the methodology is grounded in the philosophy of "operancy." In other words, it gives the subject – in this case the farmer – the opportunity to say what is in his/her "blackbox" rather than what the researcher thinks. On the other hand, the principles involved in survey technique provide the basis for generalizing the findings of this study in Swaziland.

Specifically, the process for the hybrid approach (Q-Surv) we propose may be generally described as follows:

1. Establish the population of the study: Using Q, conduct an initial random sampling of the study population in order to develop Q-sort statements based on the perceptions, opinions, needs, and value orientations of recipients of development information (e.g., farmers).
2. Stratify the geographical location of the study: To be able to generalize the findings of the study across Swaziland, we proposed that the country be stratified into four regions based on existing geographical divisions in Swaziland. The stratification was conducted along regional characteristics or traits, using the traditional sampling procedure in survey research. The study population was then drawn from the farmers in the four regions.
3. Administer the stimulus-response statements: Once the above exercise was completed, the Q-sort statements were administered to the sample population of 70 farmers, drawn from the stratified areas, in order to test the relevance of information from the communication media (radio) to their farm

work. It is important to note that a modified Q which required subjects to rank statements on the survey instrument itself was used. This way, the study avoided the cumbersome sorting of many cards by subjects typical in Q studies, while at the same time retaining the theoretical and methodological advantages of Q-methodology.

One of the advantages of dividing Swaziland into regions is that it helps a Q researcher (in this case a communication or agricultural professional) to design farm radio programmes that will appeal to selected segments of the farm population. For instance, instead of the current approach to programming whereby farm programmes have a general appeal, programmes could be designed to satisfy specific needs based on regional characteristics.

4. Conduct face-to-face interviews: Conduct face-to-face interviews with appropriate officials of the Swaziland Broadcasting Service (SBS) regarding station's policies, especially as they relate to agricultural information and activities, programming content and criteria, as well as public participation in or access to programming. Also, conduct face-to-face interviews to elicit information from relevant officials of government on the relationship between governmental policy on communications and agricultural development.

5. Content analyze programmes: Content analyze a random sample of radio farm programmes in the past one year to correlate information gathered from the above approaches.

Conclusion

Given that the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the integrated need-based model of development communication we propose rest on a systems approach to communication and development, it suffices to say that Q-Surv provides an adequate approach for dealing with some of the major issues raised in this paper.

For instance, the population for this study (i.e. farmers) represents sub-systems within the larger social system in Swaziland. If the opinions of farmers (recipients of development communication information) are in conflict with information that emanates from the communication media or with national policies, then there is the

likelihood of a consequent imbalance at the sub-system or national system level. Thus, to create a balance between sub-system level, Q-Surv, in our view, represents one of the best empirical approaches to getting the opinions of the individual, the farmer. The use of the Q-Surv technique in a study adopting a need-based integrative model sheds some light on how the systems approach works.

It is our hope that this approach will make a significant contribution to the current ferment on Q-methodology and also provide a more pragmatic approach in dealing with the problem of how best to make development projects and programmes more meaningful and beneficial to recipients in a programme of planned change.

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