CHAPTER – 6

Communication Strategy
6.1. Conclusion

“Participatory Development Communication’s role in natural resource management and sustainable development seems most promising” (Bessette 2007).1

From the elaborate findings of the five villages and five NGOs from within the communities in those villages and consequent analysis it is clear that use of group communication and interpersonal communication through human mediation and widening participation were instrumental in transforming lives positively contrary to the dominating idea that mass media and information-communication technology usher in transformation process of development.

The study reveals how simple dialogical communication can unlock resources from within any community and enable implementation of resource utilization towards specific goal achievement. It shows that despite high presence of technological media in all the villages studied, the contribution of such media for creation of development ethos was almost non-existant. Rather, these media, by way of usurping time of leisure and interaction among villagers, especially in youth are restricting communitarian forms of media and dialogue. So, the study concludes that the communication strategy for developing communities should go through interpersonal and group communication modes primarily.

The study hints at the reality that more a community integrates outcomes from governmental and non-community NGOs initiatives with own-initiatives arising from micro-level necessities, the progress reality of the people would sustain for long. This function of integration passes through project and organizational
communication pathway of community level NGOs if these are able to balance between inside drive and outside funding and execution agency’s conditions. Otherwise, networking efficiency would gradually take away the spirit of the community through distancing of organization from the community. Barjalenga Pioneer Sangha and Bishnubati Adibasi Marshal Sangha exemplify this last situation to a large extent. Failure of Total Sanitation initiative in Barjalenga, and preponderance of tuberculosis in Bishnubati illustrates the situation.

The research, by looking into perception of villagers about different types of communicative role played by development workers in implementing development schemes gave an insight into the working of governmental development efforts. In all villages health and education related communication efforts have won trust of people. Improvement of health services scenario except few aberration (as mentioned about Bishnubati) have been reflected in health outcome findings. Integration of government efforts with community volunteering along with indigenous knowledge based practices (be it in health or education or sanitation or agriculture or nutrition) through heightened interaction between both sides and within community has emerged as the principle for community condition improvement.

But many gaps are still prevailing. Its like a missing link which still eludes the development process and its integration in community living and progress. Documentation of failure of few projects in the test communities hinted at necessity to explore the missing link. When these cases of failure are looked against success stories in same villages, communication differential comes to fore. Type of communication should fit into the aim of development programme, it must be in sync; otherwise huge money spend won’t be able to sustain outcome of intervention. This hints at the need of appropriate communication strategizing for every program.
Generally programme managers or initiators in development sector work without having proper information of the actual necessity of the community members (villagers); their fund often is captured by the community elite on whom they depend. Such elite has the capacity to market themselves as the representative of the villagers. The compulsion of physical witness of outcome for outside agencies in short span of time is also responsible for inability of the initiative to take root in community. This leads to failure of projects from the very beginning or after few initial rounds of successes.

Better equity in participation of people at grassroot needs a shift in approach of information gathering and utilization from outside agencies to insiders of a community. IGEMS has the capacity of effecting the shift, studies in AURCP and Namokanda have shown. It is a series of meetings among community members which will continue until the desired results achieved.

Another aspect that comes out from the study is need of withdrawal of projects permanently on completion or rejection, or halting it for a long period once task fulfilment has scaled down the need to non-economic level. It will save outflow of resources. Projects or programmes should not be run for a long period. A gap should be there to develop the habit of self drive from the side of the members. It has been found that a number of projects are running by the initiator for the test communities from the inception of their work, but now very less number of persons are participating in it. In such cases agency should identify the reasons, and if found that it is no longer necessary then it should be stopped.

Success and failure with reference to outcome of any development programme is linked with identification of level of communication objective of the programme vis-a-vis communication strategy. If strategy fits objective it would succeed, the analysis with reference to four types of communication involvement
(awareness building, behaviour change, one time project and skill development) have shown.

Only AURCP initiative has previous sustainability study reports. It was started in 1998 and its action phase under direct supervision of Assam University research and action team continued till 2001. AURCP was designed to study how does a community respond in DCFW approach after withdrawal of outside initiating agency. The design also tried to find out how far the impact of action phase prolong in project villages in which village level organizations would gradually assume prominent role. For that 2016 is the final sustainability study year. Two village organizations here were run voluntarily by community members. Their good and honest implementation of DCFW has gradually attracted several govt. agencies and NGOs to offer them programmes meant for villages. Further BPS and NFMC have emerged as leaders in community and agriculture development respectively not only in the Borjalenga Community Development Block, but in the district of Cachar in South Assam.

GASS and BAMS initiative is ten years older than AURCP. Here the initiative had no outside initiator agency though funding from India and abroad has been the mainstay of all asset development activities of two local NGOs for long. Ghoshaldanga and Bishnubati, though improving in education, has not seen much improvement in the lives of villagers except those in government jobs. Participation of people here in GASS and BAMS activities is more of an exchange for advantage or service given to families by the organizations. Almost thirty years is not a small time to effect positive change in the life of community. However, on many aspects, especially those of improving basic needs.

Namokanda programme is the youngest, made operational in 2012 by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation, New Delhi to apply DCFW approach for
development in the scheduled caste village. GRTF did not give any money to villagers but made them understand their own problems, issues and action potentials by employing IGEMS group communication method in the beginning. Village youth, to take the case forward, formed their own organization Namokanda Prochesta in 2013. The participation model they created for arranging small sums for big works was interesting. Youth in different jobs outside the village pulled together a monthly contribution to run a unique educational initiative so that no boy or girl of the village is unattended in his or her pursuit of education. They ensured that, every such student is monitored for educational improvement, cultural enrichment and physical improvement till class twelve. All other activities such as rural library and better parenting orientation and practice regime for parents are for supplementing this basic aim.

‘Developing communities from within’ is best possible to implement through strategic communication. The participatory communication applying interpersonal and group communication techniques is the most effective form and way for interaction reaching the community in general and solving their problems and necessities in particular. Through regular meetings communication flow would continue. Interpersonal and group communication have an essence of communion which is absent in technological communication. The beneficiaries come under a harmony with the benefactors. Thus sustainability of the efforts and development is possible through such communication which is itself sustainable in nature and easy to understand and perceive. Interpersonal and group communication has the much deep rooted influence on the communities. GASS & BAMS applied this to effectively impress about the need of education among the students and their parents through several meeting sessions and by harnessing the style of open and liberal learning very close to Santhali culture. BPS has implemented this type of
communication for their health project successfully. But their awareness campaign approach for sanitation and cancer eradication failed for absence of real grassroot spirit and form. NFMC has used it to its maximum. All their meetings took place on an open platform to discuss agriculture related problems. Participation in communication process and utilization of resources transformed Borjalenga Pt I from the poorest village in South Assam to the most agriculturally sustainable village. Namokanda, slowly but steadily is improving on the same approach of face to face communication. Using communication in a participatory form is the best effective way to create sustainable community development communication.

The study hints at communication strategy for development which would consider entire communication spectrum available for the community, analyse communication objective of the development initiative, find out message components to fulfil communication objective, identify function of communication for achieving the objective, and select communication mode/media accordingly.

6.2. Recommendation

To sustain development and transforming into an ecologically sustainable phenomenon of transgenerational progress for the community needs few imperatives.

1. Either the community has the ethos and emotion to work together for developing itself in togetherness, or some initiator agency should bring out this latent community quality by instilling trust and confidence on self by the community.
2. Community level institution building to channelise leadership and followership urge among community members for solving problems of development, culture, security, education, environment, sanitation, constructive engagement of youth etc.

3. Own resourcefulness appreciation and innovative approach to use the same for cost-efficient work execution.

4. Community-streaming of development and welfare programmes of government and outside NGOs through community level institutional mechanism in the community.

5. Enhancing share of individual, family and community resources in togetherness of development.

Proper utilization of Communication may valorise all these aspects of developing communities from within in following ways:

1. Ritualistic communication and events communication in community life, in all its content and mood enhances sharing propensity. It needs to be utilized.

2. Community level institution leaders should negotiate with outside agencies and government functionaries with expertise for fitting programmes and materials into the need and development ethos of the community. Such negotiating skills would help the community to advance keeping its ‘tradition trail’ intact.

3. Enhancing frequency of Group discussion for solving problems and sorting out community issues would gradually instill confidence in community’s ability to develop.