

A.S.E.A.N.

SEMINAR ON COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS
IN DEVELOPMENTJAJASAN TENAGA KERDJA
AND
FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTING

JANUARY 17 - 23, 1972.

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I was explicitly asked not to prepare a paper in advance, but to try to pick up some of the threads of the discussions, and to wive them into the broader canvass of the development problem in general. In this way, it is hoped, it would become possible to determine where our discussions have brought us so far.

I propose to start off by trying to see where we are at now, in the hope that this will lay the foundations for our discussions today and to-morrow. The first observation that we should make right away concerns the discussions on the first day about the intragovernmental and intra-planning agency communication problem. It seems now very obvious that the developers should take care of their own communication system first. We will have to aim at building a single development community in each of our countries (and in our region as well), rather than continue to work through a set of badly coordinated government agencies, each operating on the basis of its own set of theories, traditions and idiosyncrasies. It might be useful in this connection to take up to-morrow the question to what extent a development journal, especially geared

* This is a slightly edited transcript of a tape-recorded oral presentation.

to the creation of such a development community would be effective.

In this way it will be possible to develop a common language, common concepts and shared operational tools among these agencies. But also in a wider contact. I think, there is a need for developers or modernizers to communicate among themselves i.e. across the various cultural barriers that exist in our pluralistic societies. All nations represented here are ethnically and religiously pluralistic. And one of the great problems that we have to face is that development is often connected primarily to one, often not to all communal groups of the nation.

There is therefore a need for a communication system that transcends these cultural and political barriers, a system that could assist us in the political integration of the nation, one that would involve the whole nation in the development process.

In the second day the discussion turned to the effectiveness of the transfer of information and in a very limited sense, the role of education. That discussion brought out very clearly that communication by itself is not sufficient, but that it needs re-inforcing actions and structures. It needs the face to face type of operations, it needs the organization of discussion groups, it needs activities that lead to a greater articulation and aggregation of interest. But above all it needs an overall consistency in the communication signals, in the messages, that come through.

Here, we are faced with a problem which is often overlooked. While in the villages the development programs are going on, we tend to forget that often an entirely different set of signals come through

at the same time, namely through the educational system. More and more of us have become aware of the extent to which the educational system in many of our countries disorients, orientates people away from the villages and all that needs to be done there towards nonexistent jobs in the cities, developing in the process patterns of expectations that cannot be fulfilled in the rural area. The resulting internal brain-drain, pulling the most dynamic elements of the villages away towards the city is rapidly becoming a problem of the highest priority. For whatever else the government does in the way of village development programs, unless this problem is faced up to, unless the educational system is brought to a greater degree of consistency with these efforts, much of the energy may be wasted. It might therefore be useful for us to spend sometime on this problem.

The discussions yesterday also brought out the need to have a closer look at what we might call the capriciousness of the central bureaucracy. We are, I am sure all familiar with various projects which have, wave upon wave, according to the fashion of the day in our various capitals, descended upon the farmers in our villages, only to be abandoned or neglected after a while by the central hureaucracy. In Indonesia we have over the years seen drives for the cultivation of the silkworm, the exploration of mineral resources, for fishponds (even in areas in which large amounts of DDT were used) etc. Lack of preparation, and running out of steam on the part of the central hureaucracy are failings all too frequently eroding the credibility of the development message.

No wonder then that so many villagers have developed subtle defense mechanisms in order to evade what they often have come to look at as half-baked schemes cooked up in the capital of which they fail to see its rationality in terms of their own real interests. The example of a village preferring to stick to their old village well rather than use their new house-to-house waterpipe system, because the well also served as a community center, shows the need for a systemic analysis of each village before a new project is launched. Without such preparation we run the risk, and have often made the mistake, of destroying a nexus of social relations, important for the health of a community. Our discussions have also brought out the need on the part of the innovating bureaucracy to think about and prepare more carefully the technological and scientific backup systems needed to continuously and consistently support technological innovations, once introduced into a social system. Once the new rice strains are accepted, the certainty that the new inputs: fertilizer, pesticides and water, as well as scientific services to fight plant diseases new to the locality, will be available at the right place, the right time and in the right quantities, become crucial in order that innovation takes root and become selfperpetuating.

All this means then that we should not try to evaluate the integrity, effectiveness or credibility of the message without considering the social structure in which that message is received, or without taking into account the effectiveness of the re-inforcing social structures or mechanisms supporting the message.

It should also be clear that we are not simply concerned with the persuasiveness of the message and the factors that determine the immediate receptiveness to the message, but that we are concerned with the question of how the message can be digested by a social organism, triggering changes in a social system that will make innovation a continuous capability. And here of course we come to realize that in as much as communication involves us in social dynamics, we are faced with a problem that is essentially political in nature.

Listening to the discussions yesterday I was struck by the illusions technocrats and planners apparently have about themselves and their effectiveness. I venture suggest that some research into the question as to what nations technocrats and planners have about modernity and modernization might be useful in a number of ways I am inclined to believe that the images and stereotypes that we associate with the modern world and our place in it as modernizers. will turn out to be quite distorted, fragmented and inconsistent. And one wonders what this inevitably does to the messages we are trying to communicate to the traditional sectors of our society. We have here then a communication problem of the first order, which would be worthwhile looking into. It would seem to me that the greater degree of self awareness on the part of developers and modernizers. that might result from such soul-searching. may not only add a touch of humility to their endeavours. but may also lead to a greater readiness to listen to the villagers and how they perceive the way to furthering their own interests. And this is bound to increase the effectiveness of the projects and programs

of our modernizers.

The discussion on inefficiency yesterday in implementing development projects on the village level made me realize even more acutely how much development is linked up with our conceptions of what progress really is, and how important it is to develop some national consensus about this concept as well as about the significance of the application of rationality, science and technology to our problems of poverty. For these two elements, a conception of an attainable future, and the way to achieve it seem to strike at the root of the question of motivation.

How do we motivate a village, a region, a country not only to adopt innovation but to accept its continuous need as an essential element of modernity. We are obviously not simply concerned here with economic motivations, we are dealing with the deeper layers of the cultural-religious matrix of our societies in which social and political dynamics are rooted. It is especially important to recognize these broader motivations in our pluralistic societies where we have the problem of integrating lagging majorities or minorities into the forward thrust of development of the whole nation. We should also realize that the initial motivation for innovation or progress need not be economic. Many people start things for non-economic reasons but once a process is set in motion economic calculations may take over. Motivations of power, prestige, religion, fear, indignation and anger, these all can be strong initial motivations. The modernization process therefore has many facets and our message need not be always cast to appeal to shortterm consideration of profitability, when we try to persuade people to implement our development

program. In the final analysis the test of our development efforts is the question : does innovation take hold? Does our program not only lead to a new, slightly higher plateau of stagnation? Does continuous innovation become a built-in feature of the social structure? And this inevitably leads us to the question of what we might call a "philosophy of development".

It has become more and more obvious from the 20 years or so of experience that most developing countries now have with development, that development is essentially indigenous in nature. If development is seen as the inplantation of an alien concept of progress, with development goals alien to the culture concerned, then inevitably the development projects will remain a corpus alienum, a foreign body, unable to strike roots in our own cultures, and to assume a life of their own. It is this more than anything else that accounts for the lack of sufficient progress, for the lack of an adequate rate of modernization and growth. If as this argument seems to suggest, development is a problem of social dynamics, of triggering the continuous movement of a more or less stagnant social system towards new goals, then obviously the development effort can not and should not be reduced to a methodology of technocratic or bureaucratic manipulation. Still, listening to much of the talk about project implementation and communication effectiveness makes one wonder to what extent technocrats, bureaucrats, and intellectuals are capable of avoiding intellectual arrogance as their particular type of professional deformation in this connection. For as our discussions yesterday brought out already, we are involved in

an infinitely more complex set of inter-actions rather than in a linear process, in which the developer and the "to-be-developed" must be willing to change places occasionally in order to be effective. We are involved really in a problem of social dynamics and essentially in a political endeavour. Because we are dealing here with the goals of a nation, with motivation, with movement, with power. Unless our efforts are able over and beyond their economic justification, to capture the imagination and the creative capability of the nation as a whole, the endeavour is bound to stagnate. If this conception of development as the triggering of the dynamic of a social system, of a nation, is more relevant than some of the other nations about development, then we must also change our attitude towards the so-called cultural and religious obstacles to development. For a whole decade. I think, part of the development debate has turned around the extent to which traditional cultures and religion provide such obstacles. If however development is seen as a process of social dynamics rooted in our society, then of course development also means the dynamization of elements in the existing social structures of tradition.

From this perspective these sources of tradition which have helped shape our indigenous societies then are not our enemies, but they may be our friends. Or at least they may become so if we approach them with the respect and understanding that we owe them. Most likely both the sources of modernization as well as those which have shaped the social structure of tradition will change while interacting in the pursuit of new goals. To make this possible it will be necessary to develop the proper language and the communication network between

the modernizers and the traditional sectors of our societies.

We are only at the beginning of this road. But such a conception of development together with the purposeful building of such bridges will bring within our reach one essential goal of development, over and beyond economic growth and social justice namely increased self-reliance. In the combination of growth, social justice and self reliance as the major goals of development, it is the drive for increased self-reliance that provides the key to the infusion of new life into old social systems. It is also the only way in which Indonesia can hope to solve the social, educational and political problems that follow in the wake of its population explosion, and to provide work and education for the other Indonesia, for that part of the population that would otherwise be doomed to unemployment, underemployment and illiteracy.

The integration of that part of the population which our expanding modern sectors can not hope to absorb, into the building of our nations and into the forward thrust of our economic development is a task that will not only tax the technical skills of our modernizers. It will also require imaginativeness, vision and the will and capability to make it happen. The challenge we face is how to build a society and the civilization that can support the doubling of the population of our countries within 30 years. The nature, magnitude and urgency of this problem will be the main reason why it is unlikely that the more populous among our nations will repeat the patterns of development that has characterized the modern industrial nations of today.

The bind in which these nations now find themselves as a result of their growing awareness of the limits to growth, and the limits to the ecological and psychological price mankind can afford to pay, only re-inforces the need for the developing nations to look for new answers to many of these problems to work out new development patterns, leading us to the creation of new civilizations based on a different relationship to technology and nature as well as on a clearer concept of what we want man to be.

Will our social and political structures have the flexibility to absorb the necessary changes, is the big question history will be asking us. Will our nations find within themselves the vision, the will, the vitality to respond to these great challenges. The question of evolution or revolution hinges on our response.

In any case, I thought of making this point in order to bring out how important it is in our discussions of communication problems in development to realize the magnitude of the historical processes in which we are involved, and not to limit ourselves to those aspects of development that lend themselves to technocratic and bureaucratic manipulations by an elite which presumes to operate from a superior knowledge about modernity. For if development means anything, it is the process of self-emancipation of our nations, and as such an act of human liberation. And this too is a message.

I thank you.

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