

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A Comparative Perspective

Edited by
Majid Teheranian, Farhad Hakimzadeh
and Marcello L. Vidale

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To Reza Ghotbi

For his vision of the future,
Inspired by his patriotism,
Tempered by his humanity.

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The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new . . . because men are generally incredulous, never really trusting new things unless they have tested them by experience—Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), *The Prince*

I am certain that in 300 years historians will say that in our times we were attempting to accommodate democracies as they have evolved with the old direct democracy of Athens. Pericles could speak directly to the people of Athens: a phenomenon that disappeared for over 2,000 years is finally coming back—André Malraux, *Newsweek* interview, 1974

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Preface and Acknowledgments

The leisurely tempo that characterized traditional societies in the past made it inevitable as well as appropriate that the diffusion of new ideas and technologies proceed at a comparable leisurely pace. Innovation and change tended to come about through evolutionary means, and hence were gradual enough to be assimilated and accepted by the people involved.

In rapidly developing countries this time scale has had to be greatly accelerated. The rate of change has been such as to strain people's capacity to cope with the process of change inherent in the concept of national development. Various resources are being brought into play by governments concerned about smoothing the difficult yet requisite transitions; among these, the mass communication media loom large.

In the west it took several centuries before the first industrial revolution turned into a second one characterized by the application of information technology to all aspects of life. In developing countries, both revolutions are occurring in a single historical period. The role played by mass communication media in this context is of critical importance. In socio-cultural development mass communication media are affecting beliefs, behaviours and skills. In the field of economic development they serve to mobilize human resources by raising expectations and propagating knowledge. In political development they provide those subtle ties of common national identity and interest that are essential for the formation of a nation-state and for the promotion of participatory democracy. In educational development they are becoming an increasingly indispensable

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tool for improving both the quality and reach of formal educational opportunities. In technology and management they are setting a fast pace in technological transfer and managerial innovations. Finally, in the field of international relations they help to break down national boundaries and establish a community of world interests and world culture.

Broadcasting in developing countries cannot afford to play a neutral or passive role. Nor can that role be narrowly defined or confined to broadcasting alone. National Iranian Radio and Television is a case in point. It has had to enter into a myriad of activities in order to provide the necessary support for the performance of its own broadcasting responsibilities as well as to fill some existing vacuums in national life. Formal and informal education, development support communication, sponsorship of cultural and artistic activities are examples of extra-broadcasting functions which NIRT is currently undertaking. By conceiving their mission in this broad and activist fashion the mass media of Iran have already become catalysts for change and stimuli to national development.

It is within this framework and in order to assist communication policy makers formulate general guidelines that NIRT initiated in June 1974 a Prospective Planning Project with the specific objective of exploring what future role mass communications could and should play in Iranian society.

The purposes of this Project were fourfold:

- (a) to provide a survey of the state of the art in the mass communication field including future technological developments;
- (b) to assess the views of international and Iranian mass communication professionals on future trends in their fields of specialization;
- (c) to formulate a perspective for NIRT's national mission, roles and functions in the context of Iran's development; and
- (d) to pave the way for a research institute that will focus on a continuing study of the role of mass communication in Iran's national development, including the role that media should play in educational, political, economic, socio-

cultural, technological, organizational and international developments.

As part of the Project's initial activities, four investigations were undertaken: a study of NIRT's organizational requirements; an assessment of anticipated developments in broadcast technology; an international survey of worldwide trends in broadcasting; and a national survey of the reactions of Iranian opinion leaders and communications professionals to NIRT's programming policies.

To have its own work evaluated and also to elaborate further the relevant policy issues, the Project organized two symposia during 1975. The first, held in Shiraz from 18 to 24 May, was attended by senior members of the NIRT management and other Iranian communication experts. The second one, held in Mashad from 25 June to 1 July, brought together a group of international and Iranian communication specialists.

These two gatherings served as a kind of collective planning panel. The reports of working committees were presented and discussed in plenary sessions, out of which emerged a consensus as to the principal goals and missions of NIRT. These may be summarized as follows:

- To strengthen the bases of national unity and participatory democracy through a steady improvement in the quality of the dialogue between government and public.
- To assist in the revitalization of the Iranian national culture consistent with contemporary needs but rooted in the traditions of its millennial history.
- To sponsor artistic and cultural activities at the local, regional and national levels.
- To provide recreational programmes tailored to the taste and preferences of every major sector of Iranian society.
- To expand national support communication services in fields such as medicine, literacy, agriculture, family planning, consumer information.
- To contribute to the creation of multi-media educational facilities.
- To foster the development of a socially aware and patriotic youth.

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- To raise the cultural level and social status of the more sensitive or less privileged groups such as children, women, peasants and labourers.
- To promote a greater understanding of Iranian culture and civilization abroad and of foreign cultures and civilizations among Iranians.
- To promote research and development in the technical as well as the socio-cultural aspects of mass communication.

Lessons of the Planning Project

The Prospective Planning Project generated a number of tangible results, several of which are currently being implemented by NIRT. Others, either broader in scope or less specific, are recognized by NIRT management as valuable guidelines for setting long-term policy and goals.

Among the recommendations now being put into effect are: (a) plans for the reorganization of NIRT, (b) a network expansion programme, and (c) the establishment of an institute for the study of problems of mass communication and national development.

NIRT organizational structure

The basic principles which underlie the proposed organizational structure are accountability and decentralization. With three constituencies to be satisfied (namely, the government, the audience and the broadcasters themselves who seek to uphold their own standards of professional conduct), certain tensions and conflicts are inevitable which no structural reorganization can wholly eliminate. There do exist, however, organizational patterns which tend to minimize rather than exacerbate conflicts. Accountability combined with decentralization and delegation of responsibility, it is felt, lessens areas of friction and permits the co-existence of seemingly irreconcilable points

There are additional compelling reasons for subscribing to the principle of decentralization such as the projected continued growth of NIRT both in size and complexity; the need for more communication channels (transmitters, communication satel-