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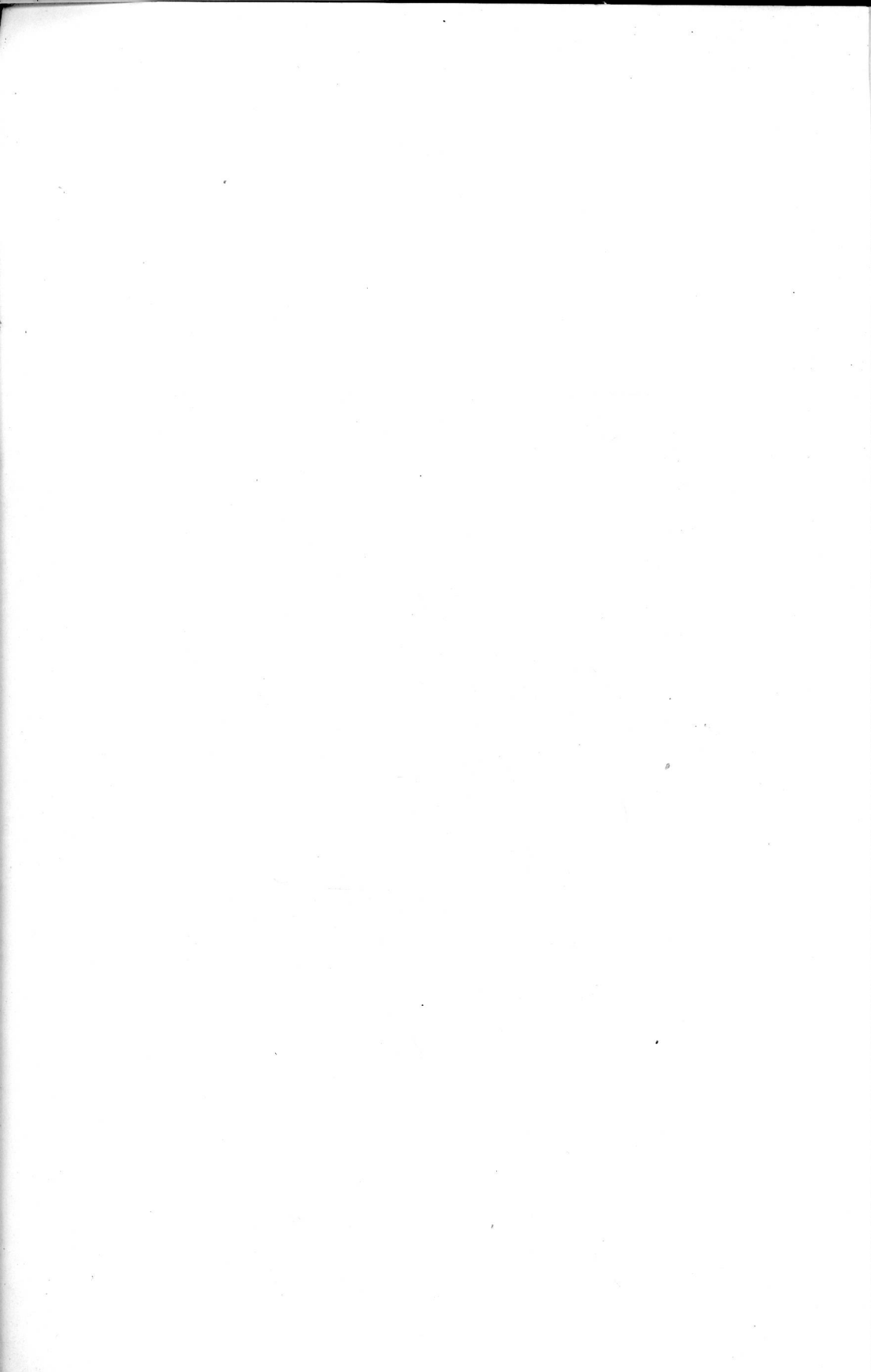
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Research in population communication

Gloria D. Feliciano

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Preface

THIS is the third in a series of manuals on various aspects of population communication.

This manual provides guidelines on various types of research, research areas, and methods, with special reference to population communication. It is designed for use in training communicators and educators working at various levels in national population programmes.

The need for such a manual has long been felt. This publication has been developed on the basis of the recommendations of the Unesco Expert Meeting on Research in Family Planning Communication held in Davao City, Philippines, in 1972.

Other materials related to this manual are three technical documents and a film. The documents are in the Unesco series 'Population Communication: Technical Documentation' and are entitled 'Evaluation Research on Family Planning Communication', 'Research in Family Planning Communication—an Analytical Framework', and 'Research in Population Communication'. The film is part of a Unesco series devoted to family planning communication and is entitled *Research and Evaluation*.

It is recommended that this manual, the related technical documents and the film be used as a package in training programmes.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Unesco.

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1 Introduction

THIS manual is intended to meet a long-standing need for guidelines for conducting research in population communication programmes in developing countries. Providing such guidelines should help improve, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the communication research output of these programmes. As communication specialists assess the impact of the information-education-communication (IEC) component of the various country programmes, the need for research information for use in such programmes becomes more and more evident. In the Unesco Meeting of Experts on the Evaluation of Family-planning Communication Programmes held in April 1974 in Davao City, Philippines, for instance, the participants took a close, hard look at IEC activities in many Asian population programmes. They observed that some of these national programmes are characterized by:

- A diffused, rather than a specific, target audience, due mainly to lack of information on communication needs by region, socio-economic class, age and other variables that may require differential treatment or approach;
 - Vague programme objectives such as broad statements about increasing people's knowledge and understanding of family planning due to the absence of bench-mark information needed for setting specific, quantifiable goals;
 - Scattered and inconvenient activities, due to lack of information on tested IEC concepts and strategies, and on how to combine or integrate activity types for optimum results;
 - A reliance on foreign communication materials, due to a dearth of locally produced materials based on information about the local situation.
- These series deficiencies in communication programmes have, it seems, contributed to the failure of many on-going national country programmes.

In the same meeting it was reported that, of the more than sixty developing nations with population programmes or policies, only six seemed to have measurably decreased age-fertility rates (although some programmes are new and therefore cannot yet be expected to have produced concrete results).

The importance of communication in population programmes is well recognized at all levels of programme administration. Communication

activities (including information and education) normally constitute one of the three major components of such programmes, the other two being provision for clinical services and training of programme personnel. Programme staff generally acknowledge that family planning in the developing countries is essentially a communication activity since it seeks to bring about behavioural change.

The role of research in population communication, however, has not received due attention. Many reasons could be advanced to explain the dearth of communication research in country programmes. A good number of these reasons apparently stem from the need for urgency. In a number of countries, runaway population growth rates are no longer considered simply as economic growth inhibitors; they are also seen as bringing the threat of famine for large segments of the population. This sense of urgency has led to a desire for results 'soonest' and, consequently, to an emphasis on action programmes in which success is measured by such yardsticks as number of clinics established, number of acceptors per clinic, or number of households reached by IEC campaigns. This is especially the case in the fairly new programmes, the organizers of which are aware that it takes time, usually years, before any population programmes can make an impact on the birth rate but that, in the meantime, expenditures must be justified before national and international funding agencies.

For some administrations, impatient for results, communication research does not belong in an action programme. Since research takes time, costs a great deal of money, and requires a number of highly trained research personnel the administrator who orders numerous studies before programme implementation may not appear sufficiently action-oriented. Moreover some may perceive research studies as an affront to their knowledge of the subject field or of the communication environment, or as a wasteful duplication of studies made previously in other societies. Others may look at research as a threat, in the manner of an audit—what if the findings do not justify previous programme activities, or conform with contemplated programme recommendations?

In short, the paucity of research in population communication often stems from a lack of awareness and understanding of what communication research is, it is carried out, and what it is supposed to achieve.

In fact, conducting communication research is not a static activity. Far from slowing down programme implementation, research accelerates it by providing a firmer, more accurate basis for the various programme strategies and activities. Essentially, the primary aim of research is to guide population communication activities so as to optimize their effectiveness. In the race to curb population growth rates, some mistakes are very costly; research that avoids such mistakes saves time.

Moreover, it is inaccurate to say that all research is time-consuming. The time required for a study depends on many factors—for example, research objectives, geographic and activity coverage, availability of data, provisions for logistical support. While completing a knowledge-

attitude-practice (KAP) survey at the national level may take a year or more, a similar study at the regional, district, provincial, town, or village level will obviously take much less time. In some cases media outreach study requires an audience survey; in others an analysis of existing media circulation figures suffices.

The same variances determine cost. If one wants to be as statistically precise as possible one employs an adequate sample, but often indicative readings from a limited number of respondents are sufficient. A national communications survey can be expensive, but sometimes only a local study is necessary. Some relatively inexpensive types of document analysis can go a long way towards clarifying ambiguities about, say, message content or audience characteristics.

As regards research staff, it is true that communication research requires expertise. But the degree of expertise depends on how sophisticated the research activity is. A 'true' or even 'quasi' experiment normally requires personnel professionally trained in social science research. However, some communication research projects—say, a case study that uses techniques of observation and projective questioning—can be carried out by 'non-communication specialists', even by field personnel, if they are trained and provided with simple but adequate guidelines for planning and conducting the study.

This manual is meant to serve as a reference guide for various categories of personnel working in population programmes: programme administrators or managers, IEC division or office heads, research and evaluation personnel, and field workers. It should improve the communication component of their programmes through research; specifically, it should (a) make readers more keenly aware of the need for and the importance of communication research in population programmes; (b) increase their knowledge of the nature, functions and types of research in population communication; and (c) improve their ability to plan and conduct communication research so as to make the communication component of population programmes more effective.

This manual is clearly not the last word on population communication research. Essentially, it is an introduction to the subject. It provides an overview of communication research requirements in developing countries, and discusses the various research methods that can be used to satisfy these requirements.

To do so, it first covers the nature, types and areas of population communication research. It continues with a general description of the communication research process, and then describes various research techniques useful in studying the communication component of population programmes. These techniques are (a) document analysis—specifically, the historical method, content analysis, and readability research; (b) the case study method; (c) pre-testing of communication materials; (d) the survey method; and (e) the experimental method.

The section on the nature, types, and areas of population communi-

cation research focuses on the role of research in population communication, from policy decision-making for programme implementation to the many 'micro' activities that make up the total programme. It also looks at the various subject areas in population communication research, identifying the wide range of specific topics for investigation, and indicating those that have received some attention as well as those that have been neglected in the developing countries. With this information, the manual should foster a greater recognition and appreciation of the value of research in population communication.

A section on the communication research process is included to familiarize the reader with the procedural guidelines for doing this type of research. The discussion is on a general level, concentrating on the framework of the process and not on the details, since the latter vary with different methods or even with different studies using the same method. Procedural aspects of each method are covered in the sections on the methods themselves.

The various research methods discussed include those that have been used, or could be used, in population communication research—their nature, applications, strengths and weaknesses in the developing-country setting; the general procedures followed; and, where available, examples of research conducted using these methods. A detailed 'how-to...' approach is not feasible: as pointed out above, procedural requirements vary with method, and some of these methods have been applied in developing countries so rarely that it is impossible to make tested and proven generalizations on procedures for this setting. While basic concepts would hold true for different environments, cultural differences require modifications in various elements or aspects of the methods.

NOTES

2 Population communication research : nature, types, areas

DEVELOPING countries with high population growth rates have experienced an increasing awareness and understanding of the population problem in recent years. In these countries acceptance of family planning has also grown due partly to accelerated communication efforts in support of population programmes.

These communication efforts have generally aimed at widespread dissemination of knowledge about the concept and methods of family planning, and sustained or increased motivation of couples to accept and use these methods. In some programmes the focus has been on providing some communication support to clinical services.

Population communication efforts have taken various forms depending on the objective(s) they serve. Some examples are: the launching of information-motivation campaigns in provinces, towns, and villages designed for specific target groups: the development and production of locally oriented materials in support of such campaigns; and provision of field-based training in the philosophy and skills of population communication. In addition, mass media support to motivators at the field level has been intensified; extension workers, for example, in agriculture, health, nutrition, local government and community development, social welfare and education, have been increasingly involved in population programmes, and more attempts have been made at integrating family planning and national developmental activities.

Such accelerated communication efforts have required large outlays of human, financial and material resources. Not surprisingly, administrators have recognized the need to study these efforts in order to (a) better understand their role in achieving programme objectives; (b) determine their strengths and weaknesses; and (c) assess to what extent they have improved the programme's communication component and the programme as a whole.

Nature of communication research

In many country programmes, communication studies have been launched to answer questions affecting policy decisions on the use of population

communication. The following is a sample of such questions.¹

1. Who do target groups rely on more as sources of family-planning information, people or the radio?
2. What accounts for the urban bias of family-planning materials produced for rural women?
3. Why are some information materials ignored and others accepted?
4. Which types of family-planning messages are more likely to persuade women to use a contraceptive, those giving only its advantages or those giving both advantages and disadvantages?
5. Which family-planning messages are better received, those that make people laugh or those that threaten them?
6. Which do rural people generally prefer, forms of rural drama produced live or modern dramas on the radio?
7. What effects do hospital information campaigns generally have on post-partum women?
8. What accounts for the gap between knowledge of family planning on the one hand and practice of it on the other?
9. Through what process do the people of a community accept family planning?
10. What motivates a family to have children?
11. How can rational planning for a communication project (research, training, materials development, campaign, and so on) be ensured?
12. How can the contribution of communications media to population programmes be improved?
13. What is the most effective channel of information on contraceptive methods?
14. Who makes up the specific audiences for population communication?
15. How does a documentary film on family planning affect its intended audience in terms of changes in knowledge of attitudes towards, and practice of family planning?

A careful review of the foregoing questions reveals that communication research in family planning can perform three tasks in addition to those previously cited.

First, it can improve understanding of the communication process by giving us new knowledge about sources or providers of family-planning information, their messages, the channels that transmit these messages and the different possible effects all these have on their intended audiences.

Second, it can give us new localized knowledge on how communication works in specific population programmes in given geographical and social settings. This will add to our knowledge on the role of communication in other development programmes—agricultural, health, nutri-

1. The questions given here were obtained from reports of population communication activities in developing countries.