



## MEDIA INTERVENTION FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

*The media are rightly known as the fourth estate of democracy. Scholars have noted significant association between infrastructural and development levels of regions even though the magnitude has declined in recent years. The country has witnessed several regional movements which have criticized the attitude of the powers that be towards backward regions and sections of Indian society. Disparities in reference to both the parameters are much higher in the rural segments across states compared to the urban segments. Decentralization of communication has not been achieved especially in the backward regions to ensure active participation of people in the process of development. The media have also facilitated better connectivity of individuals and organizations. The media clusters are also developed across the world to bridge the communication gap between the government and society in general and business world and people in particular. Scholars have emphasized that the region's development requires an understanding of the development environment and transmission of ideas, experience and other intellectual resources from government to people through various media of communication. The media should provide space and time for critical assessment of regional imbalance and serve effectively as new channels for solution.*

### **Preamble**

Integrated regional development is one of the core topics of national policy in a developing country like India. Regional imbalance has become a major obstacle to national development. In the age of globalization, the market forces have neglected the rural and tribal areas and concentrated on well developed cities for investment and business management. The effects of globalization have created a new consciousness of the need to deepen the active participation of the regional population in the process of regional development. There are several stakeholders of regional development including the civil society and media. The media intervention for integrated regional development is seldom questioned in India. The communication strategy for the regional development is critical to the successful management, implementation and strengthening of the development system within the region. The role of media in regional development is a primarily discussed in this article which is based on qualitative research.

### **Media Institutions**

The media are rightly known as the fourth estate of democracy. The framers of Indian Constitution have accorded a place of pride to the freedom of speech and expression which is commonly enjoyed by all citizens including the media professionals. India has emerged as a prominent media power over a period of time. India has the largest radio broadcasting network in the world. India also produces largest number of feature films, newsreels and documentaries in the world. India is in the forefront in regard to new media management such as satellite communication, telecommunication and computer communication.

The communications media have tremendous capacity of reaching out to a vast majority of people cutting across all barriers to communication. They have a responsibility to provide a balanced coverage of human rights violations and sensitize the various stakeholders regarding their social obligations with respect to arresting the problem of human rights violations. Mass media are providing limited services by highlighting the violations of human rights, sensitizing the insensitive, stimulating action beyond discussion and initiating cases in which the culprits were brought to the book.

The Indian media have become so powerful that they have acquired a prominent place in modern society as an effective 'opposition leader' outside the parliament. The mass media in India are also known as 'watch dogs on the hill top'. Series of investigative and advocacy media reports and analyses have invited the attention of policy makers and people on various aspects of human rights protection.

The press needs to highlight crime. Only the glare of publicity moves governments to bestir themselves and take prompt and prohibitive and preventive action." Illustrations and photographs presented in newspapers and magazines on violation of human rights leave powerful impression on the minds of readers and provide reliving human right experiences. Documented photographs constitute a witness in ascertaining our identity in different regions and times. They touch the human hearts. Cartoons in newspapers have also been focusing on violation of human rights, time and again (Chiranjeevi, 1999:06).



The freedom that the media enjoy is the freedom for and on behalf of the people. Media play the role of communicator and as such they have to inform and not to misinform, dis-inform or non-inform the people on issues of vital importance. They have to educate, motivate, persuade and entertain. They must have their fingers on the pulse of the people and they have the pious obligation not to jeopardize or harm the welfare of the people. As the fourth organ, the media have also the responsibility of building the nation. They can promote economic development, social justice and reforms; bring about religious and communal harmony. The media can aid assist in implementing development programmes meant for alleviating poverty, and for promoting health, education and literacy programmes (Reddy, 2002:19).

The contemporary media in India reflects the dominance of market forces which are wedded to maintenance of statusquoism. This tendency has caused a death blow to democracy in the country and impeded the protection of human rights. Human interest stories, business stories, political stories, film stories and sport stories have gained an upper hand over development communication, human rights communication, social justice communication and value based communication in the country. The new trends of paid news and sound bite journalism have demonstrated the upper hand of consequential statements over substance and meaning. The contemporary media have attracted serious criticism by the intellectuals and activists for their inability to provide meaningful human rights education to the people of India.

### **Regional Development in India**

Regional development is the provision of aid and other assistance to regions which are less economically developed due certain constraints and compulsions. The scope of regional development varies in accordance with the regional characteristics and environments. In India, there is a lopsided development in the post-independence era due to lack of adequate social and political mobilization. Scholars have noted significant association between infrastructural and development levels of regions even though the magnitude has declined in recent years.

It is true that efforts have been made in this direction, but wide regional disparity is still a hard reality in India. India has experienced wide regional imbalance in achievement of development goals. In recent years, the association between infrastructure and development are substantially positive in intermediate regions but insignificant in advanced regions. Expansion of infrastructure is necessary no doubt, but equally crucial is to identify specific projects for specific regions. Serious policy thinking and appropriate regional planning priorities are needed to fulfill the objective of balanced regional development in India (Majumder, 2004:14).

The regional inequality has grown over a period of time despite democratic decentralization and implementation of several plans in the post-independence era. The governmental strategy of regional development has not been systematic and judicious. The emerging regional identities, aspirations and movements have attracted the attention of media and civil society. The country has witnessed several regional movements which have criticized the attitude of the powers that be towards backward regions and sections of Indian society.

The correlation of economic development with amenities, although statistically significant, is relatively low, which suggests that the problems pertaining to health, education, and access to other amenities cannot be effectively tackled in all the states, just by focusing on economic development. Many of the relatively backward states that have large shares in population and are experiencing rapid demographic growth have, understandably, not been able to address the problems of underdevelopment and poverty due to their low rates of economic growth, as well as their inability to put up strong anti-poverty programmes (Kundu and Varghese, 2010:11).

The interstate economic disparities in India have sharply risen in the post reform period, bringing back the issue of regional disparities into the debate on Indian political economy. The market forces and political leaders have entered into an alliance in the age of globalization and compromised with regional development for obvious reasons. The new economic policies would promote a regionally more concentrated pattern of investment and growth and adversely affected the regional disparities in the country. There are marked differences in the fiscal capacity of the states. The backward states are not able to raise sufficient revenue from their tax and non-tax resources to fulfill the basic needs of the people, develop the infrastructure and raise the living standard of the people.

The main determinant of economic growth in the changed scenario is private investment, which tends to go in favour of the richer states. During the last decade all the states except Tamil Nadu have witnessed faster growth as compared to the nineties. The trend towards worsening of interstate income disparity continued unabated in the present decade. There is a strong case for another reorganization of the Indian states into smaller units based on objective criteria. The smaller states will be able to plan for the development of their area and people more effectively in the light of region specific resources and problems (Singh, 2012:22).



Disparities in reference to both the parameters are much higher in the rural segments across states compared to the urban segments. The urban India might be converging in terms of income while rural India is left with larger disparities within themselves. The performance of the states in terms of human development indicators provides a different aspect of inter-regional disparity apart from differences in per capita income. The per capita income increased for all the states in the past four decades but as it was expected that liberalizing markets would bring down the gaps between states did not come to be true. The distribution of industry and services that grew over the years need to be looked into in order to explain divergence in income (Roy, 2012:20).

Amartya Sen rightly pointed out that regional imbalance and demographic imbalance have increased in India in the age of globalization. The women and weaker sections have become the worst victims of globalization. Similarly, the backward regions of India have been consistently neglected by the various stakeholders of national development. The people of the backward regions are economically deprived and politically marginalized under the changed circumstances.

It is also evident that the economic backwardness has been measured by either sector-specific or composite indices, which often cover more than one sector. It is important for the government and the private sector to realize that disparity can be removed only if greater attention is given to areas which are backward, which means more investments need to be made in backward regions by private companies, and increased allocations need to be made by the government in backward regions. The study shows a significant positive correlation between levels of Aspiration and Scholastic Achievement which indicate that the higher the level of aspiration higher the scholastic achievement (Rajalakshmi, 2013:18). The choice of a specific location for the beginning of growth impulses depends on resource endowment, cultural factors, concessions and rebates by the state and so on. The outcome however remains far from bridging the gap between the core regions and the hinterland. The great inequality amongst different regions in terms of economic performance and the distribution of benefits of such economic development is an undisputed reality. The regional dimension is important to address specific kinds of deprivation at different sites of exclusion like dam sites, highway sides, special economic zones, industrial sites, etc (Choudhary, 2014:08).

The enhanced role of the private sector since the early 1990's seemingly increased regional disparity. A sectoral decomposition of the growth trajectory of the regional economies is important to identify the sources of growth and its variability. Per capita income differences across states have increased over time with a corresponding increase in the mean real per capita income by almost three fold during the last two decades in India.

The most important aspect of the fast growth trajectory of Indian economy is that the lagging regions of the country have started growing at a faster rate during the decade of 2000 compared to the first decade of economic reform. However regional inequality has increased over the period despite some of the poorer states registering higher growth rates post 2003-04. This is true for the post-reform period and more so for the high growth period. Sectoral growth analysis also reveals that the major driver of growth is the service sector and within the service sector communication and banking and insurance are the fastest growing sectors (Chowdhury, 2014:07).

### **Role of Media in Regional Development**

India primarily comprises rural and remote areas that are vast and sparsely populated. These regions are economically neglected even though they have created resources and manpower for the country. The impact of centrally made decisions can have significant implications for social, economic and environmental factors affecting their communities in the backward regions. There are limited opportunities for the stakeholders of regional development in India. There is no systematic public – private partnership for regional development due to absence of social commitment and political will.

The communication infrastructure in rural regions is – in spite of a certain improvement – far from being satisfactory and the digital divide remains highly topical. While broadband connectivity in urban settlements is always available, its accessibility in rural areas constitutes a real problem and it is sometimes even not available at all (Vanek et. al 2011:23).

The recommendations of Mac Bride Commission (1982) are not implemented by the Government of India which is the prime mover of national development. The central government has not earmarked adequate funds for the judicious development of the backward regions. Similarly, the media institutions are not fully nourished in these vulnerable regions. The digital divide has not been addressed by the governments in the age of information and communication revolution. Decentralization of communication has not been achieved especially in the backward regions to ensure active participation of people in the process of development.



In Europe, the United Kingdom has achieved remarkable progress in the expansion and development of communications media for effective accomplishment of the task of regional development. There are about 1300 regional and local newspaper titles, over 350 BBC, commercial and community-based local radio stations, regional television news bulletins delivered both by publicly-funded and by commercial providers, a small local television sector and a range of local commercial, public and community-based media. The public bodies, including local councils, also play a role in the local and regional media landscape. Community media often seeks to fill gaps - geographical, special interest or demographic – unserved or under-served by these mainstream media. The media have contributed decisively for the local, regional and national developmental of endeavors.

Korea has achieved success in the achievement of regional development by making use of new communication technologies. The Internet, mobile telecommunications networks, and myriad other types of communications networks have played a crucial role in the process of regional development. The media have also facilitated better connectivity of individuals and organizations.

These changes suggest that an examination of regional economic development in Korea should be accompanied by a focus on the effect of communications networks. It should be emphasized that the technological conditions of the communications network infrastructure determine the degree of regional economic development. These results imply that successfully implementing Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Internet transaction across regions will be a crucial factor for the better performance of the Korean economy. The present analysis provides a useful paradigm for considering how effective communications infrastructure works as a driving force for the strong showing of the Korean economy (Kikuchi, 2004:10).

Information technology and information networks have made learning and knowledge independent from the constraints of time and space. Globalization and digitalization have fundamental consequences in educational and learning life, working life and in governance. The media and ICT are a crucial part of the future learning environment (Varis, 2007:24). Cross-media involves more than one medium, ranging from analogue and digital media or digital media only, which all support each other with their specific strengths. As such cross-media can also be seen as an economic term used in organizational terms: companies, trade associations and city or regional development organizations (Boumans, 2007:04).

The African nations have also developed communication infrastructural facilities over a period of time to achieve the goal of regional development. The inadequacy of transportation and communication infrastructure is usually cited as a major hindrance to effective integration and cooperation among African countries. Thus, regional integration and ICTs are both pursued as in the quest to bring South America along the path of development. The ICT-for-development model that the UN recommends fits with this notion as well, both offering regions the possibilities of technological adaptation and innovation to meet regional needs and reduce external dependency (Akpan-Obong and Parmentier, 2007:01).

The media clusters are also developed across the world to bridge the communication gap between the government and society in general and business world and people in particular. The media clusters are a specialized form of agglomeration designed to produce mediated content, such as motion pictures, television programs/videos, broadcasts, audio recordings, books, newspapers, magazines, games, photography and designs, websites and mobile content. The rationale for media clusters was borrowed from traditional national and regional economic development policies.

The issue of whether media clusters are appropriate and effective as regional development efforts remains more open. It appears that the best economic and employment effects occur where large media institutions are involved in the cluster (public service broadcasters and major commercial channels with large production facilities), rather than merely small enterprises (Picard, 2009:17).

Scholars have emphasized that the region's development requires an understanding of the development environment and transmission of ideas, experience and other intellectual resources from government to people through various media of communication. The media possess direct or indirect influence on the audience. Arguably the media has an important role in regional development (Nyambuga and Onuona, 2012:16).

The social media have cut across all barriers to communication and development. They have become effective instruments of participatory communication in the urban and rural areas. The prominent tools for regional engagement include regional newspapers, TV, Radio, Email, Twitter, Facebook, Linked in, Blogs, Websites, Polls/Survey, Face to Face Meetings, Conference, Exhibitions and more. Regional social media is an excellent way to monitor what issues that are becoming



topical in rural and regional communities, gauge public sentiment about particular issues, raise awareness about opportunities to influence government decision making on an issue and encourage responses through official channels (Australian Regional Development Conference, 2014:02).

The media institutions are urban oriented and elites centered in modern times. The media have the capacity to promote regional development in a country like India. But, media are controlled by the market forces which are not committed to sustainable development and regional development causes. Media can bridge the gap between the developed regions and underdeveloped regions in this age of communication revolution. Media can also contribute for regional development by highlighting the successful regional development stories and sensitizing various stakeholders of regional development.

### **Issues and Challenges**

Other countries have also passed specific laws on regional development and have created regional and central structures to formulate and monitor the implementation of regional development policies. Inter-regional disparities within India are examined by the stakeholders of national development mainly due to its potential drag effect on the economic growth of the nation as a whole. If the existing trends in differential rate of socio-economic development continue, regional disparities in India are bound to accentuate. Meaningful decentralization of decision making and financial powers with appropriate accountability at all levels will facilitate faster socio-economic development of the backward regions where people are likely to take up considerable share of the developmental responsibilities.

The question of social, economic and financial effects of investments in the poorest regions dominates political debate across the country. Regional development has now become an important aspect of good governance in India. The Government of India and state governments should create appropriate institutions at the regional level. There is a need to address regional imbalance and disparity in India. But the basic issue is that few possibilities exist to include the lesser developed regions in the process of economic development. There is a need to ensure appropriate legislative, planning and implementation mechanisms to maximize potential for growth and benefits in the resource sector to remain in regional communities. Planned, deliberate and systematic initiatives for regional development are essential in the present times. The government, corporate houses, civil society, media and other stakeholders are required to work together to facilitate distributive justice and regional development.

There is urgent need for re-examination of pattern of development in India. The regional development policy should be implemented in order to improve quality and quantity of economic growth in all sectors of development. Systematic human resources development and environment protection programmes should be undertaken to reduce regional disparities in India. The stakeholders of national development should reduce the disparities among states in terms of per capita income and social indicators and also reduce poverty. The new paradigm of participatory governance, backed up by area and social group targeting, can help these lagging states in preparing and implementing a comprehensive plan for infrastructure, basic amenities and social development in collaboration with the major national and international partners.

### **Conclusion**

Strategic Regional Planning should provide answers to regionally specific challenges. This involves formulating the necessary guidelines, demonstrating development prospects and alternative courses of action, and, where possible, initiating or facilitating the resulting development steps. The policy makers should identify the priority fields of action bearing in mind tasks and available resources. The Strategic Regional Planning considers cross-sections of various materials that then contribute towards the corresponding products or results. The Strategic Regional Planning involves particular processes that contain systematic planning initiatives based on ground realities. A persistent search for alternative ideas of regional development especially in India should also include and empower the voices of the marginalized. Regional development in India should be based on a balanced growth which can be achieved by policies of government intervention, engineering socio-economic planning or managing effective demand and supply. The institutional mechanisms for dealing with regional imbalance in India have to be designed in consultation with the experts in regional development. The demand for autonomy continues along with a new dimension of regionalism arising from submerged identity along with political and economic aspirations should be properly addressed. The media should provide space and time for critical assessment of regional imbalance and serve effectively as new channels for solution.

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