COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: UNDP IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

G M Shahidul Alam

It would be hollow to argue with Sadiq Ahmed’s statement: “In the early 1970s, following independence, Bangladesh faced daunting development challenges.” As it would be to dispute the World Bank’s (WB) explanation for why such a situation had come to pass: “Desperately poor when it won its independence in 1971, overpopulated, and reeling from overwhelming war damage to its institutional and physical capital, Bangladesh looked to become, as Henry Kissinger forecast, ‘an international basket case’. “ Having inherited a precarious state to begin with, Bangladesh was then placed in further predicament by a famine that ravaged the country in 1974.

‘…we have to remember that the bottom line of effective communication will have to be the basic guiding principle of hard work and common sense. Communication is less important than performance. Proper performance is more likely than not to garner sustained public support, and that is critical to the success of development activities.’

After overcoming the debilitating impact of the famine, Bangladesh has been on a path of slow, if uneven, development across its territory. Some would say that the country could not do otherwise following 1974, unless it embarked on a backward slide and, in the process, fulfill Kissinger’s prediction. WB, in keeping with its doctrine, has explained the upturn primarily as a result of “income growth, the strongest engine for the workforce, its size and skill levels, and the efficiency of production technology.” For all the optimism expressed by WB, it has also expressed reservations about governance, particularly endemic corruption, which could prevent Bangladesh from attaining the MIC status or the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). “For all its progress, however,” two WB economists further point out, “Bangladesh remains a poor country --- with...wide disparities in incomes and human capabilities across income and occupational groups, gender, and regions." United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has published its Human Development Index (HDI) --- 2011 Rankings, which provides a generally realistic picture of where Bangladesh stands.
in terms of human development, both as a barometer of its individual progress over the years and in comparison to the rest of the world, particularly to the countries of the South Asian region, of which it is a part.

For a better measure of comparison we will look at the relevant data for 2010, and also at a graphic of HDI change from 1980 to 2010. In the 2011 rankings, Bangladesh was ranked at number 146 out of 187 Countries considered.\(^7\) It was given a HDI estimate score of 0.500.\(^8\) In 2010, it was listed at number 129 out of 169 countries ranked, and it was given a score of 0.469.\(^9\) In a nutshell, then, Bangladesh had slipped 17 places down in ranking in 2011 over that of 2010, although it had gained by 0.031 in estimate score during the same period.

We will find out below that Bangladesh has been making more or less steady progress in human development over thirty years from 1980 to 2010, but the cumulative effort still has not resulted in its elevation from the low human development (LHD) category to one of medium human development (MHD). In fact, the South Asia region, of which Bangladesh is a part, does not have a single representative above MHD grouping. Let us see where the other seven countries stand in the two years of 2010 and 2011. In the 2010 HDR, Sri Lanka was at number 91, Maldives at 107, India at 119, Pakistan at 125 (all classified in MHD), Nepal at 138 and Afghanistan at 155 (both, with Bangladesh, in LHD; Bhutan was not ranked that year).\(^10\) In 2011, Sri Lanka was at 97, Maldives at 109, India at 134, Bhutan at 141 (all in MHD), while Pakistan at 145, Nepal at 157, and Afghanistan at 172 joined Bangladesh in the LHD group.\(^11\) (HDR 2011, op. cit).

For the record, Norway topped the list, being in the very high human development (VHHD) category, both those years, while being given a 0.943 HDI estimate in 2011 (The classifications used by UNDP range upwards from LHD at the bottom to MHD to high human development (HHD) and ending with VHHD). Significantly, there was no change in the ranking position of the South Asian countries vis-a-vis each other over the two years, although Bhutan was considered in 2011 and Pakistan was downgraded to the LHD category that year. The hard fact remains that the best performer in South Asia, Sri Lanka, languishes only just above the halfway mark of the countries ranked (91 out of 169 in 2010, and 97 out of 187 in 2011), although, interestingly, four of the top ten countries that had the largest HDI percentage increase between 1980 and 2010 belong to this region. The following graphic will attest to that.
There are two ways of looking at the graphic presented. One is that the South Asian countries have performed creditably in developing their human resources, especially Nepal and Bangladesh, who have more than doubled or almost doubled, respectively, their positive change over thirty years from the base year of 1980. India and Pakistan have done well also, although the spillover from the Afghan conflict and its internal battle against religious extremism and armed militancy in the new millennium have probably prevented Pakistan from achieving much more than it has. The other way of viewing it would be that the South Asian countries were at a very low stage of human development and a good effort could only propel them forward at a pace faster than those countries which already were in a fairly advanced stage of human development in 1980, and could not bring about the high rate of changes that the South Asian countries could. Of course, this line of argument could be countered by bringing in the examples of China, Turkey, Malaysia, and Thailand.

In fact, China is ranked immediately below Bangladesh, improving from a 0.368 score in 1980 to an impressive 0.663 in 2010, reflecting a 80 percent change, Turkey at number 21, improving from 0.467 to 0.679, indicating a 45 percent change, Malaysia at 27, progressing from 0.541 to 0.744, manifesting a 38 percent change, and Thailand at 29, going up from 0.483 to 0.654, exhibiting a 36 percent change. Incidentally, Malaysia and Turkey were listed in the HHD category in the 2010 HDI rankings, while China and Thailand were in the MHD group. Judged from the perspective of the 1980 score, we may conclude that all four countries, while lagging behind Bangladesh or Nepal’s %HDI change over the thirty year period, besides having an advantage over the two countries in HDI score in 1980, sustained their development at a pace

The Journal of Development Communication

Largest HDI % Increase 1980-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>0.428</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>104%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>0.259</td>
<td>0.469</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.179</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that have landed them in the groups they find themselves in 2011. China’s record has been particularly impressive, when considered in the context of its ascribed (by various human rights watchdog bodies) poor record in human rights. Other countries which were in better situation than the four in 1980 did the needful in sustained development to either consolidate their superior ranking or improve upon it. The end result has been that, in spite of their percentage increase, Bangladesh and Nepal continue to find themselves among the ranks of the LHD countries.

**Millennium Development Goals**

WB has referred to Bangladesh meeting certain yardsticks of the United Nations (UN) MDGs to underscore its optimism about Bangladesh’s development prospects.\(^\text{13}\) In its 2005 report, it concludes that, of the five MDGs identified by sub-national units of the country --- consumption poverty, under-five mortality, child malnutrition, schooling enrollment and completion, and gender disparities in schooling --- Bangladesh had achieved (or had come close to attaining) the objective of eliminating gender disparity in schooling opportunities, and had some success in reducing consumption-poverty and under-five mortality.\(^\text{14}\)

It could do better by utilising a combination of interventions, including sector-specific interventions (like expanding immunization coverage and reducing pupil-teacher ratios), and improved coverage of infrastructure, economic growth, and social safety-net programmes.\(^\text{15}\) Thus, in the two areas of economic and human development, WB gives Bangladesh a mixed review, with cautious optimism being the underlying theme. However, going by UNDP’s HDI report for 2011, that optimism has to be tempered by the phenomenon of other countries leapfrogging Bangladesh even though it continues to make steady, if unspectacular, progress in certain sectors of economic and human development. Whether slow and steady will eventually win the race for Bangladesh into becoming an established middle income country, as determined by WB or IMF standards, within, say, 2025 (ten years after the MDGs are supposed to have been attained), would depend on a number of key factors, including that of substantially improving governance, drastically reducing endemic corruption (intrinsically a major factor of poor governance), and bringing about a healthy democratic political culture in the country. Bangladesh has to improve significantly in certain sectors, including in a holistic development of its relatively underdeveloped regions, in order to be able to graduate to a distinct medium-developed status by 2025. We will take up the case of one of these regions to focus on the topic of our study, development communication as applied in the
Chittagong HilTracts (CHT).

**Objective of the Study**

Bangladesh’s performance in human development has not been uniform across its regions, as measured by the four directions from the epicenter, its capital Dhaka. We will not go into any discussion of the regional records in human development, simply because the specific scope of this study will not allow us to take up any topic that is so extensive in scope, and, also because the limited focus of this study will not allow us to undertake a concentrated exercise on our chosen topic of development communication as applied by UNDP in CHT. We have deliberately used the term “applied” to include two aspects of development communication: as one existing only in theory and in plans, and as one that is actually practiced.

A prime motive for selecting CHT as our area of study has to do with the statement made earlier that human development has been unevenly accomplished across the regions of Bangladesh. That has had a debilitating impact on the country’s overall human development, and has contributed to its still lying in the LHD category in spite of steady, though unspectacular annual gains since 1980. One of those regions is CHT, and efforts have been underway by UNDP, among other governmental and intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations, to aid in its development process, both economic and human.

CHT presents its own unique set of problems, and overcoming or minimising them to manageable proportions would help it develop at a more satisfactory pace, and, in the process, contribute towards accelerating the pace of the country’s overall development. And, given CHT’s special characteristics and particular problems, which do not reflect those of the rest of Bangladesh, its human and economic development would add significantly to the country’s progress.

**Development Communication Hypothesised**

As with most social science-related theories, the development communication field is replete with hypotheses that diverge from one another in some small details or major contentious issues. Since this study is not about development *per se*, we will restrict ourselves to Conceptualizing development in the following broad term: it is a process of social change that involves wide participation of the people in a society with the intention of effecting both social and material progress (including freedom, more equitable distribution of wealth and income,
and other socially desirable values) for the majority of the population by enabling them to gain control over their environments. Communication is an effective tool in helping bring about this change.

Among the pioneer scholars in recognising the potential of communication in playing a crucial role in the national development of the so-designated Third World countries, Wilbur Schramm, occasionally referred to as the father of communication studies, argues that a development communication system needed to be established in those nations, and an inter-connected arrangement of economic development, education, urbanisation, and communication development would be necessary to achieve the objective of securing a sound development communication system. Although his bullet theory of communication and trickle-down development had only limited success in the developing countries, his basic thesis, that we must amass knowledge, phase information, and extensively and rapidly transmit information in order for development to take place, is valid and applicable to development efforts in general.

Other scholars undertook exercises to try to cover the deficiencies in Schramm’s theory, or expand and improve upon it, or propose new hypotheses. Typical is Nora Quebral, who adopts a holistic position in defining development communication: that it is the art and science of human communication, which is employed for the purpose of the swift transformation of a country beset with poverty to one that has attained a dynamic state of economic growth, opens the door for greater economic and social equality, and makes possible the optimum realisation of human potential. Uma Narula concentrates on the practical application of development communication: “The effectiveness of the development communication depends on the type and kind of audience, image of development bureaucracy, and the interpretations of media practitioners which affect the interpretations of communication and its persuasive efficiency.”

Narula also identifies three prerequisites that have to be met for effective development communication: human and localised approach to communication rather than one that is abstract and centralised; credibility and role of communication links for development -- both media and interpersonal links; and, access to communication. She also suggests several approaches that could be adopted for planning and implementing development communication, adding that they are not mutually exclusive to each other, and could be used in combination: diffusion/extension approach, mass media approach, development support communication approach, instructional approach, integrated approach, localised approach, and planned strategy. We will refer to these
approaches during the course of our study. Having said that, however, we have to remember that the bottom line of effective communication will have to be the basic guiding principle of hard work and common sense. Communication is less important than performance. Proper performance is more likely than not to garner sustained public support, and that is critical to the success of development activities.

**The Chittagong Hill Tracts**

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) located in southeastern Bangladesh, occupies a physical area of 5093 square miles, which accounts for 10 percent of the total land area of Bangladesh, and is estimated to be populated by approximately 1.3 million people. The region comprises the three districts of Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban, is a unique territory in that it forms part of the only mountainous area in the country, distinguished by very steep and rugged terrain, and is home to 11 ethnic communities with each having their own distinct language, tradition, and culture, and Bengalis who have settled from the plains. UNDP assesses the condition of the people thus: “The majority of CHT people live in chronic poverty; under-employment and illiteracy and an overall lack of economic opportunity is endemic; and the proper functioning of social services is inhibited, with serious consequences for all inhabitants.” This estimation eloquently sums up the problems that the people in that region are faced with in economic and human development.

The 2010 Report reiterates this assessment and offers additional information: “The majority of people live in poverty, unemployment is rife, there is an overall lack of economic opportunity and the proper functioning of various social services is inhibited.” Furthermore, “...about 62 percent of the households in the region, irrespective of ethnicity, are living below the absolute poverty line...while 36 percent are defined as hard core poor.... Poverty in CHT is higher than rural Bangladesh.”

**UNDP’s Involvement**

Stefan Priesner, Country Director of UNDP Bangladesh, in the course of assessing the seventh year (2010) of “successful implementation” of the organisation’s project in CHT, the Promotion of Development and Confidence Building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (CHTDF), outlines its prime strategy: “...to ensure access to basic..."
services for the CHT people through developing capacity and building confidence of the CHT institutions in the national, regional and local levels. In relation to this purpose, intervention areas continue to focus on community empowerment, economic and agricultural development, and service delivery in education and health. This is implemented through UNDP’s unique multi-sectoral area-based development approach and strengthening the local government institutions in the CHT, which have proven to be able to deliver services in an efficient way. In addition, gender equality concerns are part of all interventions. He gives an optimistic viewpoint by claiming that UNDP is making “important contributions” towards improving the CHT population’s socio-economic conditions and to a successful peace-building process. Priesner is also prudent in mentioning that CHTDF has to be considered a part of the Bangladesh government’s wide-ranging endeavours to implement the Peace accord and to bring about human development in the region.

The objectives of the CHTDF programme, sketched out by Priesner, are, in summary: Capacities of the CHT institutions, including MoCHTA, the Regional Council, the three Hill District Councils, and the traditional institutions of the three Circle Chiefs are enhanced; Economic opportunities for small local enterprises, women, youth and farmers are improved; Literacy is increased through improved access to a strengthened education system adapted to the local context; Health conditions are improved through strengthened health system supporting community outreach and localised service delivery; Local communities are empowered and their capacities to manage their own development are enhanced; Confidence required to find solutions to long standing problems and encourage sustainable development and peace in the CHT is created.

In addition, the project has incorporated the following cross-cutting principles:

1) Gender equality;

2) Knowledge management and knowledge transfer.

The timeframe for the project from beginning to completion is from 2003 to 2013. The detailed development situation of CHT falls outside the purview of this study, but the picture is a near-reflection of Bangladesh’s development pattern. However, a socio-economic baseline survey of CHT commissioned by EU, and prepared by the Dhaka-based research institution the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) in early
2009, will provide a succinct idea of the state of economic and human development in CHT vis-à-vis the national situation. The average annual net income of a rural household in the region, irrespective of ethnicities, is approximately Tk. 65,852, while in the rest of rural Bangladesh (at current price of January 2008) it is about 1.28 times higher. The overall uneven development in one socio-economic indicator between the major segment of the population of the region and the rest of the country is reflected within CHT itself.

While the average annual net income of the Bengalis is Tk. 71,031, that of the indigenous population is 61,641. These discrepancies within the country as well as the region continue to particularly irk the Indigenous people, who complain of discrimination in development efforts undertaken by the government. This sense of deprivation was eloquently voiced by Jyotirindra Bokhriya Larma, Chairman of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), on the occasion of the 14th anniversary of the CHT peace accord. Incidentally, Larma, then also head of PCJSS, had signed the accord on behalf of the inhabitants of CHT. Bangladesh’s prime minister in 1997 was Sheikh Hasina, as she is in 2011. After having termed Hasina as being communal, he complained that, “Development work is not going on as per the demand of the people; rather, development work is on to implement an evil design.” And, worryingly for the future direction of the region, he grumbled, “Except for withdrawing some (army) camps, the (peace) treaty has been fully unimplemented.” Furthermore, more ominously, he warned that the non-implementation could trigger further confrontation between the indigenous people and the government.

On an average, 2.75 persons in a household (household size in CHT is 5.2), that is, 52 percent of the total household members are either employed or employable, but 20 percent are unemployed. CHT is also a food deficit region, and the indigenous population has the worse of the situation than the Bengalis. Food poverty is widespread, and most of the indigenous people are not secured in relation to the availability of food for most of a given year. Sixty-two percent of the CHT population live below the absolute poverty line (that is, below 2122 k.cal. consumption), while approximately 36 percent are hardcore poor (below 1805 k.cal. intake). Here, too, the indigenous people come off worse than the Bengalis, as is borne out by the figure of 59 percent of the Bengalis living below absolute poverty and about 31 percent being hardcore poor.

The human development scenario is hardly better than the economic picture. The hygiene situation is unsatisfactory, as is the use of sanitary latrine. The major source(s) of drinking and cooking water are not safe. Furthermore, the unsatisfactory situation is compounded by the daily trek
of considerable distances by many in order to fetch drinking water, thereby wasting valuable time in the pursuit of their daily livelihood.\textsuperscript{36} In another critical area, one that has a huge impact on Bangladesh’s overall economic and human development, CHT fares rather inadequately in comparison to the rest of the nation. While the rate of demand for family planning is 73 percent nationally, it is 66 percent in CHT.\textsuperscript{37} In the Education sector, the picture is comparatively worse. A measly 7.8 percent of the population have completed primary education, and an even scantier 2.4 percent their secondary education. The average year of schooling for the region’s population is only 2.8.\textsuperscript{38} Financial difficulty is cited as the primary reason for 65 percent of households dropping out before completing primary schooling and 19 percent after.\textsuperscript{39} (ibid). In addition, distance, helping their parents in various capacities, and difficulty with the medium of instruction have been put forward as reasons for early school dropout. Obviously, in a less developed country, a region that is even less developed in comparison to the national achievement has to be given particular attention not only for it to at least come up to par with the national level of performance, but also, by doing so, helping to enhance the overall development of the country. It is in this context that UNDP’s efforts, especially focusing on the development communication strategy and tools employed, in CHT have to be acknowledged and assessed.

\textbf{Tools of Development Communication Employed}

As an overall strategy for Bangladesh, UNDP employs diverse channels of development communication. They include traditional mass media conduits like television, radio, documentary films, and photographs, as well as project website, and media awareness workshops and multifarious training for project nongovernmental organisations (PNGOs), local staff, local journalists, line ministries, regional council and conventional local government organisations like Upazilla Parishads and Union Parishads. With a view towards generally promoting UNDP’s work, UNDP Bangladesh Website has created a media gallery that includes press release, photo gallery, photo essay, videos/short documentaries, speeches, publications, on-the-ground feature stories of different projects, and communications network meeting. The focus of the network meeting is primarily to share success stories that can be promoted widely through the media to UNDP regional offices or headquarters, and to the donor agencies. Essentially that entails internal communication to highlight success stories or, to look at it another way, for the UNDP personnel to feel reassured or good about themselves and their organisation.
UNDP has come to the realisation that communications can play a vital role in helping it achieve its vision and mission nationally, regionally and/or globally. The organisation went into soul-searching and concluded that, even though there exists multiple examples of outstanding development communications, across the development business there has been a long-established tendency of regarding communications as a secondary activity. While development issues per se are considered to be urgent and complex, communication initiatives are relegated to an afterthought, to be executed by people who may or may not have professional field experience. UNDP thinks it to be an unsatisfactory state of affairs and reflective of poor planning. “But in communications,” it proceeds, “this kind of poor planning yields poor results. Poor planning means missed opportunities for communications that could strengthen UNDP and its contributions to human development.”

UNDP offers a theoretical discourse on effective communications, and then outlines in detail the components of a communications strategy. It differentiates between strategy and tactics, importantly pointing out that a strategy must aim at providing information to government policymakers and local officials, with the objective of increasing resources allocated towards formulating and implementing sound human development policies. Tactics, as is generally understood, signifies segmented actions that constitute strategy. It is important to note that UNDP is urging the imperative of communicating effectively with government officialdom in order for it to carry out productive development activities. One might legitimately wonder then exactly what role does UNDP play in the entire process of development. Is it in a purely advisory and/or supervisory capacity, essentially there to motivate the government to adopt and implement its (UNDP’s) own specially-devised plans and programmes, and then to oversee the entire process in operation? Whether that, indeed, is, or not the case, (although the UNDP annual reports cited indicate that it is), UNDP’s involvement will dictate that it will have to share in any failure, or partial failure that a project incurs as with any success, with the government. Given the constraints that it faces with the government of the host country, it, nonetheless, does advise, fund and supervise, and those are potent influence-peddling tools.

UNDP’s components of a communications strategy are extensive and potentially effective. They are reproduced here in their barest essentials: What are you trying to do? Good objectives are ambitious, but also realistic and specific. What are the potential threats and opportunities? These factors may be both internal (resources, staff
capacities) and external (infrastructure, cultural patterns, or political environment). Whom do you need to talk to? Reach target audiences. What do you want to say? How do you reach your audience? Why regular newsletter than more occasional briefing? Why a large national conference than a series of smaller regional seminars? Why an e-mail bulletin than more face-to-face contact? Who does what and when? Evaluating results.  

UNDP then proposes various tools of development communication: How do we communicate? print and broadcast media internal and external websites e-mail and blogs social media publications public service advertising/announcements goodwill ambassadors/celebrities non-traditional channels like street theatre, village meetings, religious gatherings, sports and cultural events, and such. 

Assessing UNDP’s Development Communication Efforts In CHT

Based on a joint EU-UNDP evaluation that was carried out in November 2009 by external assessors, and the impact of EU (to reiterate, a donor to UNDP’s CHT project) supported programmes implemented between 2005 and 2010, Action Fiche comes up with the following findings regarding CHT. The general situation in that region is assessed and reveals political complexities that are beyond the scope and control of UNDP’s programmes, but which have had a major impact in impeding overall development efforts in that part of Bangladesh.

As a starting point, the evaluation points out that its proposal, in keeping with the present government’s (headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, installed in 2009) National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction, takes the CHT Peace Accord as the keystone for both a successful peacekeeping process and as a framework for development. Priesner voiced the same thoughts in 2010: “...CHTDF is a part of the Government’s wider efforts to implement the CHT Peace Accord and to ensure human development in CHT.” However, Action Fiche has concluded that tensions continue to be present in the area, accompanied by scattered incidents of violation of human rights. And, significantly, it has noted that the indigenous leaders are increasingly getting disenchanted and distrustful regarding the government’s intentions and its political will with respect to the level of implementation of the Accord. This assessment tallies closely with that of PCJSS Chairman Larma’s observation on the occasion of the 14th anniversary of the Accord. What is important to note in these two assessments is that the fundamental condition identified for development to occur, an effective peace agreement, has not been realised to the extent that it could, and
should, have. Then, taking this point to its logical conclusion, expecting creditable all-around development to occur would be unrealistic. The onus falls entirely on the government to take the political steps necessary to implement the peace accord in its letter and spirit. Under the circumstances, UNDP and other non-governmental organisations would expectedly be limited in fully realising their objectives.

Keeping that caveat in mind, however, we will take stock of UNDP’s development communication efforts in CHT. We will notice that Narula’s suggested approaches to development communication are applied in varying degrees, with development support leading the way. UNDP’s very mission statement bears this out: “The (CHT) project supports the Government of Bangladesh, institutions of the CHT, and local communities to pursue accelerated, sustainable socio-economic development and poverty reduction based on principles of local participation, and decentralised development.”

The communication linkage has, as we have seen, been both conceptually spelt out by UNDP and been identified in operation through the tools/channels used by UNDP Bangladesh. Keeping this association perspective in view, we can deduce from the mission statement that localised and diffusion/extension approaches are also employed. The tools/channels used indicate a mass media approach to development communication. Furthermore, as UNDP’s employment of mass media tools/channels suggests, instructional approach forms part of the development communication mix, while, to the extent that the organization has consciously recognised the urgency of using communication to aid in development and has devised plans to put it into action, it might be stated that a planned strategy approach has been employed. The approaches are not given equal weightage, but that is to be expected because of the varied types of development work being undertaken, and the different people and organisations that the communication has to reach.

The development communication approaches are in use, but how effective have they been in achieving UNDP’s objectives in CHT? Action Fiche gives the efforts a mixed review, and that seems a fair assessment. Dwelling on the positives, it concludes that UNDP’s project has had a “remarkable stabilising effect” in the region. In two critical areas, too, the evaluator finds positive impact. It sees that UNDP’s efforts have strengthened the local governance systems by strengthening the institutionalisation of the indigenous communities. Even more importantly, given the overall poor governance situation obtaining in the country and its spillover effects on CHT as a whole, UNDP’s project has increased the transparency, accountability, capacity and credibility of the
local institutions, especially the Hill District Councils, thereby contributing to “establishing an enabling environment for development.”52

However, Action Fiche also identified some critical weaknesses that have hampered the development efforts, as well as the potential, of the project and the target population. It finds that paucity of vision for sustainability, along with problems in the original project design are causing fragmentation of the entire project’s diverse and several components.53 It is indicating flaws in not only planned strategy, but also, by extension, in both development support and diffusion approaches to development communication. That is because communication is an important tool in realising the positive output of those components towards the region’s progress. Similarly, following the same logic, Action Fiche has discerned flaws in the localised approach to development communication adopted by UNDP, and one that has had a negative impact on economic welfare. Its Community Empowerment concept and the Quick Impact Fund scheme to accelerate development have not totally achieved economic benefits for the target population because of the lack of appropriate analysis and the integration of the community organisations into the local government system.54 And, in highlighting a problem in achieving effective communication, the assessor concludes that the weak monitoring and evaluation capacity of the project to estimate the progress of its implementation and inform decision making bodies have serious negative implications for the region’s development.55

In the context of CHT, UNDP employs diverse development communication tools. Among the paraphernalia that it uses may be found in publications, internal and external websites, e-mail and blogs, public service announcements, prominent personalities, the print and broadcast media, social media, and non-traditional channels like cultural events. It must be emphasised that some are used less frequently or extensively than the others. The print and the broadcast media, for example, often serve as vehicles for advertising large-scale or especially significant UNDP programmes related to the region, more to grab national attention towards its efforts than anything else. It brings out annual reports and introduces new publications like the monthly newsletter of CHTDF, CHT Development News, that first came out in October 2011. This newsletter updates various development-related activities going on in the region, as well as highlights the involvement of any important personages in the undertakings. It serves as much as to keep interested people updated about UNDP’s efforts as to keep the organisation’s staff informed. The websites serve to provide general
information, and, again, would primarily attract the attention of internal organisational personnel, and persons interested in the region and its development activities. In other words, these means of communication usually serve to inform a rather rarefied group of people. Noticeable is the comparative absence from the mix, for a variety of reasons, including language barrier (the general people can hardly read or understand English), lack of interest in, or capacity to comprehend, the material being disseminated, and dearth of access to the communication channels, is the most crucial component: the people the development efforts are intended to benefit. It is not that they are ignored.

Impressive events relating to the indigenous people’s culture are organized nationally at intervals each year, bringing them into focus over the national print and electronic media outlets. But they are more of a showpiece than anything else. More meaningful for the CHT population, in that they can connect with the programmes, are the local festivals and information sessions on development issues that UNDP organises. And the more connected the general people feel towards programmes Disseminated through communication channels, the more involved they feel, and, concomitantly, more motivated to participate in them.

**Summing Up**

There has been overall development in the CHT since UNDP introduced its CHTDF project, and some sectors have performed better than the others. However, compared to the rest of Bangladesh, or in comparison to the development indicators of Bangladesh as a whole, CHT’s progress has not come up to par. CHT started at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the country because it was largely neglected by successive governments and left to follow its own traditions and lifestyles. Furthermore, its problems were compounded when the plain Bengalis were urged, even actively helped, to settle in the hilly areas by successive governments. It created tension between the Bengali and the indigenous hill communities, significantly contributing to a protracted insurgency that for long kept development activities in the region in the backburner of government policies. Ironically, the insurgency woke up the governments to the necessity of turning their attention to the development of the region in an effort to contain the insurgency, based on the premise that development would turn the people away from the rebellion and towards enjoying the fruits of development. But, while the insurgency has simmered down, tensions remain and deep-rooted political problems always threaten to disrupt the peace accord.

UNDP stepped in to help the government in its development efforts
and has been moderately successful. However, after having taking into consideration that the government’s unsatisfactory efforts in politically implementing the peace accord to the indigenous peoples’ satisfaction has hampered UNDP’s project, it still has to be said that UNDP itself has to shoulder part of the blame. Specifically, its development Communication efforts, as evidenced from its own literature and Action Fiche for Bangladesh’s findings, have been rather unsatisfactory, and have had less positive input than they could have had. From its own literature, it appears that comprehensive development communication, which should have been a key feature of the project from the very outset, was included almost as an afterthought, and then applied piecemeal. There seems to be an inordinate amount of internal communication to seemingly reassure staff members and donor agencies that things were moving in the right direction, rather than spending more time and energy on communication with the target population to motivate them on how to actively and productively participate in the various features of their own development process. Finally, it might be a good idea to communicate the root problem hampering development in the region to the key authorities. UNDP might be more productive if it impresses on the government that without gaining the confidence of the indigenous population regarding its sincerity in implementing the peace accord, its, along with UNDP’s, development efforts would only limp forward. With regard to CHT, political considerations override efficient development communication in helping bringing about comprehensive development of the region.

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Ms Safina Ilyas, MSS candidate in the department of Media and Communication, IUB, in gathering material for the paper.

Endnotes


3. ibid. There has been a longstanding debate regarding whether sustained economic growth translates into development without factoring in equitable distribution of income, but it distinctly falls outside the purview of this study. However, even though it stands firmly by its conviction that sustained growth is the prime engine of development, WB now acknowledges that it has to be tempered by equity.
4. ibid.
5. ibid. p.ii.

7. 2011 *Human Development Report*, UNDP.
8. ibid.
10. ibid.
11. HDR 2011, op. cit.
12. op. cit.
14. ibid. p. xiii. The MDGs identified by the sub-national institutions are given on p. 1 of the Report.
15. ibid. p. xii.
19. ibid, p.23.
20. ibid, p. 38.

21. A fairly extensive literature exists on CHT. A voluminous comprehensive account covering topics like profiles of the ethnic communities, their customs, tradition, and culture, and the multifarious problems they face may be found in *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, Philip Gain, ed., Dhaka: SEHD, 2011. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*, Amena Mohsin, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003, studies the processes and politics of conflict and peace-building in CHT, which was embroiled in a protracted insurgency with the government of Bangladesh from the mid-1970s, until a peace accord was signed between the two parties on 2 December 1997. The situation since then has somewhat calmed down with occasional flare-ups, but the armed uprising was a major factor in hindering the region’s overall development.

24. ibid.


26. ibid. The reference to peace-building efforts has its antecedents in the long-drawn-out armed conflict between the CHT insurgents made up of the indigenous people of the region and the government of Bangladesh referred to earlier. That conflict, which continues to flare up intermittently, often between factions of the CHT population, thereby contributing to an uneasy peace obtaining in the region, is outside the scope of this study. Amena Mohsin’s *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, op. cit., note 21, provides a fairly Comprehensive account of the conflict and the peace accord. Her assessment in 2003 of the post-accord situation still largely holds as 2011 draws to a close: “The situation in the CHT is in flux and has acquired complex dimensions following the accord, with one faction of the Hill people committed to pursuing full autonomy. The state’s slow pace of implementing the accord has only exacerbated the situation” (p. 13).

27. The donor agencies that have assisted UNDP in implementing the CHTDF project since its inception are the European Union (EU), Government of Canada (CIDA), Government of Denmark (DANIDA), the Government of Australia (AusAID), USA (USAID), Norway, and the Embassy of Japan. The overall budget earmarked for the project is US $ 160 million.


30. ibid.


33. ibid., p. 177.

34. ibid.

35. ibid., p. 178.

36. ibid.

37. ibid.

38. ibid., p. 172.

39. ibid., p. 177.


G M Shahidul Alam studied at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He obtained his PhD from Boston University, USA. He is currently Head of the Media and Communication department, Independent University, Bangladesh.