

# Television as a Medium of Information for Rural Development in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Dinajpur District

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## Abstract

*The scarcity of information on communication channels is a great threat for rural development where majority of the people are illiterate thus, do not know how to access information themselves. This study was undertaken to identify the use of television among rural communities of Bangladesh which was conducted in three villages of Dinajpur district, Bangladesh. The questionnaire included information on various information needs of the people under study, different sources of information and peoples' awareness regarding informative TV shows. The study block included 150 households where more than 50% of the respondents had TV with cable connections. The main source of information as per data analysis was radio (83.33%), cell phone(66%); newspaper (64%) and personal contact (68%) followed by television (62%). Only 19% and 18% dwellers in the study area were aware about different health and agricultural programmes on television respectively. People were found unable to access information through TV due to the inconvenient schedule of the programmes having messages for rural development. So authors recommended that there should be dedicated TV channels to broadcast more and more programmes specifically for rural people at their convenient time.*

**Keywords:** Television, Information Source, Rural Community, Bangladesh

## 1. Introduction

Rural development is the precursor to overall national development in a country like Bangladesh whose most land area is characterized as rural village giving shelter to majority of its population. The rural dwellers are the producers of agricultural resources of the nations (Ifukor, 2013). Rural development aims at building the capacity of its population to control their surrounding environment which is full of natural resources, and the predominant entity that has been identified as the key issue for rural development is information. Information is any message or news, viewed or read or told verbally

which add to knowledge, awareness or understanding of some topics, or events, problems that prepares one for uncertainty of life (Ifukor, 2013). At present, as we all know, the creation of information society or knowledge based society is getting impetus among all development activities of a nation. The emergence of information and knowledge society is a significant intervention with the potential to ensure that both are very important for achieving meaningful development. The relevance of this revolution is supported by Balit (1996) who pointed out that the least expensive input for rural development is knowledge.

Television has been considered as one of the important media for information dissemination and a tool of teaching. Though technological



development has delved many gadgets to get information, television still can play effective role in disseminating information to the rural people. This is because comprising sound and sight it has gained the ability to draw the attention of too many viewers regardless of their literacy or illiteracy (Nazari, 2001). Television is acknowledged as the most important medium for communicating with the rural population of developing countries (FAO, 2001 in Nazari). Television has the potential to diffuse development information and supplement the extension effort (Rao, 1992).

Specific targets of rural development in today's Bangladesh include the rural poor, especially the more disadvantaged groups of women and children. Rural development aims at building the capacity of these target groups to control their surrounding environment accompanied by wider distribution of benefits resulting from such control. Besides entertainment TV broadcasting has long been used for the purposes of private recreation, non-commercial exchange of messages, experimentation, self-training, and news through which people can know what is happening all around the world.

This study investigates how our rural communities in Dinajpur district of Rangpur division are dependent on TV to meet their information needs. Specifically the study identifies the information needs in rural communities, determines the relevant information sources, and checks how far people are aware about the programmes dedicated for rural development. The paper concludes by recommending appropriate strategies for designing suitable TV programmes necessary for improving information accessibility in rural areas.

## 2. Literature Review

Television has the greater potential to reach grassroots people easily with development schemes, training, resource planning, national and regional capacity building, experience sharing and mass awareness initiatives. Therefore, intensive planning for the development and implementation of TV programmes should be under consideration of our government and non-government organization. But limited practical initiative and research have been taken by concern authorities for developing content of TV programmes for rural people. Thus, few literature have been found reflecting what are the limitations of TV programmes and what could be done for the development of effective TV programmes for rural development in our country. However, the concept of this study was developed reviewing related research undertaken in other countries. Ifukor (2013) mentioned television as one of the channels that is used to disseminate information among rural people. Thus he recommended that indigenous languages should be used for TV news to enable them better understand the message. Mtega (2012) studied the various information needs of rural people and the sources people access for information. His findings showed that rural people access information mainly through radio, television, newspaper etc. and the selection of information sources depends mainly depends on rural communities' level of education, income, gender, age, occupation etc. So the author suggested for rural communities' information need assessment on a regular basis and repackaging information in appropriate form suitable to meet rural people's specific requirements. The author also suggested that radio and television should have sufficient rural related programming, and it should be broadcast at appropriate times.

Nosheen et al (2010) analysed gender specific information sources for home and farm practices. The result of the study showed that for female television was the most frequently used information source where as males were mostly dependent on personal contacts to meet their information need.

### 3. Present Scenarios of Television in Bangladesh

At present 30 TV channels are operating in Bangladesh. There are two methods of television broadcasting: terrestrial television broadcasting and satellite television broadcasting. Among the 30 TV channels only two state owned TV channels: Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Sangsad TV using terrestrial television broadcasting where as another 28 TV channels, including one state owned TV channel: BTV World, are using satellite broadcasting technology. On June 2006, a treaty agreement was signed by some of the member states at the closing session of ITU's (International Telecommunication Union) Regional Radio Communication Conference (RRC, 06) for development of 'all-digital' terrestrial broadcast services for sound and television. The vision of the treaty was to establish equitable, just and people oriented information society through connecting the unconnected in underserved and remote communities by 2015. But, unfortunately Bangladesh did not sign the treaty and thus terrestrial television broadcasting is reserved for the state owned TV channels only (BTRC website)

### 4. Background of Bangladesh Television (BTV)

In 1964, television started broadcasting as a corporation, named Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV). After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, PTV was renamed as Bangladesh Television (BTV) and continued as corporation till 1972. Then BTV was given a status of a Department of the

Government under the administration control of the Ministry of Information. Being a state owned public broadcaster, BTV's administrative and financial management is under control of the government.

As a state run organization, it is accountable to the mass people of Bangladesh. It aims at the development of the lives of the people and socio-economic progress through its creative programmes. The core objective of BTV is the dissemination of information, extension of education, motivation for development activities and entertainment for all sorts of people. National and international news, documentary and development programs and various entertainment programs are aired by BTV. For international news BTV gets supports from international news agencies and broadcasters. On the other hand, BTV imports some foreign entertainment programs. However, for national news, documentaries and entertainment programs, BTV produces programs by itself. Besides, local production houses have come forward with their productions and BTV televises the programs on terms and conditions.

At present, BTV transmits 18 hours terrestrial programs from 6:00 am till mid-night including 14 news bulleting in English and Bengali daily. Besides, Chittagong sub-station air three hours & thirty minutes locally produced programmes everyday. Bangladesh has started "BTV World" satellite transmission on April 11, 2004. As a result, BTV has now reached beyond the borders. It is a separate channel of Bangladesh Television. "BTV World" transmits 24 hours Satellite programs daily. BTV has 02 program generating stations and 14 relay stations in the whole country. At present BTV has a potential coverage of about 97% of the country's population.

Relay stations are situated in the follows areas of Bangladesh: Natore, Sylhet, Khulna, Rangpur, Mymenshingh, Rangamati, Noakhali, Shatkhira, Jhenidah, Thakurgaon, B' Baria, Patuakhali, Rajshahi, Ukhia.

In the context of Bangladesh's social perspective, the organization has earned the trust of its viewers for which the producers, artists and supporting manpower deserve commendation for their coordinated efforts, creativity and sincere devotion. BTV started color Transmission in 1980. Since then the state-run media is pursuing a forward looking journey. Till 2003 through 14 relay stations, located all over the country, BTV has achieved 92 percent geographical area coverage of the country for transmitting its programmes.

### 5. Objectives

The major objective of the study is to assess the use of television as an information source among the rural people of the study area. However the specific objectives are to:

- 5.1 Identify the information needs of the people under this study
- 5.2 Measure the sources through which people access information in the study area
- 5.3 Assess peoples' dependence on TV as a source of information and whether it has any relationship with the ownership and viewership of TV
- 5.4 Examine peoples' awareness about the TV programmes that might bring about significant changes the rural society.
- 5.5 provide recommendations for the development of effective television programmes

incorporating messages for the betterment of rural life.

### 6. Research Questions

The following research questions were put:

- ❖ How much the rural dwellers are aware about and dependent on different television programmes as are reflective of rural development?
- ❖ Are the television programmes directing towards rural development?
- ❖ What is the attitude of rural dwellers towards TV programmes?

### 7. Rationale of the Study

Television is the powerhouse of the in the communication system of a nation. According to David and Richards (1996) "Communication scholars always emphasized the great potential of television in informing, educating and entertaining people." It serves individuals and society at large through its various functions. This emotionally soaked medium gets connected easily to our personalities and actions. Television is far superior to any other media because it is a moving, visible and sound medium which gives its viewers an illusion of completeness and power over humanity. By its dominant role, it touches the lives of people in various forms.

Television performs a number of functions. The primary functions of television are to disseminate information, instruction and entertainment to people. So it is necessary to identify how far television can serve the rural people in our society and what developments are imperative for TV programmes to meet informational, educational and recreational

needs of rural people. Thus the study considered to be undertaken.

**8. Research Site and Sample of the Study**

The district of Dinajpur under Rangpur division has been selected for this study. The district comprises 13 upazilas, 101 unions and 2131 villages (BSS, 2011). Under this study three upazilas were selected to represent the major communities of Dinajpur in respect of area, population as well as southern and northern part of Dinajpur. Three unions from each upazila were considered to select three villages, one from each union for the purpose of primary data collection. Random samples of 50 families from each village were selected for the final data collection. One person from every household was chosen by the family, to respond to the questionnaire. The following table presents the details of the sample. It is notable that three adjacent unions were selected from each upazila since villagers of nearby places usually have similar topography, climatic condition, culture and the influence by the other factors of the society that enable the investigator to draw rational data.

**Table 1: Research Site and Sample of the Study**

Name of Upazila	Name of Union	Name of Villages
Ghoraghat	Boaldar	Sorangari (50 respondents)
Parbatipur	Hamidpur	Baulpara (50 respondents)
Birganj	Palthapur	Palthapur (50 respondents)

**9. Data Collection Method**

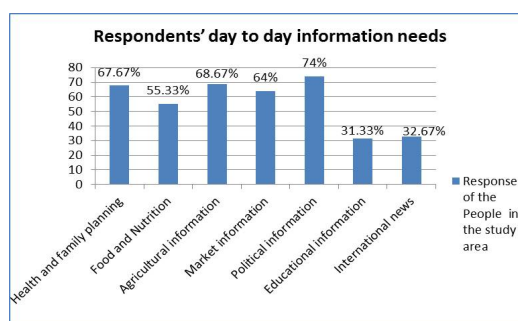
Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire and informal interviews. Questionnaire booklets in English were translated into Bangla and were used for assessing the acceptance of television by the villagers as source of information and role of television in rural development through information dissemination.

**10. Data Analysis and Findings**

Data collected through the questionnaires from 150 families of three villages belonging to three upazilas: Ghoraghat, Parbatipur, Birganj were tabulated and analyzed using MS Excel. Findings and conclusion of the study has been drawn through proper analysis and interpretation of the data.

**10.1 Information Needs of the People in the Study Area**

Each individual has specific information need which relate to the specific problem he faces and the decision he has to make. Respondents were asked about the type of information they need and responses were distributed into following categories: health and family planning, food and nutrition, agriculture, market, economics, politics, education, international affairs.



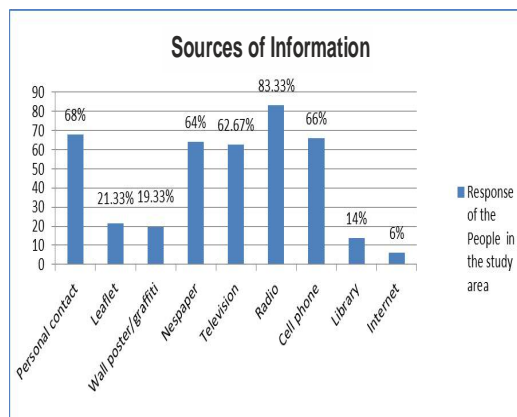
**Figure 1: Information Needs of the People in the Study Area**

### Analysis

It is clear from the figure that majority of the respondents need information on health and family planning with a representative value of 76.67% (120) which is followed by the need of information on political situation of the country where the respective value is 74% (111). However, villagers seek less information on education and international affairs for which their response rate is below 35%. The other sectors where respondents have shown much of their interest are agricultural and market information with the representative value of 68.67% and 64% respectively.

### 10.2 Sources of Information Used by People in the Study Area

Though there are several information sources, villagers are unlikely to utilize these sources to get their required information. This is because of their low education and information literacy level, lack of awareness and available spare time to use for the betterment of their life. The very common information sources on which people rely for their every day information include: radio, television, newspaper and magazines, cell phones, personal contact, leaflets, wall posters/ graffiti, libraries and the internet. Proper utilization of these sources can benefit people's success in life. So the respondents were asked about which of the information sources they prefer more to get information and their responses have been shown through the following chart.



**Figure-2: Sources of Information Used by People in the Study Area**

### Analysis

It is evident from the figure that radio has superseded all other information sources in terms of meeting villagers' information needs with a value of more than 80% while Internet as the vital sources of information worldwide has got very insignificant access by these people for information as only 6% of them use Internet to meet their needs for information. However, more than 60% villagers have shown newspaper, TV and cell phone as their important information sources. It is very alarming to note that only 14% of these villagers visit libraries for information while on an average more than 20% villagers mentioned that posters and leaflet also sometimes meet their information need. Another very important source of information is personal contact since 68% of them get information through this channel.

### 10.3 Television at Home and Television Watching Time

People watch TV for relaxation during their leisure time. Therefore if any household can avail a TV then



they can watch it at their convenient time. So the study aimed at having a statistics of TV ownership of the concern villagers and when they usually watch TV and the data received have been distributed in the following table.

**Table 2: Television at home and television watching time**

Television at Home		
Y/N	No. of Response	Percentage
Yes	76	50.67
No	74	49.33
Time of Watching Television		
Time of Watching TV	No. of Response	Percentage
Morning/Afternoon	29	19.33
Evening/Night	97	64.67
Late night	24	16

**Analysis**

The data on the above table shows that more than half of the villagers have TV at home and more than 60% of the villagers watch TV in the evening.

**10.4 Villagers Awareness About TV Programmes that Direct Toward Rural Development**

The state run TV channel, BTV and few private TV channels broadcast some programmes like drama, documentary, adult education programmes, class lectures of reputed schools and colleges of the country; programmes representing agricultural success story and advanced methods in this field and their applicability etc. Since these programmes are like everything as we practice in our life so rural people must have awareness about these programmes because these programmes have the great potential to influence rural people toward effective decision making. So villagers were asked whether they are aware about those programmes/ do they watch them regularly and their responses are like the following.

**Table 3: Villagers Awareness About TV Programmes that Direct Toward Rural Development**

Villagers Awareness About TV Programmes that Direct Toward Rural Development	Total Response	Percentage
News (general/agricultural)	92	61.33
Programmes on health and family planning	19	12.67
Programmes designed for agricultural development	18	12
Talk shows reflecting important national and international issues	54	36
Class lectures of reputed schools and colleges	28	18.67
Programmes on human right issues	20	13.33
Religious programmes	65	43.33

### Analysis

The data on the table shows that respondents are mostly aware about the news time of different TV channels and more than 60% of them watch news on the TV regularly. Besides news, significant programmes on health, agriculture and human rights have limited influence on these villagers as less than 15% of them are aware about those programmes. However, religious programmes on TV have positive impact on these people as more than 40% of them know the schedules of different religious programmes of various TV channels.

### Findings

- ❖ As a whole, the analysis shows that people in rural areas have a significant need for all types of information. However, the daily activities of the rural people and their social and economic profiles also influenced their information needs.
- ❖ It can be said that people shared much of their information through direct oral communication, as this is the cheapest source of information despite the information distortion this channel suffers from. Villagers made personal contact with agricultural extension agents, religious leaders, village governments and other influential people in their villages when they feel the need for some information in the form of advice. However the motto of this study is to see how much people are dependent on television for their information. and from the result is clear that more than 60% villagers have access to TV channels as sources of information.
- ❖ People like to watch TV at their convenient time which is usually after their daily activities.

- ❖ It can be said that there is huge gap in the process of coordination for making people aware about TV programmes. For commercial issues TV channels broadcast maximum of these programmes in the morning or afternoon which is not at all a suitable time for villagers to watch these programmes.

### 11. Recommendations

At present though several TV channels are broadcasting separate development programmes, rural people in our society somehow either unaware of them or do not get enough time to watch those programmes. Simultaneously public and private TV channels' initiatives toward developing viable programme content are not sufficient to encompass the whole variety of information needs of the rural communities. Especially private TV channels for their commercial interest are not broadcasting such programmes as would benefit the rural people. So for utmost utilization of television as a source of information the following initiatives could be helpful:

- 11.1** Frequent rural information needs assessments should be done to understand villagers' information needs and thereby sufficient rural related programmes are necessary to broadcast at appropriate times.
- 11.2** Information Ministry should take the responsibility to produce and disseminate more and more TV talks, dramas, serials and other shows at national and international TV channels for educating rural people on household, community and livelihood strategies related issues.



- 11.3** Indigenous languages should be used for radio and television news to enable rural dwellers understand the message better.
- 11.4** Popular and quality television programmes should be broadcasted on both state owned and private TV channels in order to increase the viewership of national TV channels.
- 11.5** Dedicated television channels should be there for broadcasting programmes on health and nutrition, agriculture, education, human right, local cultural heritage. The Sangsad TV that transmits the parliamentary sessions for four times in a year can be utilized for this purpose.
- 11.6** Collaboration with development partners should be made to develop quality TV programmes.
- 11.7** Information agents should study the users in order to discover and use the best acceptable method to disseminate information to their audience.
- 11.8** Functional literacy should be encouraged among rural people. This will enable them learn how to read, write and acquire information through the use of multi channels.
- 11.9** The ministry of information should focus on building network infrastructure, expanding telecommunications coverage in rural areas, and promoting information technology applications in TV programming.

## 12. Conclusion

This study highlights the existence of multiple communication channels, including TV facility in the rural villages of Dinajpur district. The most

important channels that are being commonly used to get day to day information are mass media / television, newspapers, personal contact etc. These channels can be utilized for spreading messages regarding health, education, agriculture effectively. Among all the information sources TV could be made more popular for accessing information as it has the ability to hypnotize people by telecasting programmes that touch peoples' emotion deeply. So, policy makers and programme managers should tap all these resources to educate the community, especially the rural community.

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