

Development journalism ground in Pa

The world is changing fast and the mass media even faster.

The last few years saw the mass media undergo revolutionary changes. A flood of information is flowing through this medium of communication which has reduced the world to a global village.

The mass media in Pakistan also experienced sweeping changes. The use of modern technology — computers, Internet and E-mail have completely transformed the media industry.

In terms of content, generally, politics, crime, violence, wars and diplomacy get first priority in the media.

However, since the 1960s a relatively new genre of news reporting has developed in the third world countries — development journalism. The underlying purpose of development journalism is to examine, evaluate and report social and economic projects in the wider context of national development. Development journalism came to be widely promoted when it was realised that communication skills could be effectively used to support development efforts.

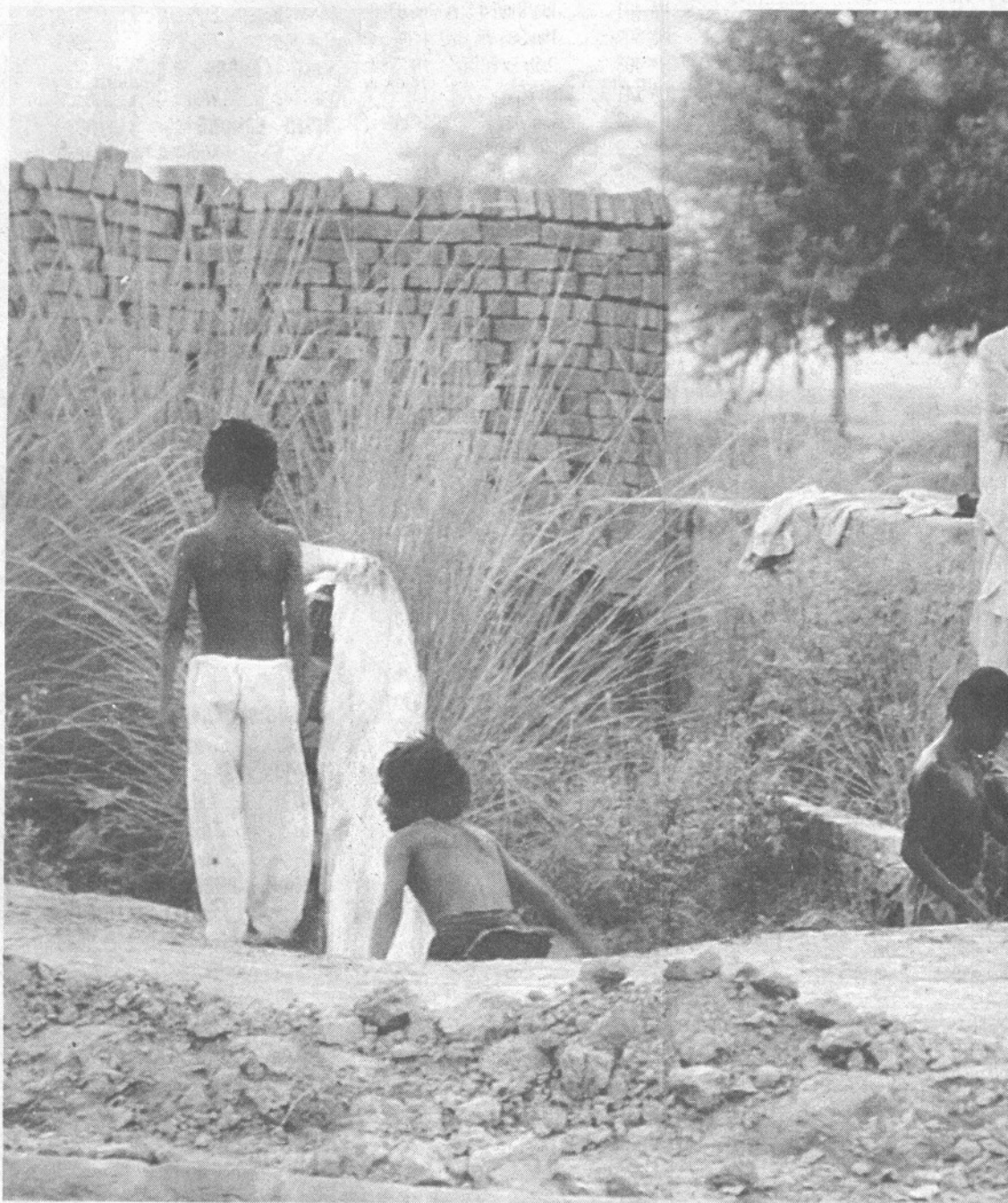
Like many third world countries, we cannot expect the state-owned electronic media in Pakistan to promote development journalism. It presents an unrealistically positive version of reality. Their news coverage is filled with achievements, real or imaginary, of whichever government is in power. Its news items consist of eulogies of government functionaries and inauguration ceremonies of development projects. Unpleasant realities that could project the government in a bad light are either downplayed or ignored altogether.

However, the print media in Pakistan, on and off, focus their reports on development stories.

But the numerous studies carried out by communication experts and researchers indicate they have yet to come up to expectations in their coverage of development and rural development news.

Researchers believe a newspaper in a developing country needs to allocate sufficient space to various problems facing that country by highlighting the plight of the people living in the rural areas.

Developing countries, like Pakistan, are facing major problems in



Development is linked to a responsible press.

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the fields of agricultural development, family planning, housing, rural and urban development, social change and national integration. A socially responsible press is supposed to turn its attention to the solution of these problems.

Many developing societies, fighting to shake off the vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness, have launched economic plans that are supposed to improve the living conditions of the weaker sections of their people — but in practice those plans and projects become tools of the elite for fulfilling their special needs. The aim of development journalism is to assess development projects in the context of the wide need of the society rather than the narrow

Research reports suggest that reporting rural development has yet to get the level of priority and importance in our media that it deserves. This is despite the fact that more than 70 per cent of our population is based in rural areas, where agriculture is the major source of income generation, contributing to more than 50 per cent of national income and investment.

Many European and Asian universities have launched development journalism related programmes in their communication departments.

The Mass Communication Department of the Punjab University is also starting an evening MA programme in Development Journalism this year.

Journalism gains Pakistan

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than two decades, feels that the MA Development Journalism programme will go a long way to meeting the needs of journalists.

"We have received an overwhelming response, as more than 2000 have applied for 50 seats," discloses Dr Shafique Jullandhry, chairman of the department.

Communication, says Dr Jullandhry, is a horizontal rather than a vertical process. Development plans in the past failed to generate the required results because these programmes were not launched, keeping in mind the needs of the masses.

"One needs to have a clear distinction between information and communication. Information is a vertical, non-interactive structure, through which a few people inform a large number of receivers. This is a 'one-way' or top-down approach in which receivers do not participate. On the other hand, communication is by definition a horizontal process, characterized by interaction. This includes an exchange of ideas, information, points of view and experiences between persons and groups. In this two-way process, the receiver is also a transmitter, or giver. In other words, in an ideal situation of communication, passiveness is in non-existent.

Experience shows that development cannot be brought about through the top-down approach, or through a central power. Some top-down projects have in fact aggravated inequities rather than reducing the imbalance. Development is not brought through orders but through participation, through an active integration of all sectors of the society.

The communication between the masses and the planners will result in the feedback which will enable the decision-makers to improve the deficits of the projects.

He said that the department has a well-equipped faculty, having enough experience of teaching communications. Some of them have been contributing research articles in internal journals on the subject of development journalism.

Dr Shafique foresees vast opportunities of jobs for the qualified persons of this discipline in the field of the print and electronic media, public relations, advertising, communication planning and practice, teaching and training and media production. One hopes this step proves a welcome initiative for the cause of development journalism in Pakistan.

the programme, Dr Shafique Jullandhry, Chairman of the Department, said that the main purpose of this programme is to groom and train journalists who will be able to handle development related stories while working in their respective fields of media.

The mass media, he explained, could act as an agent of change and help bring about the transformation of society by involving the people in the development process.

"The print media in our country is overly dominated by politics and crime. Our journalists still lack the aptitude for investigative and interpretative reporting, which is neither

