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NWICO Value Concepts and Philippine Communication Issues

Florangel R. Braid

Over a decade ago the first call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) was made. Today we ask: Are we any closer to the realization of this vision?

The NWICO movement began in the sixties when demands for a new order were expressed in various fora in several countries. In 1977, the UNESCO convened the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. Sean MacBride, president of the Commission, noted that debates became confrontational and divisive.

Still, the Commission submitted a report, which was described as a product of compromise. But it also represented the collective vision of the Commission members representing the world's ideological, political, economic and geographical spectrum.

The Commission reported that the fundamental problems in communication are linked to socio-economic and cultural structures. Inevitably, the proposal for a new communication order assumed a highly political character culminating in the withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO in 1983.

Today, nongovernment organizations, such as the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) and the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), are in a quest for a NWICO.

Defining a Vision

Broadly, NWICO expresses the desire of the Third World to restructure the present flow of information and policies which are advantageous to developed countries and the urban centers of developing countries.

MacBride believed the New Order should be defined as a process rather than a set of conditions or practices. While strategies to achieve it may differ, its goals are the same -- *justice, more equity, more information exchange, less downward diffusion of messages, more self-reliance and cultural identity, and more benefits for all mankind.*

Two major values provide the framework for NWICO, namely, the concern for *truth* and the *dignity of the human person*. Other values are: diversity and plurality of sources and outlets; cultural integrity; free and balanced flow of information; access and participation; independence and autonomy; cooperation and harmonization; creativity; empathy and social responsibility; social and political awareness; and transcendental values.

While these values have universal appeal, individual differences make them difficult to define. Thus, mere lip service was given to NWICO values. Some of them were inconsistently applied. Recognition and application of these values depend on political will and institutional policies which today still tend to be erratic and unpredictable.

The Communication Environment in the 90s

Trends indicate that some of the following issues of the 80s will continue in the next decade: centralization of communication resources, one-way flow of information, and control of media by elite groups. These problems, however, did not emerge only in the 80s. They had been there since colonial times. In fact, the issues discussed in communication policy meetings (starting 1979) are still the same issues today

Since these issues are a decade old, can we expect their resolution within the next 10 years? Since they are linked to the wider social, economic and political concerns, their resolution, therefore, depends on political will and active advocacy from the people.

The present environment is favorable for reforms. First, the 1987 Constitution, in 13 provisions, mandates the State to initiate reforms in communication. Second, legislature had demonstrated sincerity in introducing a "new" order in communication and mass media. Third, a more vigilant citizenry is ever ready to put public officials to task if they fail to meet expectations. Then there are various professional organizations which are active in advocacy -- Philippine Association of Communication Educators, Philippine Communication Society, People in Communication, Philippine Association of Media Educators and National Press Club.

Evolving a new communication order in the Philippines should, however, be a collective responsibility in line with the Constitutional mandate for greater political participation. Policy-making should not be an exclusive right of government nor of the industry. Mechanisms for participation by all

stakeholders -- peasants, workers, youth and women, cultural communities, business -- should be established to ensure that the new communication order is a product of a collective vision.

The Philippines, as shown in the statements of government and NGOs, stands in solidarity with other Third World countries in the quest for a NWICO. Even the previous regime had expressed its commitment to support NWICO, but of course, it was never translated into practice.

Constitutionalizing NWICO

Perhaps the Philippines is the only country in the world which is able to reflect NWICO values in its Constitution. The flagship provision on communication (Section 24 Article II), which says that "The State recognizes the vital role of communication and information in nation-building" is a direct response to the MacBride report's call for communication to be no longer regarded as an incidental service in the development effort. The objective is to harness all forms of communication "to make men and societies aware of their rights, harmonize unity in diversity, and foster the growth of individuals and communities." Sections 4 and 7 of Article III (Bill of Rights) ensure freedom of speech, of expression or of the press and rights of people to information on matters of public concern.

Democratization of media ownership is now a constitutional mandate for Congress to regulate or prohibit monopolies in commercial mass media. The desire to promote a *balanced, free flow of information into, out of and across the country* is also articulated together with the promotion of any *indigenous (nationalistic) communication structure*. Finally, the Report's call for all nations to formulate their own *comprehensive communication policies* is echoed in the 1987 Constitution.

These indicators in the 1987 Constitution conform with the values which NWICO stand for: *decentralization and local autonomy, people empowerment, deregulation, balanced development, and pluralism*.

With NWICO acquiring "constitutional legitimacy," it is now a matter of operationalizing NWICO values. The Constitution has set a vision in 1987. Since then, various fora have been convened on how to achieve this vision. Experience, however, has shown that visions and promises are easier to come by than action. Commitment and persistence are needed if the goals of NWICO were to be achieved.

Legislative Initiatives on NWICO

Taking their cue from the Constitution, legislators have fleshed out several of the provisions by passing many bills and resolutions on communication and information.

However, there is clearly an absence of a common framework. As a result, many of the bills are sectoral in nature. A framework is necessary since it will serve as a guide in evaluating bills. In April and May 1989, the Asian Institute of Journalism, in cooperation with the Philippines Communication Society and People in Communication, sponsored a Multisectoral Consultation Series on Communication Issues. The consultation resulted in an 18-point statement on the desired criteria for communication. The statement provides that communication policies and programs must:

1. Have a bias for the poor;
2. promote the sharing of power and decision-making (collective responsibility);
3. effect a balance between concern for administrative and regulatory issues and concern for strategic and anticipatory planning;
4. effect a balance between the needs of individuals and groups for profit, and societal requirements for development;
5. effect a balance between government regulation for the common good and self-regulation for promoting private initiative;
6. effect a balance between freedom and responsibility;
7. work towards the attainment of nationalism;
8. seek to democratize and decentralize resources and opportunities;
9. seek to provide adequate access and participation;
10. ensure that technology is affordable, appropriate and reliable;
11. ensure social responsibility in technology planning;
12. be realistic and achievable within a given time frame;
13. represent consensus of many groups;
14. be evolutionary and flexible;
15. be based on economic, social, cultural and environmental considerations;
16. recognize the ongoing North-South dialogue and international declarations on mass media and communication;
17. seek to establish a New World Information and Communication Order; and
18. lead in the building of a just and humane society and people empowerment.

That the statements reflect the philosophy of NWICO is no coincidence. Since 1980, more than a dozen communication policy meetings have recommended the restructuring of communication to correct imbalances.

Despite repeated government pronouncements on adherence to such policies as deregulation, privatization and decentralization, most bills, particularly in advertising, seek to restrict, instead of motivate or encourage. The issue of how much regulation, deregulation and self-regulation should be allowed has been much-debated. A framework defining areas for them, in-

cluding policy guidelines, was proposed (see Table 1 at the end of this chapter) at these multi-sectoral meetings.

Many of the bills are in the form of "enabling" legislation, that is, they will operationalize constitutional mandates. They seek to: give greater access to information and mass media; protect press freedom; democratize media ownership; promote nationalism in media (and advertising) content; and strengthen community communications.

Among the bills relevant to NWICO concerns are Senate Bill (SB) 352, which seeks to prohibit monopolies in the ownership and management of mass media by banning cross- and chain-ownership. The bill also seeks to Filipinize mass media. SB 417 aims to democratize ownership of sequestered broadcast stations.

The creation of a Public (or educational) Broadcasting System is provided for in several bills filed in both houses of Congress, like House Bill (HB) 1832 and SB 906. The proposed PBS will provide "alternative" programming, which will focus on education, culture, social services, public affairs, among others. It will be governed by an autonomous charter and a board which will have representation from non-government groups.

In Congress, the concept of *balance*, a NWICO value, has been given emphasis. This emphasis dovetailed with MacBride's concern on how to achieve a balance in responding to the problems of communication. The same challenge now faces our legislators as they respond to conflict. Examples are pending bills seeking to ban cigarette and liquor advertisements, limit broadcast hours allotted to advertisements, limit commercial talents to Filipinos, or broaden ownership of mass media and telecommunication.

Is there a way to resolve conflicts? The *win-win or the non-zero sum game approach* assumes that through sharing and give-and-take, a solution, which is better than a compromise, can be found. Here, everybody gains instead of one sector winning while all others lose. The concept of alternative media system will also provide a complementary channel. It will allow access to non-commercial programming as well as provide a forum for groups which are not reached by the existing system.

The concept of "process" rather than a "set of conditions" implies that NWICO values evolve over time. It means that the society will not undergo a radical restructuring of its communication system or initiate drastic changes overnight. It means that "small steps" at a time is a more meaningful approach in achieving lasting gains.

Megatrends and NWICO

A survey conducted by the Asian Institute of Journalism in 1988 revealed that various groups supported the goals of NWICO. Some 200 sectoral representatives, who were interviewed, agreed that:

- media must not only perform a watchdog function but should also support "government-initiated" development programs;
- development issues (i.e., health, education, science and technology; agriculture) should be given wider coverage;
- nationalistic themes and values must be more prominent;
- media ownership should be democratized through such schemes as cooperativism, public ownership, etc.; and
- media should be demassified within the next decade.

There is a visible emergence of a strong nationalistic fervor, manifested in the demand for a national language, Filipinization of the educational system, the growing anti-US bases sentiment, and the declaration of decade of nationalism, among others. Pressures on the communication and media groups to accentuate Filipinism is seen in such bills as SB 169 (Filipinization of the Advertising Industry), SB 1080 (limiting commercial models to Filipinos), etc.

The earlier NWICO issues primarily focused on the need to reduce the one-way flow of information (i.e., from bigger to smaller countries, from technologically-advanced to technologically-less-advanced nations, and from developed to developing countries, and nationally, from urban to rural areas). To promote a balanced information exchange, "small" countries (or the regions in each country) were urged to improve their programs by setting up local production centers, establishing program development fund, strengthening community media and exchanging information with other developing countries.

Here, lower taxes for newsprint and equipment for community media and other forms of subsidies can strengthen community newspapers and radio which today largely depend on judicial notices for advertisements or on Manila newspapers for broadcast news. This also calls for strengthening the local news agency and better networking with other Asian news agencies. More effort should be exerted in carrying out a two-way exchange in film and TV programs with other countries. It will be necessary to revive the past attempts in setting up an Asian News Network or in strengthening the Philippine News Agency in order to work towards a more effective regional cooperation.

Such exchange implies that we must continue to reduce the percentage of imported broadcast programs (TV, film, radio, print). In 1981, the ratio of local to imported TV programs was 60:40. But in November 1989 the ratio changed to 50-50. There was not only an increase in foreign programs but also in the number of local shows which have adapted formats of popular American TV programs.

An optimistic trend is the growing desire for regional cooperation such as the ASEAN and the merging of the markets of Western European countries by 1992. This trend will have positive impact in promoting

regional peace and stability. Regional sharing of information will correct the embarrassing situation where a country knows more about developments in other continents than those in his neighboring countries.

Communication in a highly centralized political system is overwhelmingly top-down and access to media is primarily confined to groups that are dominant economically, politically and culturally. This situation has reduced the public to passive receivers of information, and their views on national and local issues are seldom heard in setting policies. *Decentralization disperses political power and responsibility, just as wealth is equitably diffused.* It will put pressure on media to encourage various groups to articulate their interests and ideas. Political decentralization will require media to localize content and formats and "demassify." National media will have to give way to regional and community media. For example, a proposal to limit the transmission power of radio stations would enable the government to allocate frequencies to more operators in the region.

Decentralization and autonomy are not meant to create fragmentation but rather to strengthen national unity. As the country is divided culturally, geographically and linguistically, media plays a crucial role in promoting "unity in diversity." Media can help evolve a "lingua franca" by allowing the spontaneous integration of contributions from other local languages with the present Tagalog-based language. Unfortunately, in many instances, media often present cultural stereotypes (cultural minorities and women) often in an unfavorable light. What is seldom emphasized is the positive value of cooperation and harmony. Ethnic cultures have non-adversarial approaches in conflict resolution. We have yet to capture this value of consensus and reflect it over the national media.

The Emergence of NGOs

The emergence and empowerment of nongovernment organizations (NGOs), voluntary organizations, and cause-oriented groups is one of the more positive developments after the EDSA revolution. These groups have achieved enough power to influence political decisions and bring about social transformation. Their concerns range from breastfeeding to nuclear opposition, search and support of political prisoners and "desaparecidos," protection of consumer rights, environmental conservation and the abrogation of foreign military bases. They have linked up with NGOs in other countries which share common interests. One of the more successful groups, an ecological group, works towards *sustainable development* through judicious management of our natural and environmental resources and campaigns for resource conservation and preservation. It also promotes frugality, recycling, and "elegant" (as against wasteful) consumption.

Despite the growing influence of NGOs, their "alternative" ideas have not yet been given adequate media coverage. These groups have developed their own channels such as "underground," "alternative" and "community" media. The linkage of "big" media (urban) and "small" media is essential. It is through effective linkage that the needs and problems from below are made known to policymakers and the rest of the nation.

Global Trends

Another welcome development, particularly in Eastern Europe, is the opening up of socialist countries to democratic reforms. Many reform leaders in these countries admit the impact of images of EDSA People Power in their own political struggle. This then supports our belief that free flow of messages and images among nations can help create a supportive environment for participatory democracy.

The relationship of these political reforms to NWICO is the prospect of the State affording more rights and freedom to its citizens, particularly freedom of expression *as exemplified in Gorbachev's perestroika (reform) and glasnost (openness)*.

Ideological Breakdown

The sweeping political reforms in Eastern Europe is part of the current "ideological crisis or breakdown" and a questioning of socialism and Marxism. Even capitalism is being examined "in the search for a middle ground philosophy based on more democratic participation." A UN resolution announcing the end of the antagonistic relationship between the East and West will certainly affect the new communication order. The Cold War encouraged imbalances in information flow in the form of biased or stereotyped reporting, usually by the dominant Western media. Of course, Eastern media is equally guilty, but their sphere of influence is not as extensive as the Western press. Imbalance is shown not only in the slant (quality) of stories but also in the quality of information exchange. The end of the Cold War may result in more balanced information flow of national and international events. Greater understanding would enhance cooperation and the prospects for peace and security throughout the world.

Toward a Humanistic Communication Model

A new communication paradigm, which responds to the changes today, must reflect the ethos of Asian culture. Asian communication scholars such as Dissayanake, Jayaweera, Tehranian and Chu, to name a few, have already begun the task of evolving a new communication theory based on Asian culture, religion and philosophy. There is also a search for new perspectives

based on Taoism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. The works of religious existentialists such as Martin Buber and transactional psychologists like Jourard have contributed to greater understanding of human dialogue. Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy which emphasizes such attributes as trust, authenticity, transparency, harmony and love and focus on individual wholeness and empowerment are useful in evolving a theory of human communication.

The search for a new paradigm expresses the need for a more humane communication system which will lessen the growing dehumanization of our technological age. This "humanistic" communication model questions our primary dependence on traditional (trickle-down) theories of social change and development which dominated our thinking over two decades. This model, based on a balanced social order, has the following attributes:

1. Participatory, in the sense that it allows wider access to and use of communication facilities by many groups in society;
2. Non-exploitative, in that communication will not be used to protect and preserve the interests of the privileged;
3. Decentralized, in that it allows for growth of small media and the integration of non-traditional and folk media with new communication technology;
4. Democratized, because owners of media will come from a broad spectrum of the population. Likewise, management boards would include representatives from various groups;
5. Interactive, because it permits the bottom-up, top-down, and the horizontal and continuing two-way flow of communication and information;
6. Non-coercive, because the State will not interfere in the attainment of freedom of information. It will, however, provide policies for developing structures that will allow people to express their needs and aspirations;
7. Non-confrontational, since it promotes non-zero sum strategy for resolving conflict. Instead of the usual win-lose strategy, it encourages "win-win" and sharing; and
8. Intrapersonal emphasis, in that it seeks to deepen inner consciousness and communication with the self. This sense of wholeness will result in acts of love and sharing with others and will lead to a humanized, egalitarian and cooperative society.

NWICO in a Crisis Situation

The relevance of NWICO comes into sharp focus especially during crises like the December 1989 coup when media needed "policy guidelines." While balanced reporting is a goal, the idea that citizenship duties must

prevail over one's journalistic duties puts the journalists's code of ethics on the spot. How much respect does media owe to the government in terms of the needs of national security and constitutional democracy? The latter advocates change only through peaceful means, not through violence. Then, where does one draw the line between protecting sensitive information and limiting the free flow of information? How objective can reporters be when reporting on the whereabouts of rebel-held or government-held positions? If they stick to facts, they run the risk of being shot by either side.

From all these, it is clear that a consensus on policy guidelines for media must evolve. The consensus must take into account the lessons learned. And if the lessons had been sufficiently absorbed, they must form part of a training curriculum.

If media are afraid that government may misuse its emergency powers, the government likewise must fear misuse by media of their latent powers. Government, at least, has the excuse of having been installed by people, but who installed media in their seat of power? While it is true that media have the feel of the people's pulse, this feel must be a true feel, not one desensitized by the need for profit and the taste for power. In the final analysis, journalists must be guided by their conscience. But conscience is formed from values they have internalized and from perspectives gained from lessons in the past. Further training should provide role playing and situation-specific examples by which they can test these values. At the same time, many of the lessons and examples, particularly of conflict, which have emerged from the recent coup, must be subjected to scrutiny by a panel made up of a cross-section of society and which should be able to arrive at a consensus on the rules of the game. Areas of controversy must be viewed in the context of desire of contending parties to present the truth through balanced and comprehensive reporting.

Operationalizing NWICO Values

The media can no longer be ignored as social institutions. First of all, they are the most pervasive social forces. Secondly, they have power to create images and perceptions and are, therefore, able to even distort reality. They can be oppressive when they create disparities: gaps between the haves and the have-nots. They confer status on those they touch and they can, through subliminal strategies, as in advertising, suggest new values and direct consumer tastes. The history of mass media is replete with case studies on the effect of media on voting and in creating new types of leadership. They have also caused the rise and fall of governments.

What does this all mean? The power of communication is incontrovertible. We can recognize the direct link between a country's state of development with the state of development of its communication resources. The latter does not only mean the number and distribution of the media establish-

ments or the quality of their content or the training of their manpower. We would like to see the link between a country's social and political stability and the policies on these communication technologies.

Training a New Breed of Communicators

NWICO values can be integrated in communication training. Thus, the new breed of communicators must be:

- Oriented to projecting issues of social concern from a development perspective;
- Conscious that their role is not merely adversarial, but as partners in promoting "authentic" human development;
- Aware of local and indigenous traditions;
- Aware of the interrelationship of social, political and economic development; and
- Attuned to the social responsibilities of communication and media.

Internationalization of NWICO values and their application would promote more balanced reporting and information flow, a more accessible information system and a commitment to truth and integrity.

While it is true that values are "caught" not "taught," still there are ways by which learning systems can transmit these desired values. For example, cooperation can be encouraged through methods of learning that encourage teamwork rather than rugged individualism and highly competitive approaches. Journalists can be taught not only skills in informing, telling and reporting but also in listening, mediating and facilitating.

Local and Regional Production Centers

The new information order will require new "development messages" particularly from the region or countryside, since rural people have less access and are seldom heard over the media. These centers will, therefore, focus on packaging these issues which are relevant to the majority of our population.

Networking Among "Big" and "Small" Media

At this time when society most urgently needs to unify its fragmented sectors, the media can play a significant role by their sheer pervasiveness and power to influence. The "small" media (community radio and newspaper, folk theater, blackboard newspaper and other traditional media) can be effective facilitators in community mobilization. By linking the small

Table 1 Towards a Framework for a National Communication Policy

Media Sector	Policy Options		
	Deregulation/Self-Regulation	Regulation	Policy Guidelines
Broadcast Media	Infrastructure Development	Spectrum Allocation (franchise) Take it out of public utility category	Content/Programming – Balanced programming – Preferential taxes/tariffs – Other incentives
	Professional Standards and Ethics	Media Usage (with respect to national security) Ownership Structure – democratization – decentralization	
Print Media	Content (Coverage) – Balanced, objective, accurate reporting	Media Usage (with respect to national security)	Newsprint Allocation – Preferential – Other incentives
	Professional Standards and Ethics	Ownership – democratization – decentralization	
	Infrastructure Development		
Movies/Cinema	Professional Standards and Ethics Ownership Infrastructure Development		Content
Advertisement	Professional Standards and Ethics	Ownership and Filipinization	Content

media to the large national media, there can be a wider sharing of consciousness. The agenda of all groups will be "reconciled" to achieve a consensus towards a national agenda.

Asian Program Exchange Service

To reduce dependency on the big four Western news agencies and the Western TV networks, greater effort toward establishing exchange within Asia should be undertaken.

Summary

NWICO argues for a rationalization of the communication system in the form of a comprehensive policy framework. This framework, described as liberal and communitarian, will have these attributes:

1. All groups (including the marginalized) in a pluralistic society will have access to communication resources.
2. It ensures multi-level programming and alternative structures to enable various groups to have access to it. The commercial system will allow alternatives, like a public broadcasting system and community media catering to special interest groups, to co-exist. Because the alternative systems cannot compete in the marketplace, the government, through policies and incentives, can help them to thrive.
3. It responds to people's needs for survival. Information on agriculture, industry, environment, consumer and other populist issues are given adequate coverage.
4. The concept implies broad ownership of the communication resources. In short, no single individual or institution owns the resources.
5. It is not equivalent to free enterprise or "laissez faire" where ownership is left to the marketplace or to those who can afford to own the resources.
6. It rationalizes the ownership and resources will be distributed according to public interest. Certainly, public interest will not be served when there are too many newspapers, television stations and radio stations competing for small audiences. Such a situation results in cutthroat competition in which media are forced to cater to what they perceive as popular tastes. Cutthroat competition can, in turn, result in sensationalism, inaccurate reporting, and rumor-mongering in media's effort to gain audiences.
7. It encourages cooperative ownership of media and mechanisms for broadening ownership, like public stocks, social investments, etc.

8. It professionalizes communicators, upgrading their knowledge and skills, as well as inculcating in them attitudes and values of the new world information and communication order.
9. It orients programming and news values for cultural and national identity.
10. It is anticipatory. It ensures democratization, access and participation, despite the inroads of new technology that tends to centralize power in the hands of a few. Technology planning and evaluation will continually be undertaken to assess "cultural fit" and economic feasibility of technology.

NWICO values are indeed put to the test during these times as our society, including the communicators, search for structural changes that will ensure the survival of our nation.