

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS
OF SATELLITE COMMUNICATION IN INDONESIA:
Part I (Pre-Television Survey)

By

Alfian, Research Associate

LEKNAS-LIPI, Jakarta

The Sixth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
San Francisco, November 25-27, 1977

This is only a very brief summary of the preliminary findings of the first part/stage of a longitudinal research project on "The Social and Cultural Impact of Satellite Communication in Indonesia". This first part of the research was carried out from April 1976 up to March 1977, that is, before the introduction of television via satellite to the rural population. The actual pre-television survey was carried out from the middle of November up to mid December 1976.

In July 1976 the first Indonesian satellite, bought from America, was launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida. It marked a revolutionary jump in her communication system. Being aware of this jump and recognizing its various implications, the Ministry of Information asked our research institute (LEKNAS-LIPI) to conduct a longitudinal research on the social and cultural aspects of this satellite communication - notably television. I was asked by the director of LEKNAS-LIPI to head this research project. On the scientific side we receive assistance and cooperation from the East-West Communication Institute in Honolulu. Needless to say, the main job, such as the pre-television survey, was and will be carried out by our research institute.

It has been the intention of the Indonesian government to use the satellite for, among other things, television so that it will reach all the people. However, since Indonesia is so large a country, it cannot be done at one time. The first step taken was to make sure that it will reach all of the 27 provinces, and that was done by building around 40 ground/relay stations all over the archipelago. Each relay station would be able to beam television

programs to the population living within its radius of 80 kilometers. Such a station is usually situated near the capital city of the province. However, in the island of Java where two-thirds of the people live, now television has more or less reached every corner. In the other islands, some much larger than Java, there are still (and probably for a few years to come) wide areas which have not been penetrated by television.

Anyhow, the satellite has indeed made it possible for television to reach a significant part of the rural population. In the next few years it will probably reach all of them. So, the main concern now is about the social and cultural impact of television in the rural areas. Consequently, it also becomes the logical focus of this research project. (Needless to say, we have also been conducting, for comparative purposes, research on the influence of television in the urban areas.)

What we would like to learn through this research is whether television will have a significant influence on the following matters:

- the process of national integration (or negatively, national disintegration)
- changes in the consumption patterns
- the process of development as can be identified through the various specific development programs/projects such as in
 - education
 - health and family planning
 - agriculture
 - etc.

- changes in religious and traditional values
- changes in the communication systems

When this research project came into being in April 1976, television had not yet reached the villages we designated to study. This gave us a unique situation/opportunity to study them before that type of communication penetrated them. We also learned that some of the villages would be reached by television this year (1977), and some would not for the next few years (4-5 years). This also gave us another unique opportunity to make a comparative study of the two types of villages so that we would be able to know a more precise influence/impact of television in the rural areas of Indonesia. The first type of villages (getting television this year) we categorize as the target villages, while the second type (not getting television until 4 or 5 years from now) we categorize as the controlled villages.

Since Indonesia is so large we could not carry out our research/survey in all of the 27 provinces. Arbitrarily, for the first stage we selected 5 provinces, namely Aceh (northern tip of Sumatra), Bali, West Kalimantan (Borneo), South Sulawesi (Celebes), and North Sulawesi. Each of the provinces selected has its own particular background (historically, economically and culturally) so that they represent a variety of Indonesia's subcultures. (For this year or the second stage of our research, we are including two additional provinces - West and East Java.) We did not include some of the provinces in Java in our first year partly because we know that television will reach all of the island this year, so no comparative study between the two types of villages could be carried out.

Since this research project is a longitudinal one, we have decided to start it by doing the pre-television survey (as our first step) in

the five provinces selected. This survey was intended to collect the baseline data and for that an extensive (elaborate) questionnaire was designed, consisting of 76 questions. The survey was carried out in a cluster of villages (again arbitrarily selected) in each of the five provinces. Each province got 450 of the total sample (2250), 300 for the target villages (consisting of 3-4 villages) and 150 for the controlled villages (consisting of 2-3 villages). The actual survey was done from mid November up to mid December 1976.

Some of the preliminary findings of this pre-television survey are briefly given below. Socially and economically speaking, the Acehnese (strongly Muslim) and the Balinese (Hindus) were found to be the least developed, while the Minahasans in North Sulawesi (strongly Christian/Protestant) and the mixed group (Chinese and Malay) in West Kalimantan were far better off. The Buginese (another Muslim area) in South Sulawesi were situated between the two poles. The same was also (more or less) true with regard to their educational backgrounds. The apparent difference can be partly explained through their historical and cultural backgrounds. Aceh and Bali were two areas where western influence was minimum. The Dutch were successful in conquering them much later than North Sulawesi and other areas. In North Sulawesi, Western/secular education was widespread among the population, partly because of the missionary works.

Differences in education, social or economic conditions were also followed by differences in their systems of communication. In Aceh and Bali the role of traditional communication channels (such as religious/community leaders and friends/neighbors) was the most important, while in North Sulawesi and South Sulawesi modern mass media (radio and news papers) took that position. An interesting thing

is the fact that the Chinese community in West Kalimantan also seemed to rely heavily on traditional communication channels, notably friends/neighbors.

The situation was considerably changed when we asked them about where they received key information on 8 specific development programs/projects. Bali, South Sulawesi and North Sulawesi relied more on the government officials, The Acehnese relied more or less equally on traditional channels and government officials. The Chinese community in West Kalimantan often relied more heavily on traditional channels.

Several questions were asked to learn about the process of national integration. One question was about the ability to communicate in the national language. The majority of them answered yes. This seemed to confirm that the role of the national language in Indonesia is positive for national integration. But their knowledge of other ethnic cultures seemed to be less encouraging. Significant variety in the types of movies they preferred also seemed to indicate relatively strong primordial attachments. The Chinese community in West Kalimantan, for example, strongly preferred Mandarin movies, while the Malays liked Indonesian films.

Another interesting finding is about their religious and traditional values. We found that there was only very slight difference with regard to their strong attachment to these. The Acehnese and the Balinese, especially, seemed to cling to their religions and traditions very closely. This can be partly explained by their relatively poorer conditions - educationally, economically and socially.

In conclusion, cultural differences seemed to be strengthened by the apparent differences in education, social and economic condition.

The five provinces were not only culturally different from each other, but were also dissimilar in many other ways - especially in their nature of development. This, then, poses the problem of communication policy, that is, whether to have a uniform/centralized policy or one which would allow variation in accordance with the different conditions of development of the various provinces or regions.

What I have written here is only a small segment of the findings of our pre-television survey originating from my oral presentation before Committee II-A of the Sixth ICUS Conference on November 25, 1977.