**Speech by Sh. Dipok Kumar Barthakur, Vice-Chairman, State Innovation & Transformation Aayog (SITA), Assam**

**Fr. (Dr.) Stephen Mavely, Vice Chancellor, Assam Don Bosco University**

**Professor Emeritus, David Mould, School of Media Arts & Studies, Ohio University, USA**

**Dr. Tushar Rane, Chief, UNICEF Assam Field Office**

**Shri Siddartha Shrestha, Chief, Communication for Development, UNICEF India**

**Faculties, Students and other participants present today on the occasion**

It gives me immense pleasure to be here today at the Conference on -**Social and Behaviour Change Communication for North Eastern Region** being organized by Assam Don Bosco University in partnership with the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University and UNICEF. On behalf of State innovation & Transformation Aayog and Government of Assam I congratulate the organisers for their efforts to bring together academicians, policy makers, members from the development sector, Government sector, civil society and students

to a common platform to discuss and deliberate on the concepts, models, approaches, theories and strategies in the field of Social and Behaviour Change Communication and share and learn from each other’s experiences and practice.

The emerging trends in the development trajectory have aroused interest among professionals, practitioners, development partners and academia to make development policies and strategies - effective and cater to people’ needs. In the course of the years the development discourse has been revisited many a times and what emerged was that “Development could no longer be confined only to global development organizations but development had to be brought down to the national, regional and local level and more importantly it had to be brought down to the level of the people i.e. make it people centric.

Although the economic dimension of development is grounded, yet when we look at *communication for development* it is fundamentally a social process that involves people in their development and guarantees the rights of the most affected. Looking at it from a rights’ perspective, I would say that it is not the privilege of a few but the right of all to explore options and identify what is

best for them. This would mean overcoming stereotype thinking and promote better understanding of diversity and plurality. This is important because the entire development initiative and process should not lead to further exploitation.

Well, there is no universal formula of addressing all situations - and communication for development shall be based on responding and adapting to the social, political, cultural and economic context, so to say - the framework of multiplicity would be best suited.

Social and Behaviour Change Communication approach (SBCC) to development is a shift from media to people and from product to the process i.e. involving people in the process leading to change i.e. people must be at the centre of the discussions, debates, choices and decisions making. Early incorporation of participation allows the use of all available knowledge and perspectives in a cross-cutting investigation and analysis of the situation, minimizing both political and technical risks and, most important, enhancing projects planning and results. It entails – listening, facilitating mutual understanding and sharing knowledge among stakeholders, assessing and uncovering risk, exploring options and opportunities, building trust, facilitating the experience and perception of the stakeholders,

empowering and assisting them to design effective strategies grounded on empirical research.

It is heartening to know that UNICEF is a major player in this region in addressing development concerns by bringing about change in peoples’ attitude, beliefs, norms and behaviour through SBCC. A positive step is that institutions of higher education like - Assam Don Bosco University and Tezpur University are also getting into it and are moving towards strengthening communities and building a healthy society that is the key to development.

Attaining desired health, education, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, gender equality and protection are vital indicators of development and thus it is crucial that we create an environment where communication insist on behaviour change programs that aims at increasing knowledge, stimulating dialogue, promoting attitude change, reducing stigma, improve skills etc. SBCC attempts to persuade the affected group to engage in certain behaviour through accessing information. Intervention measures to change behaviours in the affected group are an area of concern and must be fully supported by both the government and non-governmental organizations.

In the North East -health, education, sanitation, nutrition and protection concerns are of utmost importance and I am happy that UNICEF along with its partners are being able to make necessary and timely interventions. Universities going beyond their boundaries and partnering with development agencies for bringing about change is commendable. Assam Don Bosco University is committed towards creating socially relevant courses and conducting researches that impact societal development - which is in alignment with its vision. Tezpur University also has made their contribution in this field. I would like to wish both - Assam Don Bosco University and Tezpur University the best for coming forward and directing its courses towards social change and development. Change is not brought about in isolation, but only with the concerted efforts and involvement by all concerned.

I wish the organizers and the participants a very enriching and engaging sessions in these days ahead.

Thank you.