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PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

OF

M. PUTHUR RURAL EXPANSION PROJECT

OF

NATIONAL Y.W.C.A.

25PP

THOTTIYAM, TIRUCHIRAPALLI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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INTRODUCTION

This is a brief report on the outcome of the Participatory Evaluation of "M.Puthur Rural Expansion Project" of National Y.W.C.A. in Block Thottiyam, Tiruchirapalli District, Tamilnadu. This report contains salient findings and proposals for future actions based on information collected and discussions jointly made by the Project staff and the PRIA representative. Meetings were held in all the villages as part of the evaluation and the project staff and animators wrote down their comments and suggestions for future activities. The facilitator also met some of the active members of the Tiruchi YWCA, attended village meetings and met some government officials.

The initiative for this evaluation was taken by YWCA national office. In consultation with them, this evaluation exercise was conducted with the following broad purposes:

a) How to enhance local people's involvement and control over project activities such that it becomes self-reliant ?

b) How to reduce involvement of national YWCA ?

c) How to increase the involvement of local YWCA ?

BACKGROUND

This project had its origin in 1977 when there was a severe cyclonic storm and flood which caused widespread damage. The YWCA of India was among the voluntary organisations that came forward to assist the government in rehabilitation of the vic-

tims. This project started in December 1977.

M. Puthur care colony was a new settlement to rehabilitate some of the affected people and the YWCA decided to work on a long term basis with this community. The YWCA's thrust was to promote developmental activities as a long run process with people's involvement, rather than to provide one time relief.

An evaluation of the work in Care Colony was held in September/October 1981. On this basis, YWCA of India decided to expand its programme to the nearby villages. On the basis of a survey, 8 villages were selected for the expansion programme. Later one nearby village was also included in the activities. A mid-term evaluation of the project was done in the first half of 1984 and a follow-up meeting further clarified the objectives and the work.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

1. To assist people in assessing their needs, strengths and resources.

2. To build up local leadership -- through the formation of village groups and people's social action committees to address community needs through various programmes (Education and Health) and bring improvement in education, health, etc.

3. To train villagers to utilise their skills to their utmost, to assist them in mobilising services and resources available, and improve their employment situation.

4. To assist in bringing about improvement in the status of women.

KEY FINDINGS

In this section, the major findings of this evaluation exercise are being described:

1. Adult Education programme seems to have made a significant contribution for the creation of a local leadership and village based organisation. From the very beginning, the programme had an opportunity to create a series of adult education centres both for men and women separately. These centres became the starting point for bringing people together in the village and initiating special village level activities (sport competition, special day celebrations, etc.).

   Though the project has been working in 10 villages, the programme was started in Care colony. Overall, 12 adult education centres are being run (see Chart). As can be seen from the chart, a large majority of the learners have been regular. This percentage of regular learners is better than other adult education programmes in the country.

   About 25% of the learners became drop-outs of the programme. The major reason for drop-out seems to be individuals disenchantment due to lack of economic programmes.

A very important aspect of this is that drop-out by women is less than men. Women seem to have used adult education significantly more than men.

Post-literacy programmes are now being run seems to lack ~~of~~ vision of the next steps. Several ways to strengthen this may be necessary.

2. Initial steps for Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs have been made

Of the nine villages where the project has been functioning, Mahila Mandals have been constituted in and Youth clubs in 8 of them. On the whole, the project seems to have taken importa first steps in constituting these local groups. However, as detailed records of these groups show (see box), they have not yet reached the stage to be able to function entirely on their own. In some cases (like Bharathipuram and Gundumanipatti) th efforts are very recent; therefore, proper assessment of the capability of these villages based organisations is somewhat premature. However, in groups like Maraichipatti and Thalaima patti which have been in existence for more than 3 years, the growth in strength of these Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs lea much to be desired. It appears that it is not a case of lack motivation and effort on the part of the animators and field workers; it seems to be so largely because an understanding o what is meant by strong Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs is we among the programme staff. Therefore, they are unable to spe fically work towards enhancing the strength of these groups w a long term vision of making them capable of running these programmes on their own.

Status of Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs

1. Thattiyapatti Village (M. Puthur Panchayat)

Mahila Mandal is weak; though in existence since September 1982, having a good adult education programme and several economic development activities, sustained and collective initiative from the women has been lacking; needs attention regarding group-building.

Youth Club started in late 1983 through the adult education centre; is good and has membership from all castes; a new youth club has emerged in the last couple of years which represents a more cohesive leadership; this group can be effectively supported for future strength; they can soon work on their own, dealing with the government officials.

2. Koondrakkampatti (Natham Panchayat)

Mahila Mandal formed in late 1982, mostly harijans; is no longer active due to lack of initiative and group process; several activities were undertaken, but without strengthening local leadership.

Youth Club is very active and comprises of only harizans; started in later 1982; has undertaken several activities (like petitioning for drinking water, electricity, etc.) and made their own contributions(like for sports materials); can be strengthened through a more intensive group-building process.

7. Maraichipatti (Elurapatti Panchayat)

Mahila Mandal started in late 1983; is functioning well but has not yet demonstrated sufficiently active initiative of their own; can be strengthened through focused support.

Youth Club is practically non-existent; past efforts have not succeeded.

8. Thalaimalaipatti (Elurpatti Panchayat)

Mahila Mandal started in late 1983; is now functioning at an average level; several economic programmes have been undertaken and potential for strong collective functioning has been demonstrated; can be strengthened through further support.

Youth Club started in late 1983 is functioning quite well, it h taken up several issues at its own collective initiative (like water) and is also successful in them; has an effective leadership; can be encouraged to take up most of its responsibilities

9. Tholurpatti (Tholurpatti Panchayat)

Mahila Mandal sta-rted in late 1982, it is not very active ri now, though it showed several initiatives in its early phases; group building process has been weak and hence sustained colle initiative is absent.

Youth Club started about the same time is active; have approa various government officials for several issues fa-ced by the village (street light, leakage in pipeline, etc); can be encou aged and supported to take greater responsibility for itself.

3. <u>Local level leadership and initiative has been developed and supported</u>

By and large, project staff understand the importance of catalysing local action, instead of doing the programme themselves. This seems to have been clear after the 1984 mid-term review. Animators themselves represent the first cadre of local leadership. The self-assessment of their group as well as tho made the project staff, demonstrate the significant enhancement in their self-confidence, understanding of their work as well as skills in providing leadership to their villages.

The second category of leadership has been created to some exter among Mahila Mandals and Youth Club; they have been able to take several initiatives on their own both inside the context of their village as well as across villages. The following example is an interesti illustration of this process.

"All India Women's Literacy Day was celebrated on October 2. The animators were informed at the September meeting and encour aged to celebrate the occasion in this village. They said YW must meet all expenses. We declined and said that if they fel the occasion was significant, they could make efforts to mobi the resources for it. In four of the ten villages (Natham, Thottiapatti, Thalamalaipatti, Bharathipuram) this day was celebrated with public meeting, elocution contest, songs, and sports for learners. The best learners were given prizes ....

A variety of economic programmes have also been initiated and several members of Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs have obtained loans from the government departments and programmes. It is useful to know that animators and field workers have regularly encouraged people to take initiative to influence the governmen functionaries and programmes in order to obtain loans and other benefits. They have been able to acquire loans for mat-weaving chappal making, carpentry, tailoring, cycle shop, coir rope mak milch animals, etc.

However, the process of sanctioning of loans from the governmer seems to have been frustrating and delaying; as a result peopl expect loans from YWCA, Many local people give up their attem when faced with these delays; many others demand a greater rol of YWCA in securing loans. Howsoever difficult and frustratin this process may be, it seems that animators and field workers are pursuing it with consistency, a desirable effort.

4. <u>On the whole, the project staff have functioned as an effectiv team.</u> The project has clearly contributed to the development skills and capacity of field staff; as mentioned earlier, anin tors have become a capable set of leaders in their villages.

An interesting recent development is the emergence of animato: association of the project. While the dynamics of this associa is not very clear even in the minds of the animators themselv it appears that employer-employee relationship did exist in t begining. The animators felt that they are paid much less in

comparison to the project staff. The local nature of animators and outside nature of project staff further added to this differentiation.

However, there is no cause for concern if the emergence of this association is seen in positive terms. They meet regularly on their own and have also taken initiatives in several ways(e.g., broadcasting a drama on local radio); as potential young leade of the village, they can be encouraged to individually and coll ectively play this role much more creatively and effectively. fact, they from the key basis for the withdrawal of YWCA and co nuation of the programme by local villagers.

While some animators do look on their work only as a job, this is not wide-spread. Given the positive orientation to their individual and collective potential, efforts to harness their energy need to be made more clearly.

The project staff is a five person team. Historically, communication in this team has not been the best. Yet, after the m term review, several efforts have been made to improve this. Monthly meetings for review and planning have been regularly held and found extremely useful. This has contributed signifi tly to the team functioning.

One of the difficulties appears to be that each field staff lo at his or her area as an end, and suffers from this narrow vis As a result, the entire project and its programme does not be focus of their concern. For example, a staff member trained :

communication did not make sufficient efforts to train others in the same skill.

A major irritant seems to be the location of the project officer at Trichy. This is not only viewed as unfair location for the project officer by other staff, but this has also hindered the quality of support to the staff in the field. This issue has occurred in the past as well and needs to be resolved once and forever. It appears that the project officer should stay in the project area; this can boost the work of other staff as well as strengthen their hands in dealing with various government functionaries and programmes.

SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE ACTIONS

Some initial suggestions for future action are contained in this section :

1. It seems to us that the initiatives taken so far in building Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs need to be consolidated by acquring a conceptual framework as to what it means to build strong village based groups. While the project staff and animators hav some rudimentary ideas of this, they need to be urgently oriente to be urgently able to understand the process of group functi ning and interventions needed to strengthen them. For example, conflict among leaders of a group is a common phenomenon of man groups; the animators need to learn how to analyse this conflic and how to intervene to maintain unity and collective leadershi

in the group.

Having developed an understanding of what is a group, how it functions, how it can be developed and how can we intervene, a detailed exercise in respect of each of these groups needs to be done. This exercise should highlight the steps to be take in order to strengthen those groups with a clearer time-bound programme. It is also possible to decide that some groups can be encouraged to become more independent in functioning on thei own within the period of next few months. This seems certainly possible for some groups, for example for the Youth Club of Thattiyapatti and Mahila Mandal of Natham.

It is also possible that some groups never reach the stage may of operating on their own because of the history of their past experiences. If a group working for the last 4 years has not moved much in this direction, it can be decided to phase out su groups. However, such plans need to be carefully made and sudd dropping (like in case of Care Colony) is not desirable.

It is in this context that some Mahila Mandals and Youth Mandal Clubs may be encouraged to register themselves in order to acqu a legal status and thus be able to attract government programme and resources directly. However, premature registration can a be problematic in this respect. It is also in this context t the idea of some Mahila Mandals becoming associate members of Trichy YWCA sounds a useful one.

2. Despite the success of adult education programme so far, it is important to decide the future vision for this programme. In most cases, post-literacy programmes are being conducted. The question is what is the next step ? Where do we go from here ? It seems that the important function of bringing people together has been achieved by the centres. Literacy and post-literacy should be viewed in strengthening of Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs. This programme should not be run on its own and ca become a vehicle in the hands of the village based groups.

There is also a need to shift the content and methodology of thi programme towards greater socio-economic and political conscien zation with the use of folk methods like songs, drama etc. In a sense, this programme should gradually become a programme of Ma Mandals and Youth Clubs, and not of YWCA.

3. The proposed health programme also needs to be viewed in this context. If we want a strong Mahila Mandal and Youth Club capa of their own development, then we have to introduce health prog gramme with their active involvement and selection of village health workers to be trained as part of this programme can also done in consultation with these village groups. The strategy health programme should be to make it a part of the activities Mahila Mandals and Youth Clubs and not some ~~the~~ separate activ In fact, this programme can be an intervention in bringing add tional membership and further strengthening these village base groups.

The health programme can also look at the existing health practices of the people and thereby encourage them to be concerned more about preventive care, by modifying and improving upon their existing health practices. Such a thrust will make the women in the village as key factors in the success of this programmes.

4. The development of local level leadership and village based groups can be futher strengthened through a systematic training programme. In fact, intensive training over the next 18 months could strengthen the local animators and other leaders of these groups to an extent that they can then manage their own programm

The training is needed both for the leadership as well as collec group of women and youth. Specific training on group building can strengthen group functioning.

Similarly, animators need to be specifically helped in acquirin skills to work in a manner that can build local organisations. Besides, wider perspective on the future of their work needs to be developed among them. Besides intensive training, an exposu to other similar efforts in Tamilnadu and nearby areas through field visits can substantially enhance their orientation and capacity.

5. The existing project organization and staff seem adequate to m this activity. The project leadership can be strengthened and made more effective if project officer stays in the project ar

and looks upon her role essentially to train and develop other staff and animators.

There may be a need to review, depending on the resources and future plans of the YWCA, the salary and benefits of various staff members. The fact that one of the staff members gets regular salary and benefits is an issue of concern in the team.

6. The issue of greater involvement of local YWCA is a matter of discussion between the National YWCA and its local chapter. However, it is our sense that greater involvement of Trichy YWCA in the project is desirable. This view has also been expressed by project staff. It is possible to look at the book binding/note-book making programme and health programme as possible events to start a greater involvement of local YWCA. Perhaps a meeting of the project staff, local YWCA and nationa YWCA can help in this.

For the national YWCA, this project was started in an experimer fashion. Therefore, insights and experiences gained from this project should be useful in supporting similar activity in oth local YWCAs in the country. That will be a major contribution this project.