

Development Training of Marginal Farmers in India

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Development training of marginal farmers in India

RAJESH TANDON*

Introduction

THE last three decades have been characterised by the search for strategies of development in all parts of the world. Various theories and models of development have been propounded; various programmes and projects of development have been attempted. In the developing countries, search for developmental approaches has become more intense. Both the developed as well as the developing countries are engaged in large scale experimentation in this direction. To the extent that bulk of the developing countries are still, by and large, rural societies, most of the resources have flown into the area of rural development.

There is a large body of mounting evidence to suggest that these developmental efforts have met with limited success. A central element that has emerged from this experience is the need to focus upon the individual development in a micro setting as a pre-condition for triggering macro-development. It has become increasingly evident that developmental strate-

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gies need to focus upon creating and enhancing pressures from below. More and more, the knowledge, skills and organisation at grassroot level are being recognised as critical ingredients in developmental process. This document is an attempt to describe, in detail, a method of intervening in these critical ingredients. It is in this context that it presents a case study of developmental training of a group of marginal farmers in a part of India.

Principles of Training

It has been argued that the developmental efforts have to focus upon creation of awareness, provision of knowledge, building of skills as well as changing feelings and catalysing actions. For a group of people who are expected to participate in a developmental process, the above mentioned elements could be considered as the primary focus for a training intervention. For such a group, therefore, the following are some basic elements in the areas of awareness, knowledge, skills, actions and feelings:

- (1) Awareness of:
 - (a) The needs and interests.
 - (b) Their present reality — its historical roots; social, cultural, political and economic dynamics of the present situations.
 - (c) The dynamics of conflicts of interest within the society and mechanisms by which these get expressed.
 - (d) The need for mobilisation and organisation for collective action in common interest.
- (2) Knowledge about:
 - (a) The legal rights and their ramifications.
 - (b) The duties and obligations of those engaged in providing service; the procedures of service delivery.
 - (c) The individuals in the government and political sectors who could be approached for information, complaint, suggestion or help.
 - (d) The process of law and its implementation.
- (3) Skills in:
 - (a) Collecting, processing and disseminating relevant information.
 - (b) Planning collective actions.
 - (c) Influencing others.
 - (d) Mobilising and organising people.
- (4) Actions which demonstrate:
 - (a) Initiative.
 - (b) Collective efforts.
 - (c) Planning and strategising
 - (d) Impact.

(5) Feeling a sense of:

- (a) Confidence about ability to act in common interest.
- (b) Empowerment.
- (c) Satisfaction with past achievements.
- (d) Optimism to influence the future.

The above mentioned elements constitute the range of foci in training of marginal farmers in India. This combination of elements need to be dealt with in any developmental training.

In order to derive the principles on which such a training could be designed, three existing intervention approaches were considered. These are consciousness-raising, experiential learning and community activism approaches. Both in theory and practice, all these three approaches are well developed. They have been used in different countries with different groups of people. Without going into the details of the theoretical under-pinnings of these approaches, the following are some of the key principles on which training was based:

- (1) Dialogue can be used as an effective mechanism for consciousness-raising. Dialogue means a critical examination of the objective and subjective reality of the people. It focuses upon their concrete situations and catalyses thinking as well as articulation of the dynamics of the experience. To that extent, a dialogue acts as a vehicle for raising awareness.
- (2) While the dialogue helps to initiate the process of active participation, it is critical that learners are engaged in determining the content and method of learning. The trainer can act as a learner-teacher by developing collaborative relationships with the participants.
- (3) An experiential approach implies using the concrete experiences of the participants as materials for discussion and understanding. Moreover, the trainer may facilitate developing new experiences during the training by designing simulations which highlight some particular dynamics. For example, a simulated exercise can be used effectively to bring out the salient characteristics of group decision-making.
- (4) Learning new skills and their application essentially mean behavioural changes. Such changes can be brought about only if an appropriate learning environment is created during the training and later on. Mutual support, encouragement, trust and a sense of psychological safety are critical ingredients for such a learning environment.
- (5) In order to translate the new skills acquired during the training, it is important to pro-

vide opportunity for transfer of learning to 'back home' situations. During the training itself some effort has to be made for concrete action planning of a few real problems.

- (6) To the extent that such a training intends to facilitate collective actions, some effort has to be made in the direction of group development. The locus of the training needs to be the group. This implies that learning skills is a group activity and all the necessary skills must be available in the group. It also facilitates the process of organising as some rudimentary attempt takes place in training itself.

Context of Training

THIS training was carried out in collaboration with Seva Mandir, Udaipur, India. Seva Mandir is a voluntary agency involved in various non-formal adult education and rural development efforts in the district of Udaipur. In one of its blocks, Kherwara, the agency has been working for the last six years. This block is socially and economically a backward block with more than 2/3rd of its population being tribal. The block is, in comparison to other blocks in the same district and other districts, very weak in educational, irrigation, communication and health facilities. Bulk of the population is living on subsistence agriculture. Most of the families own small (less than 5 acres) plots of land out of which only less than half is available for cultivation. Dependence on monsoon leads to frequent droughts and the general economic deprivation.

The agency has initiated a Peer Group Project in 1975. It identified, from 25 contiguous villages, one person who could act as a Peer Group Leader. This person is generally literate and works on his fields in the village. These Peer Group Leaders were trained by the agency in the area of agriculture, cooperative and rural engineering. They were also informed about the various developmental projects at the block level. These Peer Group Leaders were then expected to act as change agents in their respective villages by organising Peer Groups of like-minded persons.

After two years of this project, in mid-1977, the author agreed to provide further training to some of these Peer Groups. The agency staff felt that the Peer Group Leaders were not very effective in organising their Peer Groups. The training by the author was intended to facilitate this process. The author agreed to work with the agency staff in designing and conducting this training. However, as a start, it was decided to choose two Peer Groups for the purpose. A three day residential training programme was organised for the Peer Groups from Pati and Pura (pseudonyms) villages. There were 11 persons from Pati and 9 from Pura. The average age of participants for Pati was 33.5 years and for Pura 32.4 years. While about 2/3rd Pati participants were literate, only about 1/5th of Pura participants were literate. All of the Pura participants were tribals

while bulk of Pati participants were non-tribals. The average size of land holding for the family of each participant was 3.3 acres in Pati and 2.7 acres in Pura. The next session presents a detailed account of this training.

Detailed Description of the Training

PEER groups from Pati and Pura were randomly chosen for this training. The two peer leaders were briefed about it a month in advance. They were consulted about the design, location, and timing of the training. They pointed out the possibility of conflict with the upcoming sowing season. Since sowing was spread over a period of a month, they agreed to persuade their peer groups for a three-day session. They were also asked to acquaint their respective peer groups with the methodology of training and the novelty of design based on their own experience. They were also told that the voluntary agency would meet all the travel and boarding expenses. The two peer leaders appeared excited about this new experience and expressed their hope that it would benefit their groups.

Training Session

THE two peer groups from Pati and Pura participated in this training programme. Each group consisted of about 10 members. It was a residential training programme. The trainer also stayed with the participants. Two members of the Seva Mandir field staff were also present throughout the programme. The participants as well as the trainer sat on the floor during the training. The following is a blow-by-blow account of the training session.

Trainer: (The participants were asked about their understanding of the relevance of forming peer groups in the villages.) Why does the village need a peer group organisation? Why is it that Seva Mandir wants to build peer group organisations in certain villages?

Response: Peer group organisation can help in solving the problems of the village. (This response appeared as a summary statement after struggling with the question for over half an hour.)

Trainer: How is it that a peer group can solve the problem of the village?

Response: An organisation of villagers is more powerful than individual villagers. (This statement appeared as the gist of their discussion that lasted about 30 minutes; mostly it was a period of silence and brief responses. In order to highlight the obstacles to development of the village, an analysis of developmental process in the context of Indian villages was undertaken.)

Trainer: Can you explain how the various developmental efforts of the government during the past 30 years have or have not reached the rural poor?

Response: (from the Pura group) Education and health have not reached our village so far, for example.

Response: (from the Pati group) While Education has reached our village, health has not.

(These responses were preceded by mumblings and soft exchanges among the group members.)

Trainer: According to your description, two channels of development between the rural poor and the resource providers, i.e., the government, can be identified. There are certain developmental items like education which come through the Panchayat Samiti. There are other developmental items like health which come through the various government agencies. Can you identify the different government officials who help the developmental work in the village?

Response: Gram Sevak,* Patwari,** Teacher, Policeman, Malaria Inspector, Cooperative Society Manager, etc. (Three persons gave most of the answers; others sat quietly.)

Trainer: Why is it then that developmental work, e.g., education and health, has not reached some villages while it has reached others? (This question led to long pauses, brief remarks and a lot of hesitation; the following response was the summary of what was verbalised.)

Response: Because villagers are illiterate; they are weak; they are lazy.

Trainer: That means if you are organised, if you become literate, and if you become active in your own interest, then it is possible that your villages can be developed. (Discussion among the participants for about an hour was low-key.) We have seen that both the channels of development, i.e., the Panchayat Samiti and the government officials, have to be continuously pressurised; they have to recognise that we are strong and vocal, and that we are not going to sit idle. If we are organised, strong and powerful, it is conceivable that Panchayat Samiti and the various government officials will be forced to listen to and deal with our problems. However, I want to warn you that in the process of becoming organised and strong, you will face a lot of difficulties. Those vested interests, e.g., the local rich and powerful persons, governmental officials and Panchayat Samiti members, whose interests will be challenged by the emergence of strong village-based organisations, will create conditions for the failure of emerging village-based organisation. They will try to buy-off or threaten you and create similar hurdles on your way to getting powerfully organised. So the question is: are you prepared to face those threats and dangers?

*Gram Sevak is the village level worker (VLW) who performs agricultural extension functions.

**Patwari is the clerk who maintains land records.

(About four hours have passed since the beginning of this training. Discussion has been mostly low-key and marked by long periods of silence; struggle to overcome hesitation can be observed in the brief, short sentences and phrases being used. About two persons from each group act as spokesmen of their respective groups.)

(The two peer groups then took sometime to discuss and understand the issues raised so far in the context of developing their organisations. Within the group, discussions have become more lively, and all seem to be participating. They have spent about an hour in their groups and a lot of mutual explaining and clarifying can be observed. Having developed an understanding of the costs and gains involved in getting organised and having shown a willingness to go ahead with their peer group organisations, further dialogue with the trainer begins.)

Trainer: In fact, if your group members start facing these types of obstacles then you should know that your organisation is getting stronger. Moreover, why is it that Seva Mandir has appointed one person from each village to act as a peer group leader? (Discussion among the participants was again on low-key and limited.) It is difficult for the Seva Mandir to call all the villagers for sharing information with them. Therefore, one person from each village has been identified to act as a contact person and prime-mover for initial work between Seva Mandir and the villagers. This does not imply that only the leader is responsible for all the developmental work. I would suggest that you discuss in your groups how you are going to share the responsibility of the various tasks which the village peer organisation will face. Moreover, you might also discuss the objectives of your peer organisation.

(Each of the two groups then discussed the above-mentioned issues and there was a general agreement, verbalised by all of them, that they are prepared to equally share the responsibility of the peer organisation. This time the discussion was much more lively and loud. More than an hour was spent within groups and more and more people started to share their views clearly. It was evening by then and so the session was folded.)

(One of the groups had raised the question as to how exploitation of the villagers by the various government officials could be curtailed. In response to this question, the trainer introduced an exercise.)

Trainer: There is a scheme just started by the government for improving health in the villages. The government wants two persons from each village panchayat to be in Udaipur for a period of three months. After the training, these people will be sent back to their villages with a stock of medicines which they will distribute for primary health care. You represent the two village panchayats

from your area. I would like you to select unanimously two persons from each of your groups for the proposed training. You may discuss among yourselves and decide whom you want to recommend but there will be a secret ballot to confirm your choice. If even one person disagrees with the choice made in the secret ballot, then the election will be void.

(The two groups recommended two persons each. The secret ballot was conducted. In Pura, one person got 8 and another 9 votes out of 10. Similarly in Pati, one candidate got 9 and another 11 out of 12 votes. It was evident that internal dissension in the groups was being reflected in the results of the secret ballot. The groups were then instructed to reconsider their nomination and put the candidates up again for secret ballot. In case no unanimity emerged this time, there would be no representatives from those panchayats for this health scheme.)

(While in Pati the candidates were changed, they remained the same in Pura. Roop Lal and Thawar Chand were the candidates earlier, and Vir Chand and Kanji were the candidates now in Pati. This time the results of the secret ballot were unanimous. The trainer started processing the exercise.)

Trainer: I would like to ask the Pati group about the reasons for changing their candidates in the second round.

Response: (from the Pati group) We had an internal election to determine the candidates initially. While Roop Lal and Kanji became high scorers, the name of Thawar Chand was recommended by a few members to replace Kanji. This led to some dissatisfaction among a couple of members who privately expressed it during the secret ballot. Moreover, there were some who were confused during the ballot about the voting procedure. In the first round, no attempt was made to explain the voting procedure to everyone. When the group met after knowing the results of the first round, Kanji expressed his desire to be nominated by the group. Then the group changed the representatives and Kanji along with Vir Chand was nominated. This time, Kanji made a special effort to explain the voting procedure to all the members. (He admitted that he showed more interest in the election because he was a candidate the second time.) (Most of the above response was made by two members of the Pati group but others chipped in their opinions and points of view, too. It looked more like a group presentation than individual.)

(The trainer asked the same question to the other group. The Pura group explained the reasons for initial differences as a lack of clear understanding of voting procedure. However, the results of the first round came as a shock to them and they decided to explain the voting procedure thoroughly to all members before the second round of voting.

The trainer then asked the otherwise silent members of the various groups, especially the Pura group, to discuss with each other and to explain to each other, in their local dialect, the learning from this exercise. At this point they were also told that this election was an exercise in testing internal solidarity of the groups. When some members showed hesitancy in talking, the trainer allowed time and patience for them to feel free to say whatever they wanted to say. After sometime, two members from the Pura group started talking and very soon all the participants were intensely engaged in discussing the issue of internal solidarity and how to counteract external attempts to create internal differences.)

(After the tea break, the trainer introduced another exercise to test and demonstrate the dynamics of inter-group decision-making. Each group was asked to nominate two persons. These four persons would have to select one representative among themselves who would be made responsible for an important developmental work. Moreover, this selected representative would be monetarily compensated for this job. These four persons would sit right here to select this representative for the entire group. While doing this selection, they would have to specify the criteria of selection. When the groups are nominating two persons, they should attempt to nominate the generally silent members.)

(When these four persons assembled in a fish-bowl, they were hesitant in their selection process. With very little discussion, they came up with one person from Pura. This committee of four was then asked to confirm the choice with their respective groups. While the Pura group agreed to this choice, the Pati group was not satisfied. After briefing their two representatives, the four person committee met again to reselect the representative. One of the Pati representatives was such a smooth and influential talker that the two representatives of Pura accepted this choice of representative from Pati. They decided that one of them had to make the compromise. The trainer then started processing this exercise.)

Trainer: What have you learned from the above exercise?

Response: In order to select one or two representatives from a large area, mutual trust and understanding is critical. We have to arrange a number of meetings in order to develop a consensus for the desired representation. This requires interest in involving others and hard work to ensure the same.

(After an afternoon of volleyball match by the participants, the programme started again after dinner. In order to develop further skills among the participants in joint decision-making and consensus-building, the groups were given another task.)

Trainer: To the extent that personal honesty is an important characteristic for rural leadership, I would like to reward Rs. 5 to one person selected by you who rates high in personal honesty. In order to choose this person, you may follow the procedure of the previous exercise and send two of your representatives from each group for a fishbowl in the middle.

(Each group nominated two persons for the fishbowl. Interestingly enough, both the groups nominated their silent members. In their discussion, these four persons decided that personal knowledge based on the previous activities of an individual was the only basis for determining personal honesty. Then these four persons came up with the names of two persons, one each from the two groups. Since there was a constraint in terms of choosing only one person, the group again faced the difficulty of compromise. When the group was unable to reach the decision, it was recommended that one person from the observers could be invited for consultation. The peer leader of Pati was invited for consultation. Through his intervention this committee of four selected one person from Pura for high personal honesty. Apparently, it was a magnanimous gesture on the part of the peer leader of Pati. The committee of four was unanimous on this choice. In order to test the acceptance of this decision by their respective groups, they were asked to ascertain the opinions of their constituency.)

(It turned out that group members from Pati were disappointed because nobody was selected from their group for personal honesty. It was seen as an emotional affront to the Pati group since no person of high personal honesty was found among its members. The trainer intervened to reconvene the committee of four to reassess their choice. They were asked the basis on which the Pura person was selected; especially the question was posed to the Pati representatives.)

(This reassessment led to another dead-lock in the group. These four were sent back to their constituencies and each group was asked to deliberate upon the issue. This time a new set of representatives, two each from the groups, came for the fishbowl. The new representatives were more vocal and they presented data-based logic for nominating persons from their own group. The pattern of discussion in the committee of four continued to be self-oriented just as in the beginning; each set of representatives started the discussion by nominating one person from their group; none of them approached this problem from a perspective which might reflect over all concern for the community. On the intervention of the trainer, the group of four agreed to call the two recommended persons for a personal interview in order to obtain more information about them. During this interview process, the Pati representatives were much more active and strategic in their questions. From the interviews it could be seen that they had

established the supremacy of their recommended candidate. So when the group of four started making the decision for nominating, a person from Pati was nominated again.)

(The various dynamics obtained in the above exercise were pointed out by the trainer. First, the self-orientation of the group representatives which was coming in their way of making a consensus choice. Secondly, their repetition of the morning pattern was highlighted. It was mentioned that due to aggressive logic and presentation of the Pati representatives, the Pura group lost out again. While they had one of their men nominated in the first round, his name was deleted during the second round of discussion. It was emphasised that inability to present one's interests in a forceful and united fashion may result in exploitation by others and inadequate response to our needs.)

(The identification of this dynamic for the Pura group appeared to have agitated the group members. While others dispersed for the night, the Pura group continued their high-pitched discussion late into the night.)

Trainer: Who are the people in your village who irritate you or cause difficulty for you?

Response: (Pura group) Patwari — in matters of land.

Response: (Pati group) Forest Officer — in matters of obtaining wood for house construction.

Trainer: Let the Pura group discuss a strategy to meet with their Patwari. (Patwari was role-played by one of the staff members. The Pati group started preparing itself to meet the Forest Officer.)

(Each of these groups was asked to enter in a role-play based on the most pressing problems of their village identified by them. This was intended to develop an understanding of skills and strategy needed to confront these problems.)

Role Play by the Pura Group

AFTER discussion among themselves, one person from the group came to the Patwari. When the Patwari asked for 20 rupees to do his job, this person said to him with folded hands — "I am poor; I can not pay this fee." The Patwari responded that the fee is universal and the government does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. Disappointed, that person left. After discussion within the group, two more persons came to the Patwari and begged him with folded hands for consideration. The Patwari was adamant. The conflict could not be resolved.

Role Play by Pati

AFTER discussion among themselves, the whole group approached the Forest Officer for obtaining wood for house construction. The Forest Officer told them that he has not received government orders

for chopping down the trees as yet. He is expecting the order any day and asked them to come back after a few days. When one of them pointed out that no such orders were necessary last month, the Forest Officer said that this is a new system. When they asked him to give a rough estimate of the cost, he quoted a figure which was much higher than the usual. When asked about this change in cost, he responded that there had been no change in price. Any way, the whole group returned to meet him after a couple of days and still the Forest Officer was hesitant in issuing the orders. Promptly the group threatened him with further action to his boss.

(These two role plays were so contrasting in the process as well as the outcome that all could see which strategy worked and which did not. The trainer pointed out three key differences between the two role plays in terms of their contribution to task accomplishment: first, approaching the official in a group of 8 to 10 persons as opposed to individual; second, presenting the problem in a clear and forth-right manner; and third, threatening further action with higher ups as opposed to begging for consideration and pity.)

(The trainer highlighted that in such a stalemate situation where the officer does not agree to do the job even after the threat, further action is called for. While the group is approaching the higher officials for action against the Forest Officer, some interim arrangements must be made to ensure that the person who needs a house immediately does not remain homeless. If no such arrangement is made, he will approach the Forest Officer privately and offer him the "fees" necessary to obtain wood for constructing his house. It is conceivable that villagers could contribute some wood on their own to build the house for this person or to provide temporary shelter for his family.)

(Finally, four quiet members from the two groups were called to role play a similar exercise with the Sarpanch.)

(When these people approached the Sarpanch for obtaining his signatures on one of their applications, he asked for a fee of ten rupees. His point was that this fee is needed for the purposes of development of the villages. He announced that the government had given authority to the Panchayat to collect fees in order to finance various developmental projects. When somebody pointed out that the fees cannot be charged without a "chorum", he confidently said that the chorum can approve this any time. In fact, the other ward "panchas" were his own favourites. Suddenly, one person pointed out that the Sarpanch was elected only by them. And so he threatened the Sarpanch that he could be changed in the forthcoming Panchayat elections.)

(The trainer emphasised the need for organising across the villages in order to select their own Sarpanch in the forthcoming elections. It was pointed out that by electing an honest and sincere Sarpanch

of their choice, they might ensure continued development of their villages.)

(By this time the groups appeared ready to do some action-planning. The trainer then asked each group to identify three problems of their village that they want to take up as a peer group for solutions over the next six months.)

After discussion among themselves which lasted over an hour, the groups came out with the following problems:

Pati Group:

1. Connecting road between the village and the main road.
2. Problem of drinking water, needs a hand pump.
3. No provision for drinking water for the cattle.

Pura Group:

1. No post office.
2. Getting canal from the nearby dam.
3. Primary school in the village.

(When the trainer noticed that the election of the new Sarpanch was not mentioned by any of the groups, he asked this question. This was based on his previous experience with the two peer groups of Bawalwada region. The Pura group said that they wanted Sarpanch from their own village because the previous Sarpanch was from the other village. However, they had not done anything so far in this direction. Though the Pati group also had not done anything so far, its peer leader was willing to fight for the Sarpanch's position. The trainer suggested that Meena village was also within the Gram Panchayat of Pati. And since we have a peer group there which is also looking for a change in local leadership, the two peer groups can combine their efforts to make it more successful. The Pura leader said that he was ready to contest for ward panch.)

Trainer: Now that you have identified the problems that you want to take up as a peer group, I would suggest that you engage in developing detailed plans for the same. It is one thing to desire the solution of a problem, and it is quite another to plan and execute it.

(The trainer then explained briefly the various ingredients of planning with special emphasis on the process of participative planning. This presentation included items like identification of objectives, resources necessary, detailed activities to be undertaken, time schedule, and assignment of duties. It also included items of reporting, writing, and monitoring. The two groups then broke out to work on detailed plans for each of the three problems that they have identified.)

(The exercise took about three hours and it had to be done on paper. Then the groups reassembled and made their representations.)

Response: (Pati group) Problem 1 — Hold the meeting of the village on November 8, 1977. Discuss this issue and seek ways of obtaining government assistance. To give a report to this effect to the BDO by November 15. If no response from the BDO, give a reminder after 15 days. A copy of the reminder to be sent to the District Collector (DC). By December 10, five persons from the village will go to meet the District Collector. In the meanwhile, every household from the village will be persuaded to arrange its share of help in cash or kind.

Problem 2 — In the meeting on November 8, discuss the issue of drinking water and send a letter of request to the BDO asking for installing hand-pumps. The request will be certified by Gram Panchayat, and if not, sent without certification. If no response by December 10, go and meet the District Collector. If the above scheme is accepted, villagers will be persuaded to provide free labour.

Problem 3 — Discuss the issue in the meeting of November 8. A request letter signed by everyone is to be carried to the BDO by five villagers before November 15. A letter to the DC if no response by December 10.

Response: (Pura group) Problem 1—Hold the meeting of the village on October 15 to discuss the issue. Send a letter of request to Udaipur by October 25. In the meanwhile, find out the relevant authority in postal department to whom the letter will be addressed. In the event of no response by the end of November, approach the DC.

Problem 2—Since it involves other villages in the vicinity, meeting to be arranged by November 1. Each member of the peer group will go to different villages, discuss this problem, and invite villagers to the meeting. A report signed by persons from all the villages will be sent to the BDO, irrigation department and local MLA.* Five persons from the village will meet the MLA by November 25. In the meanwhile, approach the irrigation department for survey purposes.

Problem 3—Since this problem has been going on for the last two months, continued effort will be made to get the school sanctioned quickly. However, in the event of further delay, some alternative arrangement can be made locally. The teacher of the night school could be persuaded to start a class for children for two-three hours in the morning.

(The above was followed by a closing session where the groups were asked to recapitulate the happenings of the last three days and highlight their learnings. An attempt was made by the

trainer to integrate and re-emphasize the key issues.)

(The group from Pati dispersed after this. However, the trainer was asked by the Pura group to stay for another hour. The discussion that followed was on different socio-economic issues bothering the members. It could be seen that left to themselves, even the quieter members of the group became open. The trainer felt that the Pura group being the weaker and the more hesitant of the two, separate discussions with them avoided crowding and put them at ease. It was evident that this separation was needed to allow them free expression and consolidation of the three days. The issues included drinking practices, dowry system,* superstitions, need for literacy, advancement of women, etc.)

(Before the groups left, a date for a follow-up meeting, to be held roughly after six weeks, was fixed. The follow-up was to take place separately for the two groups in their own villages.)

Follow-up

FOLLOW-UP visits to the villages of the trained peer groups were intended to monitor the progress made by the groups and to discuss the issues that they had experienced after the training. The details of what happened in these visits are presented here.

Visit to Pati: The trainer-researcher was accorded a very warm welcome by the villagers. About 50 persons had gathered there. It was decided that the peer group would spend some time with the trainer initially. In the late afternoon, when other villagers returned from their farms, there would be a general meeting in the village.

The peer group started with a presentation of the progress on their plans. Two members made this presentation. They also described the future actions that they had planned themselves. They discussed the gains that they had made and they were pleased with it. They had realised the value of organisation and collective action. As one of them said, "We are a different group now, more aware and more active".

In attempting to solve one of their self-chosen problems—trying to bring the canal up to their village — they were experiencing some difficulty. When they approached the government officials in charge of irrigation projects, they were told that it required massive investment and could not be undertaken soon. Even though the proposed extension to the canal was going to benefit six more villages besides Pati, it became clear to the trainer that this peer group was constraining its exploration of alternatives. So, the nine-dot exercise was presented to them (this exercise asks the participants to join nine-dots with one stroke in four lines). The experience of this exercise is to force a person to think beyond his self-designated constraints. The peer group, after the exercise, discovered that it needed to convene a

*MLA is the elected representative to the state legislative assembly.

*The dowry system among tribals is called "Dapa". It is reverse because the groom has to pay a certain amount of cash to the bride's father before marrying her.

meeting of all the interested villagers and present a joint application. A date was set for this meeting and the people were assigned the responsibility of informing these villages. Interestingly enough, the Patels* and the tribals took responsibility to inform the Patels and tribals respectively in these villages. The traditional caste networks seemed to be the most appropriate information channels.

When all the villagers assembled, the trainer decided to engage in a dialogue with them about their understanding of reality. The dialogue explored the causes of their poverty and possible ways to deal with them. The villagers showed enthusiasm about the upcoming Panchayat elections and a good deal of time was spent in discussing strategies for electing the right kind of people. During this discussion, it was apparent that the Patels and the tribals still thought on caste lines. When asked about the number of households in the village, for example, a Patel respondent gave 40 (the number of Patel households) and a tribal respondent gave 50 (the number of tribal households). This led to a discussion about integration and unity and the need for developing common references, frameworks, and understandings. The meeting ended after sunset.

Visit to Pura: A similar field visit was made to Pura. The peer group was joined by five other villagers. They presented the details of the progress made by them during the past six weeks. They were so excited about reporting their progress that they started speaking simultaneously. The trainer had to ask only one of them to narrate the details in order to understand it. It was evident that they were pleased with and proud of their gains. They also described their future plans in some detail.

Most residents of this village are tribals, also illiterate. They tend to ignore the value of education. So, literacy became a major focus of dialogue. The central issue in the discussion was desire to learn. They felt that for adults (25 years and above), new efforts to acquire functional literacy were futile. When reminded of the sacrifices that they had to make due to their illiteracy, they came out with many stories about their experiences. One of them narrated the incident of cheating when he borrowed money from the local cooperative society. He took out a loan of Rs. 240, and repayed Rs. 125 in two years. Still, his balance payment due was Rs. 325 (at 12 per cent annual rate of interest). Such narrations led to a serious resolve on their part to vigorously pursue functional literacy. The meeting ended after a long exploration of potentially beneficial government projects and schemes for their village.

Conclusion

As the detailed description of training indicates, there are several issues which need to be considered by those who engage in such training. The most important issue relates to the trainer himself/herself. While the above description provides some indications of the skills required to be a trainer, it does not clarify the values and attitudes appropriate

*Patels are members of a farming sub-caste in this area.

for such an effort. Primarily, the central skills of the trainer are in the areas of group dynamics, planning, inter-personal dynamics and process facilitation. However, it is equally important for the trainers to examine their values and attitudes as and when they engage in such training effort.

The second issue relates to the nature of relationship that a trainer develops with the participants during and after such a training effort. As has been mentioned in the section of principles as well as indicated in the description, one of the important ingredients of learning is a mutually trusting relationship between the trainer and the participant. To the extent that trust is a relational phenomenon, conscious effort needs to be made by the trainer in this direction. In the experience of the author, one of the mechanisms for establishing this trust was the gradual adjustment by the trainer in the setting of the participants. As the trainer felt comfortable in the context of the participants, in their behaviour and reaction to himself, the marginal farmers also began to feel comfortable with the trainer and his style. This indicates that the setting of training needs is important for the participants to feel comfortable; and the trainer's adjustment to that setting is an important beginning towards developing mutual trust.

This developmental training was focused upon those aspects which were intended to facilitate the creation of organised and collective initiative by the marginal farmers. Anyone familiar with the structure and dynamics of Indian Rural Society will realise that such a training can have political implications. One of the primary reasons for the poverty in rural India and lack of impact of developmental programmes is the distribution of power and influence in the rural society. Marginal farmers are, by and large, relatively powerless in comparison to those who either own large areas of land or are engaged in money-lending and other businesses. To that extent, such a developmental training may have some impact upon the existing power structure of the society and thereby generate threat to those who are presently powerful. As a consequence, the trainer may become, advertently or inadvertently, involved in local politics. The important point is that the trainer needs to be aware of this possibility and develop his/her strategies accordingly.

In conclusion, this type of developmental training can facilitate mobilisation and organisation of those people who are presently under-privileged or lack in influence over the various programmes of development. It can be used to generate pressures from below so that top-down programmes of development can become more accessible and relevant to the population. To that extent, such a developmental training has relevance to various settings. It can be used for a more effective health programme; it can facilitate implementation of irrigation projects; migrant and industrial labour can benefit from it; slum-dwellers may be involved in such a training; non-formal educational programmes may adopt this approach; mobilisation of women can be catalysed through such a strategy. It is hoped that this note will assist those who are engaged in such developmental efforts.

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