

Official Documents**Reports on Extension Work in India**

Evaluation Report on First Year's Working of Community Projects,
Programme Evaluation Organization of the Planning Commission. May, 1954,

Community Projects Administration's Report for 1953-54.

Report of the U N Commission on Community . . . Development in South and
South-East Asia, December 1953.

Reviewed by Evelyn Wood

THE reports listed above are not in order of appearance; nor are they in order of importance; but, since they have appeared in India within the last few months, it seems convenient to look simultaneously at the three different views.

The Report of the Programme Evaluation Organization is far and away the most impressive of the three. There are, obviously, profound and scholarly minds working behind it. Better still, there is evidence in the PEO's Report of a mental reference to standards which take into account the living traditions of this country. This report consequently reflects a quality of insight into the real problems of rural development which makes it a most outstanding document.

Quite a large number of studies and proposals have been published during the last three years; but all of them deal with fragments of the whole problem of rural development. Most of these documents have been therefore based on situations abstracted from the whole complex of rural life. They have been written mostly either by strangers to India, or by Indians educated abroad, who have apparently adopted the standards of evaluation which are current in the West. Consequently the appraisals of those situations which are considered in these publications have reference only to the values accepted by modern science. The PEO's Report is refreshingly free of this rather desiccated, analytical approach to the realities of Indian village-life; it keeps far closer to the traditional, holistic attitude which still prevails among the people who live in rural India. This characteristic makes the PEO's Report directly usable, as none of the other documents have been, despite some excellent material which many of them have presented.

The PEO's Report is outstanding in another sense, too. It is, after all, a Government of India "blue book". As in most Government

publications of this order throughout the world, the account given, and, still more, the judgments expressed, must be confined by the inhibitions to which those working for Governments have to submit. There is, however, in this Report much less evidence than one would expect of such "official" inhibitions. Further, the usual cramped conclusions which are caused by over-restricted official terms of reference are happily not a feature of this document.

Taking it broadly, the PEO's Report is an extraordinarily outspoken piece of work, which hits very hard and so far as an outside observer can judge, places its blows where they will do as much good as possible.

The PEO's Report is not perfect, of course; even when one has made allowances for its status as a Government document, there are still gaps in the record and even more lacunae in the conclusions. Notably, there is a certain bias running through the whole of this 300-page document; this bias is more particularly apparent in the first 60 pages of general matter. It can perhaps be accounted for partly by the nature of the conditions in which the Programme Evaluation Organization was set up. It would be too much to expect such a document, at this early stage of evaluation, to be objectively scientific; it is, therefore, all the more desirable to try and assess the nature and the degree of bias which influences the report. An outside impression about this biased approach may perhaps assist interpretation, and enable the extremely valuable findings of the report to have a more useful meaning for the Extension workers who will surely study it.

BIAS IN FAVOUR OF US AGRICULTURE

The bias which this reviewer notices is most unexpected: there appears to be an unquestioning faith in the super-eminence of agriculture in the United States. It would seem

probable that there, are in the PEO few representatives of the agricultural profession, who have had agricultural experience in both countries. There is, however, a general leaning towards American standards, throughout this report in other respects. This approach to values does not seem likely to make a good yardstick for operations in this country where the culture-patterns, the nature, of human relationships, and the norms which are set, particularly for the quality of the work done, are all so completely different from those in America.

At times, indeed, this report seems to ignore matters which are still fundamental to village life in India. This comment can be most briefly justified by quoting section 116 on page 45: —

"The working of these projects has amply demonstrated the prime importance of Agricultural Extension in the Rural Development Programme. The physical and psychological requirements of a successful Extension Programme touch a variety of subjects, *eg*, health, education, communications, supplies, credit, etc. Unless all these are attended to, even agricultural extension will have only a limited success."

COMMISSION : RELIGION AND LOCAL POLITICS

The "variety of subjects" exemplified by the writer of this paragraph strangely omits those very subjects which colour the thinking of villagers in almost every part of the country: religion and local politics. Although the writer of this paragraph has specifically referred to the psychological requirements of Extension programmes, he chooses to ignore these two major psychological factors. The same trend of thought is found in page after page of this lengthy document. It may, of course be that the PEO was obliged to serve official Government

policies of "secular" and non-political Extension by these omissions, which would, in that case, be deliberate.

This seems in any case to be a peculiarly partial approach to evaluating the Work of the Extension Services. The omission of any reference to the need for social and political research and development seems to this reviewer to be a serious lacuna. As for the side-stepping of religion, one must at least say that such evasive action is unrealistic. Apart from these notes of omission, of course, section 116 quoted above makes a very fine and important point.

There is another most memorable statement on page 46:

" Old habits of thought and action are being discarded with an unsuspected ease. It appears that very soon it is going to be more difficult to check the speed of expansion so that it may not outrun the resources of organisation than to secure full response to such aids to progress as can be put into the field."

This reviewer can confirm (of

course from very much more limited observation) both the conclusions and the tentative prediction which are made in the above two sentences. One word of criticism only must be added. This reviewer would have written " Superficially, it would appear that old habits of thought, etc". The assumption of the writer of the report that these habits are actually being discarded in reality and not merely as presented to the passing observer, is scientifically quite unwarranted.

SHORTAGE OF STAFF: DELAYS ON THE SUPPLY-LINE

One of the features of the Community Projects and Extension Organizations which sticks most firmly in this reviewer's mind after reading this report, is the reiterated record of short staff and delays in supplying equipment. These are exactly what anybody who has been moving" around the Project areas would expect, from more general observation. It is interesting to find the same impressions confirmed by the PEO's systematic examination of the sample projects. Probably it has not been possible for the report

THE ECONOMIC WEEKLY

torunt at the reason for shortage of staff; and therefore this reviewer may fill a blank. There is no attempt whatever in educational establishments, at any rate in the four university centres and a fair number of schools visited by this reviewer, to put before students or pupils the idea of working in rural development. This may seem to be contradicted by the fact that many colleges and groups of students, sometimes as NCC squads, are asked to build roads, dig irrigation channels, or to perform other " social service for villagers" in the Extension held. These activities are not, in this reviewer's opinion, likely to produce anything but distaste for a career of rural development work —except, of course in the rare young man with an early and over-mastering vocation for such work. The preparation of the groups of students, for these exercises is negligible; the attitude of superiority to the villagers with which they set out is thoroughly prejudicial to any good which the students could otherwise gain from contact with the wisdom of village-folk.

In this reviewer's experience, rural

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people are becoming very impatient with do-goodery", which is all that these extra-collegiate stunts profess. In many instances where this reviewer has followed in the wake of such an invasion of students in rural areas, the resentment of the more enlightened village-folk has been all too apparent.

From the accounts given by those who participated in these village "service groups", this reviewer has the clear impression that the students are also made fully aware of the hostility of the better order of villagers. Is this a way to prepare young persons of high education for a career in rural development?

One would expect university colleges to be more perspicacious in this respect, but it would be unfair to expect most schoolmasters to take any line other than the habitual one: that, if Extension be a Government service it must be good for the pupil; but that any other Government service would be preferable, because there is neither prestige nor promotion to be expected in village-work.

ACADEMIC BLOCKS

Unless some means can be found to remove these academic blocks upon encouraging students and pupils to take up rural development work, short-staffing will continue. The other major factor, of course, which prevents suitable candidates from coming forward is, the pay, which is far too low for the work required of Extension fieldmen. Further, the conditions in which *Gram Sevaks* are expected to work, as dogsbodies of everyone else in the Extension field, are also not conducive to a rush of young candidates for Extension work.

Probably the most obstinate block in recruitment of new workers, will be in the women's cadre. No means have yet been devised by which conditions can be organised on a tolerable basis for resident women workers in the villages. There is, further, a well-founded tendency to minimise the possibilities of women as non-resident workers being able to achieve anything. Until this false atmosphere is dispelled it is hard to see many suitable women coming forward for Extension work in the field.

The above observations are added from the reviewer's general experience, not in criticism of the PEO's omission of them; but rather in the knowledge that a Government report cannot say such nasty things, for example, about pay and condi-

tions of work. Most people who have worked in the Extension field during the last two years, will agree, however, that these nasty things will have to be faced, and dealt with.

Once these criticisms have been expressed, one must also say that the PEO has had very little time in which to produce this large volume of information. In particular, it has not had time to go deeply into any subject. This factor is referred to on page 51 of the report, where a number of special studies are promised on various aspects of change in the areas under development. Some of the studies promised refer to village factions, health and levels of living, farm expenses and activities. These studies will no doubt be of a more scientific nature; and their publication will be awaited with much more than interest.

CPA: REPORT FOR 1953-54

By comparison with the PEO's full review of a year's work, the Community Projects Administration's own report on its activities is of course a less exciting document. Especially, in view of the PEO's more exhaustive review of events and results the CPA's report must be valued for what it is, an admirable record of the bare facts of the all-India undertaking. This is quite a masterpiece of compression within some 60 pages.

UNITED NATIONS MISSION'S REPORT

It is also perhaps a little unfair to compare the UN Mission's report with the PEO's report. After all, the distinguished investigators sent by the UN were only able to spend six weeks in India. It is true that one of them has spent many years in this country before the war; but this hardly excuses the rapidity of this god's-eye view. One or two major points stand out in the UN Mission's report. There is, for example, a wholly admirable condensed account of the Etawah Project on pages 103 and 118. This account must have been processed for condensed information well in advance of the UN Mission's visitation. It must have been written by the originator of the present Extension pattern in India, who was also the founder of the Etawah Pilot Project.

Of the UN Mission's personal witness, one factor stands out very strongly. They return again and again to the importance of considering the special interests of women and Children in Community develop-

ment. In the emergency of launching the Community Projects and other vehicles of Extension Development in India, there has not yet been time to get down to the more difficult problems involving the women and children in the villages. There is no question whatever that village women could, if tackled successfully, unlock the adult doors which bar the way to rapid development. But, for many reasons, there has been extremely little work done by Extension on the women's angle during the last two years; the chief reason is probably the shortage of women field-workers. And yet, most of the rapid and striking changes in village-life previous to 1948 or so were achieved by working through the women.

As to the interests of children; the emergency which has been rather unreasonably assumed (probably in deference to the American's accelerated sense of time) to develop rural India towards more modern patterns, has been almost solely concentrated on adult education—and mainly in agricultural techniques. Very little work has been done on or through the children; but it is quite obvious that children are the carriers of the future social and technical patterns. To rather a smaller extent here than in countries where tradition is less powerful, Indian children can also influence their parents towards social and technical change. As yet, Extension workers have done very little towards bringing children into Extension schemes. This is partly because of shortage of all kinds of staff, and the need to concentrate the few available to get quick results from adult villagers. Partly it is because of the knotty problems presented by any attempt to make changes in village schools. In many ways, the schoolmaster is the toughest character with whom Extension workers have to deal. The poor fellow's authority of knowledge is impugned, of course, the moment an Extension field-worker gets busy in his village. Naturally, he reacts badly (as any one of us would) to protect his personal power and sustain his ego.

There is nothing else in the UN Mission's Report that has not been said many times over by other, more extensively and professionally informed, persons in contact with development work in rural India. This reviewer's final remark on the subject of this report is that it is unfair on the distinguished team who were asked to produce it in so brief a period.

