Social Welfare Services

(Contributed)

There have been developments of considerable significance in the field of social welfare in India in recent years. One is the emergence of a public sector in social welfare work, following increasing participation of the State in that sphere. The other is the growing co-ordination in the activities of the various voluntary social welfare organisations in the country engaged in a specific field of welfare work or among different organisations engaged in a number of allied activities, which could be beneficially co-ordinated.

These two developments are of immense significance for the country as a whole and, in particular, for the needy or socially defenceless groups in the population for whose benefit the activities are designed. Considered in their proper context, they are the first steps in the direction of a Welfare State, which is the goal of India's Constitution. The provision of social security, in the broadest sense of the term, to all the needy, destitute and socially unprotected sections of the community is implicit in the concept of a Welfare State, and so is the obligation that the incidence of preventable unemployment, old age, infirmity, physical handicaps and destitution should be made bearable. We are yet far from that ideal; but the first steps have been taken in that direction in the scheme of Employees State Insurance and the various labour welfare laws. Foundations have also been laid for social welfare work for the needy and the defenceless and for social services in the shape of education, public health, community services, housing and so on.

Social services and social welfare activities of the magnitude and extent demanded in the conditions obtaining in the country are manifestly beyond the scope and ability of the purely voluntary organisations to provide, however well-established the latter may be. The All-India Women's Conference, the All-India Adult Education Council, or any similar voluntary organisation could undoubtedly be regarded as agencies competent to initiate programmes or suggest measures for the furtherance of the interests of women or the cause of adult education. But when the question is one of providing welfare activities and services in the requisite measure for the large number of women who are the victims of social vice or who need maternity services, it is beyond the All-India Women's Conference, for example, to afford either the funds or the personnel for the purpose. Obviously, it is the State or the public sector, which alone can shoulder and discharge this responsibility. The public sector or the organisation which represents it would undoubtedly seek—and is entitled to obtain—the co-operation and the support of voluntary organisations in implementing the necessary schemes. There is no other method by which the needy sections of the people can be assured of an adequacy of assistance and the requisite efficiency in the administration of the programmes than through such fruitful co-operation between the public and private sectors. That is how social services and welfare activities have developed in a number of other countries—East and West; there is reason to believe that in India too we are walking along the same road to reach the same goal.

Co-ordination Among Private Organisations

It has, nevertheless, been found in India, as in other countries, that while co-ordination could be attained comparatively easily as between the public and the private sectors in social welfare work, particularly at the planning and directional level, it is not so easy to ensure co-ordination among the private organisations which are engaged in the same line of welfare activity or in different but inter-related activities. Life has become so complex that different kinds of social welfare work cannot be separated in water-tight compartments. Organisations functioning, say, in the field of child welfare can render greater and much better service when they act in co-ordination with one another and pool their resources and efforts. If we look at it from the standpoint of the services they can render, there can understandably be no escape from the conclusion that these can be maximised only when they are prepared to work together, though they may not merge their individual identities in the common pool. Progress of social welfare work therefore depends on the systematic promotion of this co-operation, where possible through mutual agreement among the organisations themselves and where necessary, under the guidance and with the assistance of the State organisation.

Central Social Welfare Board

Voluntary social welfare activity has had a long tradition in India and the number of organisations engaged in it has always been quite considerable. In the course of the past few decades, a number of all-India organisations, interested in one aspect of welfare or concerned with the welfare of one particular section of the population or the other have sprung into existence. There are child welfare organisations, youth welfare organisations, organisations for the welfare of women, organisations interested in the welfare of the physically handicapped like the blind, the deaf and the mentally handicapped, organisations for rehabilitating delinquent children, community welfare organisations and so on. While this doubtless represents a commendable and welcome development, in a number of cases, the financial resources of such organisations are not adequate to enable them to undertake programmes of welfare on any extensive or sustained basis. This deficiency has been sought to be eliminated for the first time through the constitution by the Government of India of the Central Social Welfare Board, in pursuance of a recommendation in the Report of the Planning Commission, and the provision of Rs 4 crores made for the implementation of its assistance and co-ordination programmes during the First Five-Year Plan period.

The Board's activities have lent point to the concept of social welfare in India, invested it with meaning and significance, and demonstrated the need for and the potentials of purposeful co-operation between the public and the private sectors in that field. The significance of the Board's work consists principally in that it has been given to it to infuse life and vigour into a number of voluntary organisations which, starting with highly laudable intentions, have in course of time
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begun to decay due to financial difficulties and become completely or partially defunct. Financial assistance has been given to 1,700 such organisations, many of which are situated in urban centres, to resuscitate themselves and to extend their scope of usefulness. These organisations, representing the private sector in social welfare, may not in all cases have responded to the effort to inject life into them; but, by and large a vast proportion of those, who have received grants to the extent of Rs 35 lakhs, have been helped to extend their social service activities in their respective fields and to that extent, have relieved distress and provided relief to a number of needy persons.

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST ABUSE

That is an aspect of the work of the Central Board, the significance of which can be properly evaluated only in course of time. If the voluntary welfare organisations which have received grants utilize the money to the best advantage, it will have automatically augmented the sum-total of the resources available in this vast country for social welfare work and relief of distress. There is, indeed, need for vigilance against the grants being badly utilised or remaining unutilised. The Central Board’s inspectorate system and the supervision of the work of aided institutions by the State Welfare Boards are a safeguard against such mis-spending or waste of public funds.

That co-ordination in the provision of relief and assistance to the socially down and out sections in the rural as well as urban areas is an essential ingredient in producing satisfactory results is now accepted. While it is attained at the policy-making and directional level at the centre by the Central Social Welfare Board, it is achieved at the implementation and execution level by the State Social Welfare Advisory Boards set up in the various states and by their subordinate bodies. It is no longer so much private charity or endowments, hedged in with conditions on the utilisation of funds provided that sustain voluntary welfare organisations as state grants and assistance from public revenues. Hence co-ordination is all the more necessary. Extravagance on the one hand or dissipation of resources over a widely scattered field on the other can now be avoided by, say, child welfare organisations in a particular area or child welfare and women’s welfare organisation in another area, coming together first to pool and then to share their funds and the personnel they employ in their institutions for the common good.

WELFARE EXTENSION

In the rural areas, where the welfare services are few and far between, the Central Social Welfare Board has, in the shape of a scheme for welfare extension projects—one in each district in the country, totalling 352 projects—covering more than 35,000 villages in the First Plan period. The welfare extension projects do not duplicate the work in the national extension service blocks or the community development blocks, in which the accent is mainly on food production, agricultural development, and economic development. They concern themselves at present with provision of welfare services for women, children and the handicapped, which do not trench on the jurisdiction of the national extension service blocks.

There is, however, the hope that, as the area covered by the NES expands and as, simultaneously, the area under the welfare extension projects also expands, as it is expected to do during the Second Plan period, the two schemes will become increasingly complementary to each other, despite the different auspices under which they will function. To the extent that the programmes under the two schemes are identical in some respects—such as in the provision of maternity or child welfare services duplication and overlapping can be avoided by earmarking a specified number of projects for the operation of the programmes of each organisation.

The two principles of co-ordination of the activities of voluntary organisations as well as utilisation of the agency of the private sector in the social welfare field are clearly evident in the execution of the welfare extension projects. In the project implementing committees at the district level, all—or almost all—the private welfare organisations operating in the fields of women’s or children’s welfare are generally represented and function in a co-ordinated manner in formulating work programmes and implementing them. In the State Welfare Boards themselves, representatives of the State Governments sit side by side with private welfare workers under non-official chairmen appointed by the Central Board in consultation with the different State Governments. The State Boards screen the institutions within their respective areas for the distribution of the Central Board’s grants and formulate the over-all programmes of work in the welfare extension projects, for spending the Rs 25,000 grant made by the. Centre to each one of the projects for the First Plan period.

GRANT MAKING BODY

It will be seen that the function of the Central Board, representing the public sector in social welfare is presently more or less restricted to the making of grants to private or voluntary organisations, giving directions to the State Governments or State Boards, drawing up of the over-all plan of schemes of welfare, arranging for the training of personnel like the gramsevaks or village level workers and maternity assistants and other health personnel for employment in the project centres, and inspection and auditing of the accounts of the voluntary organisations accorded aid. It is also directly handling the family welfare programmes which at the moment is limited to the establishment of a match factory on a factory-cum-cottage industry basis in Delhi.

It is, however, inherent in the scheme of aiding voluntary organisations that, whenever any particular service provided by these develops into such a magnitude and size, that it cannot be effectively executed by such organisations, it will be taken over by the State agency to be executed directly by itself or through a non-official agency competent to carry it out if financially aided by the State. A comprehensive scheme for the provision of after-care and correctional services for a number of needy groups which the Central Board has approved for implementation during the Second Plan period is thus proposed to be put through in cooperation with voluntary agencies.

Though the most important in that field, the Central Board is not the only State agency which provides for social welfare services. A number of such services are either directly sponsored or aided by the Central Ministries of Education, Health, Home Affairs, Labour and Rehabilitation, particularly for the welfare of the youth, in the sphere of family welfare and family planning, for industrial workers in mines, Scheduled Tribes and Castes and for displaced persons. The area of
these various services is vast and continuously growing, even as the Central Board’s field of work is growing, thereby revealing the great leeway that has to be made up before India can develop a sizeable welfare service. These welfare services represent in their cumulative effect the contribution which the public sector is making and will continue to make to social welfare work and invariably they are put through with, wherever possible, the co-operation of voluntary organisations. It is a two-way traffic, and it postulates a readiness on the part of voluntary agencies to extend their co-operation to the State agency.

The field for social welfare work in India is vast; what with the large number of people whose problems call for the demonstration of human sympathy and exhibition of an understanding of human needs, particularly of those sections of the population, who have remained so far unblessed by the benefits of education or of healthy life. It is a field in which the State agency should play an increasingly important part; it is also a field for which the vast reservoir of private funds and voluntary efforts could be tapped to the maximum possible extent. An increasingly fruitful partnership between the public and the private sectors should be developed in this sphere, and it is to be hoped that that is the direction in which things are in fact moving.

There is a growing movement, sponsored by the Indian Conference of Social Work, to secure the establishment of Social Welfare Ministries and departments in the Centre and in the various states, which has borne fruit to the extent that in three states, Departments of Social Welfare have been constituted. Further developments along this line in other states should be welcomed as a concession to the demands of the times and as representing the enlargement of the principles of extension of the scope of welfare services, fruitful co-ordination between the State agency and voluntary welfare agencies and as affording greater scope for private and voluntary effort to enter the field of social service with the assurance that it can draw on the financial assistance of the Government or a Government sponsored organisation for their programmes. This postulates that substantially larger appropriations should be made in the Second Plan period for these services.

Smooth co-ordination between the public and the private sectors in the field of industry is yet to be attained. The growing importance of the public sector in industry, however, is not regarded by all as a happy augury promising harmonious relations between the two. Fortunately, co-ordination between the two sectors in the field of welfare work does not give rise to such conflicts, it can be and is being pursued with the prospect of extended responsibilities devolving on the public sector in course of time. Nevertheless at no foreseeable time in the near future is there any prospect of the private sector being eliminated from the picture in the social welfare field; rather it is possible to visualise the continued occupation by it of an honoured and honourable place.

The Simla Conference of Asian Nations

B N Ganguli

THE first plenary session of the ten-nation conference of the Asian members of the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee which recently met at Simla gave top priority to a discussion of the utilisation of the $200 million Asian Development Fund allocated by the US Congress for the development of intra-regional trade and setting up of machinery to provide credit to enable Asian countries to tide over short-term balance of payments difficulties.

This new variant of American economic aid deserves more careful examination than it has received so far. It is based on the recognition of the fact that economic aid received on a bilateral basis is not enough. Secondly, it is felt that emphasis on regional needs and interests would tend to counteract bickerings and misunderstandings sometimes generated by discriminat- ing American aid. Thirdly, the regional approach emphasises the need for inter-regional economic co-operation which is conducive to intra-regional trade and to stable and peaceful economic relations. Finally, such an approach puts foreign aid in proper perspective as an aid to economic development and not as the basis of economic development. It may be pointed out that these basic principles are in accord with what may be called the Colombo Plan approach. President Eisenhower’s special fund operating through, or in conjunction with, the Colombo Plan agency is, therefore, calculated to put external aid to Asia on a new and more effective footing.

What broad purposes is the special Fund likely to serve? The purposes mentioned in this context are:

1) Development of intra-regional trade, and
2) Provision of credit to enable Asian countries to tide over short-term balance of payments difficulties.

Asian economies are said to be competitive, and not complementary, economies and, therefore, the scope for intra-regional trade is naturally small. But the extent of diversity of production which already exists and which can form the basis of a large volume of intra-regional trade should not be underestimated. Before the war South-East Asia had a large volume of intra-regional trade in tropical products, particularly rice and fish, the total value of which was estimated at $400 million. There has been a certain degree of primary industrial development in this region over the years. Some countries have also developed their secondary industries. But there is no reason why intra-regional trade should not develop while South-East Asian countries are passing through a process of concurrent economic development. In fact there is every reason why it should be possible to utilise the proceeds of foreign loans or foreign economic aid for the purpose of stimulating sales and purchases, within the Asian region, of essential light capital goods, consumer goods and foodstuffs which Asian countries would need in order to develop their economies without internal inflationary pressures and serious balance of payments difficulties. Clearly President Eisenhower’s special Fund is not meant for financing economic development in Asian countries and thereby raising the volume of intra-regional trade to a high level. What it seeks to achieve is to provide credit by means of which primary producing countries of Asia will be able to meet their...