

**Resource Persons' Meet for sharing the experience and lessons of Training Programme
on Panchayati Raj held in Satyabadi Block
Venue-CYSD Conference Hall,
Dt- 12.8.05.**

Background

With a view to strengthening Panchayat Raj System in Satyabadi Block of Puri district, 'The Humanity', in support of Concern World Wide, an International NGO, has undertaken a pilot project to carry out a massive awareness campaign with involvement of all sections of people. As a first step in this direction, the organization had organized a series of capacity-building training programme for the PRI functionaries like Sarapanchs, Samiti Members, Ward members, GP Secretaries and Executive Officers. During this training programme, the organization had involved a good number of resource persons hailing from different walks of life, who not only provided training on different aspects of Panchayat system but also got themselves abreast of the ground reality that the PRI system with its myriad problems was passing through at the moment. In the process of sharing of their knowledge and experience with the trainees they did also gather further clarity and understanding about the actual functioning of the system at grass roots level. The resource persons, who were involved in this training process spanning three months, had faced a lot of questions from the trainees basically relating to the difficulties and problems they were facing in the field. It was a novel experience for the resource persons themselves too. As suggested by the resource persons to share their experiences in a common forum and to help formulate a collective action plan for the further measures to be taken to strengthen the PR system in days ahead, a Resource Persons' Meet for the purpose became a felt necessity.

Accordingly a Sharing Workshop for Resource Persons was held at Conference Hall of CYSD, Bhubaneswar in the afternoon of 12th August 2005. **Mr. Pradip Pradhan, Secretary 'The Humanity' and Project Coordinator** first of all welcomed the participants and briefed them about the objectives of the session. In course of his talk, Mr. Pradhan gave broad details of the ongoing training programme to strengthen Panchayatiraj in Satyabadi Block of Puri district. **Mr. Jayanta Kumar Hota, the Chairman of the Satyabadi Block presided over the meeting** and informed all about its agenda. Mr. Hota in his opening remarks observed that he was grateful for the series of activities undertaken by 'The Humanity' to sensitize the PRI representatives in his Block. Then **Mr. Ramakanta Behera, the Training Coordinator** presented a summarized version of the several programmes and activities undertaken by 'The Humanity' for capacity-building of the PRIs involving all the G.P.s of Satyabadi Block.

Then **Ms. Sanjukta Sahany from 'Concern Worldwide'** the international agency supporting 'The Humanity' in respect of this project shared a few words with the participants. She said the current project in Satyabadi Block was a pilot project, being experimented in the State of Orissa. If the project met its prime objective of boosting the efficacy of participatory governance at grass roots level, then they might go for a massive campaign and advocacy for devolution of powers to the PRIs covering the whole State. She expressed her satisfaction that the resource persons of the project in stead of being typical NGO leaders hailed from diverse disciplines and professions and are eminent in their respective fields. Ms. Sahany hoped that with the continued contributions and feedback of these resource persons would prove immensely valuable in getting the main objective achieved in due course i.e. the empowerment of the institutions of grassroot democracy. She further hoped that a constructive and effective strategy would emerge from the deliberations the present meeting as to how to move the pilot project forward from where it was then. .

Deliberations by the resource Persons

Mr. Nirakar Behura: He said that the training programme by its nature was a profound exercise in thinking and rethinking on the part of all centring round the knotty issues confronting PRIs at ground level. The PRI representatives were found on the whole to be quite curious and receptive to learn new ideas and suggestions on these issues.

Mr. Behura suggested that a TOT (Training-of-Trainers) might be organized for the resource persons, where they could be armed with more information on PR related matters and with newer methods of presentation for impacting the trainees. He suggested that a Monthly Bulletin such as *Panchayati Raj Suchana* by name might be occasionally brought out covering updated information on working of Panchayatiraj in Orissa and elsewhere in the country.

Mr.Madhusudan Das, Social Activist

Mr. Das who had imparted training to the volunteers on the 'role of youth in national development and Panchayatiraj' said that a good number of volunteers from among the youth of the concerned areas should be mobilized and trained so as to serve as catalysts and watchdogs to ensure proper functioning of the Panchayat raj in the villages. He also stressed the need for improving the quality and impact of the training programmes by way of organizing TOT for the resource persons.

Mrs.Rituparna Mohanty:

Mrs.Mohanty observed that the youth volunteers could really provide the social leadership to the cause of social change in their respective areas by way of constructive collaboration to the PRIs. Their skill deserved to be upgraded for taking the message of Panchayatiraj to the people. If empowered, they could really fight for real power to be given to the PRIs for control over local resources. She further suggested that a massive campaign and advocacy programme was also required to influence the process of policy level changes.

Mr. Ranjan Rout:

Mr. Rout observed that the existing Acts and provisions relating to Panchayatiraj speak one thing, while the ground reality demanded something else. There is a glaring mismatch between the system in vogue and the real needs of the people. He further said that notwithstanding the loud platitudes mouthed by our legislators and bureaucrats about the Panchayats as self-governing institutions, the present generation of PRIs for all practical purposes are working as agents of the Central and State Govt.s just to carry out the schemes and programmes imposed from above. To make the PRIs really effective, there needs to be a people's movement. Otherwise it is not a far-off day, when the Panchayats might work as agents of private organizations. One insurance company has already ventured to use the Panchayat for their lucrative business. For the genuine development of the Panchayat, alternative ways and means have to be devised. The main aim of the proposed reforms should be that the Panchayat can address to its problems without depending every time on Govt. funds. He suggested the need for undertaking a mass awareness campaign to sensitize and familiarizes all concerned with the pitfalls and prospects of the PR system.

Mr.Nihar Dash Pattanaik:

Mr. Pattanaik stressed the need for a hundred percent participation of the PRI representatives in the training programmes to be organized in future. Those who have not been able to attend the last chain of training programmes should be covered in a special training programme to be organized exclusively for them. In a few cases the women members of PRIs were seen to be accompanied and guided by their husbands and relatives. So we should allow the male relatives of such women members to come together to our training programmes. A focus of our would-be training programme should be to raise the level of

knowledge, information and articulation of the women members, so that they would in due course give up their dependence on their male relations.

Mr. Chitta Behera:

He raised a critical question, which according to him deserved to be sorted out first before we could think of strengthening the PRIs under the present dispensation. That moot question is, why the Panchayat has till date no control over the local resources and why it doesn't function as an institution of self-governance in real sense? Mr. Behera said, there is an inbuilt anomaly in the Constitution itself, which prevents the PRIs from working as self-governing institutions. Most people have been misled to believe that Panchayats are now endowed with powers over 29 subjects as mentioned under the 11th Schedule of the Constitution. But the 7th Schedule of the Constitution which contains only Central, State and Concurrent Lists give power over these very subjects to the State and Central Government. And they continue to exercise their power over these subjects even after the 11th Schedule was added to the Constitution as per the Article 243(G) following the 73rd Amendment. Only if these subjects would have been removed from the State, Central and Concurrent Lists and then put together under a separate List called Local List under the same 7th Schedule, then the Panchayats would have been endowed with real powers. In that case, a separate 11th Schedule, unconnected with the 7th Schedule should not have been added at all. Real power means a combination of the legislative, executive and judicial powers. And Panchayats today unlike the Central and State Governments don't possess such real powers. So another Constitution amendment is required to amend the 7th Schedule and insert a Local List therein for the Panchayats to administer its subjects. People might scoff at Panchayats to run courts and police, but just look at the Section 154 of Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1965 on Panchayat Police and Adalati Panchayat, which is legally in force even today. This legislation at least theoretically upholds the idea of Panchayat running its executive and judiciary besides being a legislature itself.

Echoing the recommendation of the Report of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution 2002, Mr. Behera urged that we should go for a continuing and in-depth discourse on such Constitutional anomalies on the status of Panchayats at different levels.

Mr. K.J. Pattnaik, Expert on Micro-planning

Sharing the views of Mr. Chitta Behera, he said that during the training programme, the PRI representatives were found to be repeatedly telling that they didn't have any resource worth the name. They further queried, how could they run the Panchayat with the meagre and pre-earmarked amounts obtained from the Govt. under different heads. He suggested that all the natural resources available within the Panchayat should be handed over to the Panchayat itself. Otherwise the Panchayat cannot plan for itself. No plan worth the name can be formulated on the basis of resources provided by the Govt. A larger advocacy drive at policy level was required to press for the hand-over of all resources to the Panchayat.

Mr. Digambar Swain, FEO, Satyabadi

Giving a feedback about his experience as a GPEO (Gram Panchayat Extension Officer) in the Satyabadi Block and as well sharing his experience of the training programme just held, he said that he had taken the training class almost in all training programmes from the beginning because of his personal interest. It was an excellent programme. He suggested, (1) there should be separate training sessions for the Ward members only, and then for Sarapnchs, Samiti Members, Secretary and Executive Officers combined,. (2) large-scale village level awareness programme is highly required along with distribution of information materials like leaflets and posters etc. (3) Launching of an advocacy campaign for inclusion of Local List in the 7th Schedule after striking out the 11th Schedule, (4) *There should be an independent grievance cell to resolve the disputes relating to Panchayats within a stipulated time period.* (5) *a few case studies need to be prepared as to how the Govt circulars issued from time to time contradict the spirit of Gram Sabha.*

Prof. Radhamohan

Giving a patient hearing to the discussions that went off, he advised that there was no place for cynicism or pessimism for the activists working for reform of Panchayatiraj. To substantiate his point, he culled an instance from his experience in the remote past. When the Banks were nationalized, most people at once took the news at its face value and thought that the nationalized Banks would henceforth provide easy and liberal loan to the poor peasants. But the ground reality remained as before for quite a long time. As a matter of fact, the behaviour of the bankers took a long time to undergo a change as desired by the Bank Nationalisation. Similarly, a day will come when the powers of Panchayat shall prove to be the genuine reality unlike today's situation. Conceding that there might be a genuine need for Constitutional reforms to empower the Panchayats, he however advised that all have to work unitedly to strengthen the Panchayat System of governance. He further admitted that when the elites seated at the upper echelons of our power structure formulate the policies and programmes for Panchayats, those are bound to miss the critical input that is required for real transfer of power to the Panchayats. Prof. Radhamohan then made some specific suggestions that could be acted upon by the Panchayatiraj activists. First, messages on Panchayat and devolution of power to *Panchayats should be broadcast through electronic media and community radio on a regular basis. Secondly, a subject on Panchayats should be included in the Course Curriculum of the Schools and Colleges. Thirdly, there should be a larger campaign advocating the local control over local resources. We should prepare a vision document for Panchayat at least for the next 25 years. Fourthly, the MP and MLA LAD Funds should be spent through the aegis of Panchayats for the all-round development of villages.* Then he suggested the following concrete steps that can be taken by the Panchayat to give a pro-people orientation to these bodies-

- 100% enrolment and retention in the schools.
- 100% free from malnutrition.
- 100% free from infant mortality
- Panchayat level planning for agricultural development
- Pursuit of suitable non-farm enterprises.
- Debate around 73rd Constitution amendment.

At last, Mr. Jayant Hota, President of the meeting concluded the session with the following major recommendations.

1. There should be a training provision for the trainers to upgrade their knowledge, understanding and skills on devolution of power to Panchayats.
2. Massive awareness campaign to be undertaken at village level.
3. Cultural team to be formed to carry out the message to the people at grass root level.
4. More training for the youth volunteers to be organized.
5. Dialogue and discourse on real devolution of power to Panchayat and the necessary amendment of the 7th Schedule to be organized across the State.
6. A VISION Document for Panchayat for at least 25 years to be prepared to boost the campaign at the State level.
7. Electronic media and Print media to be mobilized to cover more stories on Panchayat.
8. Massive policy-level advocacy campaign should be launched to hand over resources to the Panchayats and to constitute statutory bodies to resolve all disputes relating to Panchayats.
9. Preparation of case studies on both success and failure of Panchayats in addressing to basic issues of the people in the villages.

**Report Prepared by
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