

## Official Papers

# Working of Community Projects and NES

Evelyn Wood

*It is an odd fact, that most of the admiration for the Community Projects and National Extension Service, and for the Programme Evaluation Organisation as their determined critic, comes from foreigners.*

*Yet a spell of living among village people should convince any one that here, if nowhere else, a new life is beginning for India, perhaps for the whole civilized world.*

A GOVERNMENT which supports critical organs with the duty of probing into its own activities is demonstrably in good health. The Programme Evaluation Organisation (P E O) was the first such organ; now, at rather a less official level, comes Industrial Management Unit for Research and Planning (IMRUP). More power to these elbows at the sides of Government! May they keep acutely angular! The Directorship of the P E O has changed. But this Third Annual Report' is no less critical than its predecessors. Further, it is published at a time when the whole of the Extension Service as a rural development mechanism seems to be in a critical state. The last session of the Lok Sabha discussed Community Development and the National Extension Service at great length; and the ministerial response laid the responsibility for further examination and recommendations squarely on the shoulders of the P E O' This is an honour: to be regarded officially as a permanent Commission of constructive investigation, and the P E O will have to work hard to keep earning such an accolade.

This report gives every indication of the P E O's continued ability to evaluate, within the very broad frame of reference given; and no less of its fertility in constructive suggestions. The N E S has growing pains, and these are duly examined, suggestions for palliative treatment being made, even if no radical therapy can now be defined.

The C P A

may have started the right way,

but the N E S

has got itself into a bit of a mess'

Don't let's have the P E O

saying, in 1961, "I told you so!"

There is this danger that the P E O's

\* Evaluation Report on Working of Community Projects and N E S blocks—2 volumes: Main & Summary, 230 & 17 pp Programme evaluation Organization of the Planning Commission. April 1956.

excellent, constructive advice may go unregarded. There are ominous signs of this. For example, to meet the problem of field-records, the P E O designed a form of report to simplify and standardize cumulative news of what happens in the villages. It seems that the Extension field-workers just won't use the P E O's system.

### Extension is a Two-Way Channel

There seems to be a growing realization in the P E O that plans and programmes cannot just be made for village folk and planted by Extension workers. There is constant need for criticism of the programmes by all sorts of village people. This is why the "First Reactions" Report of the P E O was so valuable; and it may therefore be hoped that some of the further studies, which are listed in Appendix I of this Report (pp 63-66) may indicate more of the changing needs and values of village people, besides their negative reactions to Community and Extension programmes worked out for them by non-villagers'

Records by field-workers are vitally necessary for this very reason of logging the changing attitudes and abilities of village folk. The special features of the Community Projects tended to mask the needs and values of ordinary people in the villages. As this P E O's Report now recognizes (not in as many words, of course!), the amenities which account for the additional finances of C P's over N E S Blocks are actually 30 much bribery to get people in the villages to work together on an official programme.

Section II on pp 13-14 of the Report opens up the whole question of tapping the villagers's practical knowledge. This is a pregnant suggestion. It might have been considered that farmers know how to farm, and that all the gram sevaks who are briefly trained in agriculture can offer is a few new tricks of this trade, for simple and controlled experiment by the village-farmers, and

in their own conditions. But here the P E O slips up. On pp 40-41, it is seriously proposed that, selected cultivators should have the benefit of "comprehensive advice" from agriculture-trained gram sevaks, who will teach the farmers scientific farming. Well! . . . I have seen a gram sevak try this on with a Kannadiga Gowda, and I must say I blushed for the poor boy!

On the other hand the P E O points out that Block Development Officers (R D O's) are mostly revenue men, and suggests that there is no function which they can serve so efficiently as that of being "area specialists". This is a really magnificent concept; if it is adopted, it can really lodge Extension as a permanent, constructive service in rural India. But the advice can only be fruitful if the Block Development Officer sticks to the same Block for many years. And a tested vocation for the work is also required. How many official Extension workers have such a vocation comparable to that of a Buddhist Bikkhu-or would even be permitted to think about it? Aren't they just shoved out into the rural development field, without being asked whether they want to go and work for and with village people, or not?

### Jungle of Development Agencies

There are more topics under Extension between villagers and better educated people to-day. It was possible to start off the Community Projects with a few, crude targets. That won't satisfy village people any longer. We have advanced in complexity. This Report reflects the complexity, and it inevitably reads rather confusedly in attempting to deal with values in the many fields of activity which are now involved,

The attempt to bring other agencies besides the Extension Service into the tally of input in the rural development field is new this year, and much to be commended. But besides the "regular", old established Departments of Agriculture,

Public Works, Health and Education, there are other development agencies at work to-day which are less noticed by the PEO. For example, the Central Social Welfare Board (which does get a mention) cuts across most of the fields of work of all the others, and with scant reference to or collaboration with them. In the field of rural industry, the All India Khadi and Village Industries Board, now under the Ministry of Production; the All India Handicrafts Board; and the Handloom Organization of the Ministry of Commerce and Industries all offer pandity and some funds to rural industry. Should not the NES be the channel? Is it?

Panchayats are at last allowed to come under criticism. On pp 18-19 the PEO raises for the first time the radical difference between the statutory and the traditional panchayat. Hitherto, it has always been assumed that the statutory panchayat is referred to; and it is refreshing to see an official publication so forthright about the defects of these very unproven institutions.

With the acceptance of the BDO as the "area specialist 2" for his Development Block, it seems odd that the PEG should question, on p 22, "to what extent" other development agencies should accept that their "activities will be channelled through the project or block agency". Surely no proper question can arise or this principle? Certainly all official bodies concerned with rural development and, let us hope, all unofficial bodies seeking to promote or implement change in the villages—should at least keep the BDO fully Informed of their operations and results. If not, chaos and resentment in the minds of village folk are the most likely outcome of un-coordinated effort.

The PEO's championship of the gram sevak as a man much put upon by his seniors, who is diverted unconstructively from his primary, educational function, runs from pp 22-25. These pages should be compulsory reading for all secretariat personnel, from Ministers downwards, in so far as such desk-experts are concerned with rural development.

### Conclusion

Although this PEO's report is not obsessed with certain a priori "improvements" which village folk "must" accept, as were the two previous Reports, this third year's

review is packed full of constructive ideas. The confused handling of tabulated material and the comments thereon is probably unavoidable. I would guess that there is never enough time to work on the presentation of the collected data. I would also guess that the preoccupation with such physical data as crowd the tables is not at all a PEO vice; in fact, the comments on such preoccupations in the body of the Report suggest that the PEO is fighting the battle of the real objectives of the Extension movement against those bureaucrats (of whom many are, despite themselves, in the field) who feel the need for concrete economic objectives instead of the Planning Commission's magnificent concept. This was quoted in extenso at the beginning of the Second Year's PEO's Report; it does not need repeating in this review.

It is not the fault of the PEO that the writers of the Report appear to have bitten off more technical matter than they can chew. This indigestion is common to the whole of the rural development organization of governments in India. As such, the PEO rightly sees the complaint as one for systematic treatment.

If many of the statements made in the body of the report—and, more particularly, in the Summary of 17 pages—appear too sweeping, too generalized, it must be realised that the human canvas of this picture is the biggest ever yet attempted. The changes in mind, heart and detailed behaviour of three hundred million people are being depicted. Moreover, these people probably vary as individuals and as groups more than any other contiguous block of the same size, anywhere in the world. One must admire the courage of the development staff in tackling this immense task, and no less the PEO for its equal courage and greater detachment in forming a critical analysis of the new movement, as it grows in scope and complexity.

It is an odd fact that most of the admiration for the CPA and its children, the (Community Projects and NES; and for the PEO as their determined critic, comes from foreigners. Indians are only too accustomed to destructive comment on what goes on in the villages. Yet a spell of living among village people should convince anyone that here, if nowhere else, a new life is beginning for India, perhaps for the whole civilized world.

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