

THE CHALLENGES OF FACILITATION

Field report by a Course Participant



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The paragraphs below are extracts translated from a field report written in Hindi submitted to Manavodaya by one of the students of the programme that highlight important aspects of the process of facilitation, the challenges faced in building trust, in learning about the multi dimensionality of problems and in enabling people to move away from the mindset of receiving outside grants to building their own institution for tackling various problems. The field work was done after lectures, tests, assignments and classroom interaction on various subjects like understanding poverty, principles of participation, methods of communication together with reflective sessions on purpose of work and self development through yoga.

BUILDING TRUST

The Challenge of Staying with People

The family that agreed to host me had only one room where the four of us would live for the next month : husband, wife, their grandson and myself. I got a lot of affection from the family as they treated me like their own daughter. I too helped them in household chores like cooking, cleaning, fetching water and occasionally also helped their grandson with his homework in the evening. I had brought with me some food items like dal, chana and some clothes for their grandson. So they were very happy and I got to learn about the living conditions of the poor.

However, this was not easy at all. I had never lived in such conditions before. The biggest difficulty lay in going to the open field for toilet and also to bathe in the open. As a result I did not take bath for days and went to the field in the dark before sunrise. I could never sleep properly all through my stay due to an unknown fear. I could never relish the food they ate, so I often ate just once a day, sometimes porridge and potato vegetable only.

I could also not get accustomed to fetching water from the hand pump early in the morning. But as the couple was old, I would help them in getting water for the house and the cattle, something I did not like at all but felt that I should share their burden while I am living there.

There was no electricity in their house so I had to go to the neighbour's house to charge my mobile regularly to help me take photographs. The couple did not take electricity connection due to their inability to foot the bill and preferred to stay in the dark.

However, all this helped me in building a trusting relationship with villagers. In the evening I would see people sitting around a fire in the open. So I would go there and talk to them about life in the village. They started accepting me as their own and this helped me in meeting my objective of learning from them.

SOME IMPORTANT ISSUES

Identified from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Exercises

1. Drinking water availability is a major problem. Between 368 families living in the village there are only 6 hand pumps in working order. There are 6 wells in addition of which 2 have dried.
2. There is a primary school (upto class 5) and a junior school(upto class 8) in the village, but most families still do not send their girls to school.
3. Due to shortage of water major crops in the village are those requiring less water like millets, mustard and chick pea. The village was famous for red chilly produce but few people plant it now due to absence of irrigation arrangement.
4. Many farmers sow wheat, but nobody is happy with the agriculture due to high cost of production and poor returns. Consequently, some families are migrating away from the village. The mapping exercise revealed that four families have permanently migrated and their house is locked.
5. A focus group discussion revealed that some toilets were recently constructed in the village as a part of a government supported programme but only among those families that were favoured by the village head. Most poor families were left out.

The student writes that in the focus group discussion she highlighted the need for solidarity among people and mentioned that if the people were organised, the village head would have some fear and would talk to them about where to install toilets to avoid controversy. She told them that she would assist them in organisation building and writing to higher authorities. She then helped the group to draft a letter to authorities for toilet construction and asked them to send a reminder after 15 days if there was no response.

She concludes from the experience that while it was not easy to convince people, one must know how to communicate with them with suitable background knowledge and this makes it easy to move forward.



FIRST VILLAGE MEETING

According to the report, the meeting was well attended. The student writes that she was assisted by a local youth, Yashpal, who had been selected as the local facilitator because of his interest in social activities and willingness to help when needed. (Identification of a local facilitator was an important part of the work programme).

Yashpal introduced the subject of building people's groups for development, for better utilisation of grants received from the government. The student suggested writing to

authorities for sanction of an intermediate college in the village. Many other subjects like better health, issues in agriculture like better seeds and organic fertiliser were raised and discussed in the meeting.

The report concludes that people do understand what is being said provided someone can facilitate the discussion properly. It is more difficult to get the people to come for the meeting, especially the women who had to be escorted from their homes.

GROUP FORMATION

A separate meeting was organised for group formation where the student reports that she started the meeting by asking a few questions :

“Are you able to avail the benefits offered in government programmes ?”

To this the people answered by saying that the benefits did not go into right hands.

She further asked “Why ?”

Observing silence in the meeting she reports that she went on to explain the need for solidarity among people, that money is important in life, but equally important is to work towards self respect and the power to do things.

She writes that one elderly person immediately supported her views and said that if there is self respect and self confidence, one can overcome all difficulties. The women too responded and asked her what to do.

She then explained the concept of self help groups also why existing groups formed on the basis of greed had failed. She further explained the need to share joys and assist one another through the group, the benefit of starting with prayers. She then asked the women if they are ready to stick together in a group and not get misled by outsiders.

While most women agreed, one woman asked what benefit would accrue to the members. The student reports that this really irritated her as she had already explained everything but thankfully other women were able to bring her along. Thus the group was formed and the necessary rules and regulations were discussed and adopted.

By the time this report was written two women had already taken loan from the group for medicine and marriage expenses. The report gives a full presentation of the group accounts too. The group was preparing to raise other problems in the village and writing to authorities if needed.

This section of the report ends by a concluding observation that the groups should always be formed on the basis on trusting relationships and never on the basis of greed which becomes the basis of its failure.

OVERALL LEARNING

“ I did not know much about a village environment before and I learnt to adjust to the circumstances by living there.

I learnt to control my anger, but the best thing I learnt was to have patience and courage in working, not to hurry as then the work is not done properly.

I learnt how to talk to people in the village, how to build trusting relationships, so that they take us as their own and tell us the truth of their circumstances.

I learnt how the poor lived their lives. Earlier I always looked at people above our level of living and insisted on nice gifts from my parents. Now I realise the need to look at people living below our level, not those above.

I saw very hard working women in the village which gave me inner courage. Whenever I feel weak, I think of them, how they remain happy even when they toil so hard. They are not worried, so I should also not worry and start work again.

There are a lot of deficiencies in the village. But first we have to prepare ourselves only then we can teach others. We cannot bring about change till we change our thinking and are able to, at least, sit with a poor person.

We have to mobilise people and build more and more groups as only then development will take place. We have to transform their way of thinking so that they are forced to think about their life.

We have to develop local facilitators who have an interest in social arena and are able to give time to the poor and enable government programmes to benefit the poor. In fact we have to raise awareness in such a manner that the people themselves come forward and demand their rights. Such a change is essential.”



Teaching Yoga in the village school

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