

# MANAVODAYA

Manavodaya, a community building organisation in India, has developed important ways of working that other organisations and individuals can learn from.

Manavodaya's approach has been developed in rural India, working alongside village communities where poverty is at its most extreme. The approach can be used by anyone who wants to make positive and sustainable social change. Indeed, it can be used by anyone who wants to be more effective in their work or relationships.



## The three key elements to this way of working are:

1. **Power shift** - working so that power of the people who are being helped or supported grows stronger
2. **Attitude change** - it is by developing our own attitudes – especially humility – that makes action more effective
3. **Self help** - facilitation enables even the most disenfranchised groups to take control of their own situations

## 1. Power shift

It is vital that power and control remains with people themselves. Often, when we help others, we do not notice how - in helping - we can strip away power from the person who is being helped.

If professionals are to contribute to sustainable social change, then the professional culture must change, so that power shifts from the worker to the people supported. The importance of this shift is acknowledged in many official statements. However, while organisations may understand the theory, the actual shift to a different way of working is very difficult. Organisational culture, assumptions and working practices determine that, although

the words change, things go on much as before.

## **2. Attitude change**

Manavodaya's approach interrupts these habits by rethinking the contribution of the professional. Workers are challenged to move to a position of humility in their relationship with people they support: they can be helpful to those who want to change but they have no power to make them change. This move to a more humble position can be started by taking practical steps.

Another important aspect of this approach is creating a personal state of calm. Better outcomes and a more effective use of time are achieved if we are able to adopt a more

considered approach and escape the target-driven, fire-fighting style that can dominate our lives. This state of calm can be achieved by spending a little time each day in quiet reflection about ourselves and our actions – perhaps combined with yoga, meditation or any other method which quiets over-stimulated minds.

Taking responsibility for our own attitudes and behaviours is the start of any genuine process of change. Attempts by others to enforce change by imposing new patterns of behaviour rarely have any lasting benefit.

### **3. Self help**

In India, Manavodaya has supported the creation of hundreds of self-managing groups among low-caste villagers living

very far below the international poverty line. Groups are usually started with women who are in debt to moneylenders and who may be bonded labourers (effectively slaves to moneylenders). The techniques used for establishing and maintaining such groups are directly applicable everywhere to groups of poor, disabled or isolated people.

Good facilitation, that enables people to build on their own strengths and which enables people to work together and provide help to each other is far more powerful than patronage - however generous or well-intentioned.

## **Eight Steps for Sustainable Change**

Dialogue with thousands of villagers and professionals (including many from the

West) have concluded that there are eight practical steps that any individual can take; each of which can help grow the strength and self-discipline that will enable more effective action:

1. Self-reflection - take time to look within yourself
2. Group reflection - take time to reflect with others
3. Time sharing - give some of your time to other people
4. Income sharing - share some of your money with others
5. Local purchase - buy what you need from local people
6. Self discipline - work on reducing your faults

7. Speech awareness – to speak with reflection

8. Shared domestic responsibilities - join in the chores