

## Six Projects from Rural India

# Non-Formal Education for Sustainable Development

## I. Introduction

The Indian Institute of Education (IIE), Pune, India, which is one of the ten member institutes of the APPEAL Research and Training Consortium (ARTC), has undertaken an investigation of projects in India that emphasize innovative approaches to non-formal education for sustainable development. These projects focus on disadvantaged members of rural society (women, tribal minorities, lower castes) and (in addition to local empowerment) address literacy and primary education, vocational education, health education, improvement of the environment, and the decentralization of financial and administrative powers to local levels.

The IIE has been engaged over the last quarter of a century in experimenting with innovative ideas for the spread of literacy and primary education through formal and non-formal modes and for the empowerment of rural women and other oppressed people. Its model of non-formal primary education (called PROPEL or Promotion of Primary and Elementary Education) has been used in other parts of the country. The model is considered an appropriate replicable alternative for bringing primary education within the reach of all children with due regard to community lifestyles and people's expectations. Two other IIE projects, the Vigyan Ashram and the Centre for Education and Development of Rural Women, have been widely acclaimed and are also covered by this survey. The former project provides vocational education on the principle of



*learning while working* and the latter is an action research project for the education and development of rural women with a view to empowering them to become agents of rural reconstruction.

India is a vast country and there are many projects in rural areas oriented toward improving both formal and non-formal education. However, there are three in particular that deserve special attention because of their focus on previously unserved or underserved populations:

1. Lok Jumbish and its programmes for literacy, education and the empowerment of rural women in Rajasthan
2. The Integrated Abujhmarh Tribal Development Project undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission for the development of tribal people in Madhya Pradesh
3. Agragamee and its rural education programmes for the tribal people of Orissa

The survey of these six programmes was conducted by an IIE research team under the leadership of its Director General, Dr. S.K. Gandhe. Outside agencies provided assistance in the case of two of the projects (Abujhmarh and Agragamee) The research team obtained data from available documents and supplemented their interviews of students and staff with first-hand observation of project activities.

Full details of these projects and their programmes, as well as information about a seventh project (Rashtriya Seva Samiti, Andhra Pradesh) not included here for reasons of space, are found in the full version of the study report submitted to APPEAL, UNESCO Bangkok.

## II. The PROPEL Project (Promotion of Primary and Elementary Education)

IIE believes that education and development are closely interrelated and that the people at the grassroots level are the makers of development while government agencies are merely facilitators. The PROPEL project assumes that *Education for All* can best be organized through community mobilization.

PROPEL has evolved through three phases with an emphasis on action research and the mobilization of rural communities for educational development. During Phase I of the project (1979-1985), nearly 4,500 children from 110 villages in different agro-climatic zones were reached under the non-formal education programme involving local leadership and communities. For this purpose 263 NFE centres were established. Phase II (1985-1988) covered 669 children in 40 NFE centres at 35 newly selected villages in poor, drought-prone and hilly areas. Emphasis in this phase was on testing measures for community involvement by strengthening village education committees as local motivators and managers of primary education. In the third phase, there have been attempts to develop a replicable planning and development model to facilitate training programmes in community-level planning for education that can be set up by voluntary agencies and government officials. During this phase more than 5,500 out-of-school children were brought into the stream of primary education through 178 NFE centres and learning camps. Emphasis has been on reaching girls, the largest group excluded from schooling because of the household division of labour and deep-rooted social prejudices.

Currently, PROPEL serves a population of 120,000 living in approximately 18,000 households scattered over 4 *blocks* or sub-districts in Maharashtra State southeast of the city of Pune.

### *Basic philosophy*

PROPEL believes in teamwork, good governance, and responding to local needs. It has encouraged micro-planning, thus passing responsibility for the project operation to people at the grassroots level. It acts as a catalyst and attempts to support community ownership of the project. Collaboration and participation of the villagers are prerequisites for all activities.



From the very beginning local community members are made aware of education problems in their community and participate in surveys of specific educational needs and facilities available. After the surveys have been analyzed and the community decides to take action, a village education committee is activated to help project staff set up an NFE centre, organize classes, and mobilize the community to serve the educational cause.

The village education committees (VECs) have been the chief vehicle ensuring community participation in the PROPEL project. Since 1992 these VECs have received legal sanction as well as political and administrative support. VECs are established by consensus at village council meetings and are expected to play a major role in convincing parents to place their out-of-school children in NFE centres.

### *Curriculum and materials*

The NFE community centre and its curriculum are the heart of the project's programmes in non-formal education. The curriculum espoused by PROPEL attempts to cover the basic content of the first four grades of the formal primary school curriculum. In addition, the curriculum emphasizes skills needed for everyday life in the community rather than securing entrance to further education. Local relevance is imperative as far as curriculum content is concerned, as all non-formal learners are poor, and most are older than children who attend formal schools. Curriculum content is designed to further the following ideals:

1. All children should become cultured, educated and self-respecting citizens.
2. Children's scientific temper should be nurtured.
3. The habit of self-learning should be encouraged.
4. The poverty in which children live should be countered by enabling them to organize their work systematically and learn new skills.
5. Children should become aware of the social conditions around them as well as the need for social change.

The PROPEL project's NFE curriculum proposed in the 1990s includes such subjects as language studies, mathematics, general and developmental knowledge, science, aesthetics, social skills, and physical fitness and relaxation. In particular, it emphasizes opportunities for girls to express themselves freely in speech, drawing, singing, drama, and other activities that help them to become socially competent, culturally creative citizens.

Unlike the formal system of education, PROPEL emphasizes locally relevant learning materials. The staff have regularly consulted local communities as well as specialists (linguists and psychologists) regarding the content and language of primers and readers. Many NFE materials are designed for self-learning and peer tutoring. Consequently, the materials have proven quite useful and efficient in the hands of semi-professional teachers. Materials belong to an NFE class, and are collectively shared by all students, which keeps the costs down. All materials are meant to improve literacy skills, as well as disseminate useful and practical information for everyday life.

### *Student evaluation*

One noteworthy innovation in the NFE programme is the absence of formal examinations. Evaluation of learning is based on the NFE teacher's daily diaries and students' continuous self-evaluation as well as testing of learning by peers during the students' group work activities. Self-testing is made possible by the preparation of graded evaluation materials, particularly in literacy (language) and arithmetic. Students are also encouraged to demonstrate their learning achievements daily to family members and periodically to the rest of the community. Particularly useful for public demonstrations of achievement are the community meetings during which the students can give speeches and thus show off what they have learned.

In addition, there are the biannual *bal jattras* (children's fairs). These events, which take place in a centrally located village, provide opportunities for singing, storytelling and games, and are thus settings for both recreation and informal evaluation of children's accomplishments. Students display their skills in the **three Rs** and are evaluated with simple test materials by teachers other than their own. The rationale for this innovation was the assumption that tests administered in the class would be neither useful nor relevant, because teachers might be tempted to pass all students to show good results, and the students might be constrained to copy one another's answers. This is what often happens in formal schooling due to the anxiety of both teachers and students.

However, to continue studies in the formal school, NFE students may take the formal Grade III or IV examinations. Several former non-formal education students have been admitted to formal schools. Achievement tests show that the competence of these students in many subjects is on par with, if not better than, the competence of formal education students.

### *Conclusion*

The PROPEL project has achieved some goals that clearly indicate changes in the social life of the project area. Over 90 out of 137 project villages had reached the goal of universal primary education by the year 1995. This means that in these communities all children of school-going age are either learning in formal schools, attending NFE centres or in some rare cases studying on their own and receiving systematic coaching from volunteers, teachers or family members. A great majority of the children in the area attend formal schools. This shows that the project has been able to raise awareness of the importance of basic education. Simultaneously, formal schools in the area have become more relevant to students' needs, and thus also more attractive to them.

PROPEL has reached children, especially girls, who would otherwise never have had the chance to learn. Moreover, it has shown that more lively, participatory teaching and community awareness of the importance

of education can stem the tide of dropouts and increase the quality of education, bringing universal elementary education a step closer.

What PROPEL has demonstrated so far is that in the matter of Education for All, breaking the barriers of educational orthodoxy is a tough task, but it can be tackled successfully if communities are mobilized and helped to determine their own educational and developmental destiny.

### III. The Centre for Education and Development of Rural Women (CEDRW)

In 1993, IIE's priorities – action research, social and economic development, improvement of the status of women – led to the establishment of the Centre for Education and Development of Rural Women (CEDRW) in the village of Shivapur about 25 kilometres southeast of Pune in Maharashtra State. The centre not only focuses on education and empowerment of rural women and girls, but also attempts to make them both participants in development as well as subjects of development.

A significant feature of the projects undertaken here is that they adopt an ethnological research approach combining the ideas of Paulo Freire on education and Gandhian principles of education for the rural masses. Freire argued that oppressed people had to reflect on their existing social condition and subsequently take action to bring about required changes. The Gandhian principles urge modification of the Anglo-Saxon model of education to include more participation by learners themselves.

The CEDRW is at present engaged in the operation of various activities, such as women's savings and credit groups, vocational programmes for dropout girls and for women 15-45 years of age, camps promoting health, nutrition and personality development, and the training of local farmers and artisans through *farmers clubs*.

#### *The Centre*

The CEDRW, which became functional in 1994, occupies one hectare of land outside the village of Shivapur. The infrastructure is simple and designed to harmonize with the rural setting. It consists of a workshop, administrative office, lecture-cum-dining hall, agro-exhibition hall and a preschool or child recreation centre. Apart from this, hostel facilities for 40 trainees, two self-contained guestrooms for visiting faculty, quarters for two academic staff and a residence for support staff are available.

From the total land allotted, one third is for the building and the remainder is used for a tree plantation and as experimental plots for various kinds of horticulture, including the cultivation of flowers, vegetables and medicinal plants.

#### *Objectives*

The Centre has the following objectives:

1. To develop a new system of rural education that will empower women to become agents of rural transformation
2. To evolve integrated activities for
  - ▶ women's personal development
  - ▶ women's educational development

- ▶ community development
- ▶ overall socio-economic change in the villages for sustainable development

### *Assumptions*

1. Education that goes beyond schooling has a major role to play in the process of development. This education, which is a lifelong process, is required to preserve human dignity and stimulate creativity among individuals.
2. The process of development must be given a holistic perspective and hence the community as a whole must be involved in this process.
3. Women's development cannot be considered in isolation from the development of men.

### *Mode of participation*

During informal meetings and discussions, community members initially identify the local problems faced by the community. The identified problems are prioritized according to the needs of the community. Subsequently, local representatives or *animators* are chosen from the community in order to establish linkages between the institute and the community. With the assistance of the animators and the community, and in consultation with the research team, an intervention or strategy is selected to tackle the problems. After implementation, the community itself evaluates the intervention on the basis of its success.

### *Projects undertaken*

The following are the major projects undertaken and conducted by the CEDRW.

#### *Vocational education programme*

The CEDRW, in response to the demand from many villagers, developed a vocational education programme for school dropout girls and women aged 15 to 45 years. The programme was introduced in 1997 and is presently being conducted at the Centre with assistance from the Department of Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The minimum qualification for the course is literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to Grade 3. At present, 34 students are attending the course, which lasts 6 months.

The course focuses on developing skills related to sewing, tailoring, embroidery, hand and machine knitting, and the preparation of items such as bags, purses and coverlets. In addition, there are lectures and discussions on topics related to social legislation, women's rights, work ethics, budget and accounts maintenance, marketing skills (communication), personal health and hygiene, family education, environmental health and labour law.

#### *Self-help (savings and credit) groups*

Another major achievement of the CEDRW is the formation of savings and credit groups for women, which have now spread to 17 villages. The success of these groups has led to the formation of a consortium, where two members, the chairman and treasurer of each group, meet occasionally to review the work and provide guidance to the others. It is interesting to note that the success of the women's groups has motivated the men to form their own.

### *Health education camps*

These camps were arranged especially for women who experience health problems. Simultaneously, there were attempts to make the community aware of the requirements of basic personal as well as environmental health and hygiene. For this purpose, doctors at the Primary Health Centre as well as private physicians offered their assistance. Later on, the villagers themselves requested information related to vision and oral hygiene, areas that posed special problems in the village. Village women, who volunteered and worked in teams, were responsible for convening the health education camp for these topics.

### *Child Recreation Centre*

In 1997 the CEDRW set up this centre to show that the parents and the community play a major role in the integrated development of children during the pre-school stage. In addition to preschool activities for young children (i.e., storytelling, games), the Centre also has a training programme for rural women to serve as preschool staff members. Parents are actively involved through regular parent meetings.

### *Farmers club*

This club, established by villagers in Shivapur and nearby communities, arranges meetings with visiting experts in order to keep up with advances in agricultural technology, especially as related to the cultivation of rice, a major crop in the area.

### *Conclusion*

The activities described above and their results show that the interventions made by the CEDRW have been successful in mobilizing the rural community, especially in regard to education and women's development. The series of camps that were conducted in response to the demand of the village women are sufficient proof of the growing awareness in the community. Furthermore, researchers observed that the women also participated actively at Centre meetings by expressing their views on certain issues raised. Other indicators of project success include the various articles prepared by the girl school dropouts during their vocational training programme and the men's emulation of the women's savings and credit groups.

On the whole, the developments occurring so far in Shivapur and other villages strengthen the need for adopting Freire's approach and Gandhian perspectives in rural development.

## **IV. The Vigyan Ashram**

The Vigyan Ashram near the village of Pabal in Maharashtra State has developed a system capable of educating and empowering school dropouts through training in basic science and technology at affordable cost and in an acceptable time frame. (The word *vigyan* means science and *ashram* denotes a place of simple living and high thinking.) The experimental project initiated by Dr. S.S. Kalbag in 1983, under the auspices of IIE, has developed a skills training programme that emphasizes ***learning while doing*** and ***servicing the community***. In 1985 this programme was approved by the Board of Secondary Education, Maharashtra, as a rural technology course and is still implemented in schools as a part of the technical stream. The course adopted in the school caters to both formal as well as non-formal education students. A similar course is also conducted exclusively for non-formal learners on a full-time basis at the ashram.

## Principles

1. The basic principle governing the Vigyan Ashram model is **learning while doing**. It is based on the assumption that working with your hands stimulates the intellect.
2. Technology is the application of science, and is the collaboration of head and hand.
3. Basic scientific procedures such as observation, measurement, recording, classification, documentation, and formulating and testing hypotheses are essential for everyone and can also be easily practised in everyday life.
4. Education means training for real life.
5. All labour is worthy of dignity and there are no such things as **white collar** or **blue collar** jobs.
6. Any education system to become relevant and life-based must enable learners to offer services to their community.

## General objectives

1. To integrate education with development
2. To stimulate the intellect in order to enable learners to reach their highest potential
3. To provide a broad spectrum of technical education through access to many modern technologies
4. To develop new opportunities in the rural economy through local support

## Specific objectives

1. To provide skill training in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, food processing, food preservation, soil science, sewing and knitting, electrical assembly, and equipment maintenance
2. To develop the ability to take appropriate management decisions, to quantify and document, and to do simple accounting, quality measurement and quality analysis
3. To develop individual self-confidence and self-respect

## Courses

The ashram offers a course titled **Introduction to Basic Technology** exclusively for non-formal education students. This course lasts one year. At present, schools in 15 villages also offer this course. In addition, there is the course in rural technology, which lasts almost a year (300 days) and is open to 20 students aged 17-25. This course consists of four *themes*, with related topics and skills, as indicated in the following table:

Theme	Topic	Resource Centre	Skills Developed
Living (human and society)	Home	Food lab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Prepare preservative food products e.g., jam, pickles, biscuits</li><li>▶ sewing and knitting</li></ul>
	Health	Rural lab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ provide first aid</li><li>▶ conduct pathological tests</li><li>▶ home remedies for common ailments</li><li>▶ oral rehydration therapy</li></ul>



Theme	Topic	Resource Centre	Skills Developed
Living (plants and animals)	Agriculture	3 acre plot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ plant and grow vegetables, crops</li> <li>▶ use of pesticides</li> <li>▶ irrigation</li> </ul>
	Animals	Poultry farm Cattle (goats, cows)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ undertake poultry and cattle raising</li> <li>▶ artificial insemination</li> <li>▶ diagnosing pregnancy</li> </ul>
Non-living (material)	Engineering	Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ undertake measurement</li> <li>▶ soldering, welding</li> <li>▶ use carpentry tools</li> <li>▶ repair tractors</li> <li>▶ construct buildings, equipment and geodesic domes</li> </ul>
Non-Living (Non-material)	Energy and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Water resource unit</li> <li>▶ Electrical lab</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ prepare energy devices-pressure stove, bio-gas stove.</li> <li>▶ maintenance of engines (diesel)</li> <li>▶ measure water table</li> <li>▶ install water pipeline, hand pump etc.</li> <li>▶ make electric circuits</li> </ul>

The students are divided into four groups, one for each of the course themes. They are rotated through all four themes for the duration of the course. Each student is required to undertake a project related to each of the themes. In addition, all students receive training in financial management skills such as estimating a budget, maintaining accounts, managing stock, and analyzing costs.

### Major achievements

1. A survey conducted in an area 25 kilometres around Pabal revealed that a large number of ex-ashramites have started small enterprises, workshops and poultry farms. These include welding works, fabricators, a photocopy shop, and women entrepreneurs who raise poultry. Other graduates have acquired sewing machines and become tailors.
2. Schools in the vicinity have benefited from offering the rural technology course. There have been increases in enrollment due to the entry of students from the neighbouring villages. The students have performed better in technical subjects as well as the subjects in the formal curriculum. There has also been an increase in the percentage of students passing the high school standard examinations administered throughout the state. Finally, the contributions of students to their home communities have facilitated closer co-operation between these communities and the schools.

### Conclusion

The Vigyan Ashram provides vocational and technical education to NFE learners directly at the grassroots level. It makes the course content more locally applicable by emphasizing the dignity of all labour and the necessary co-operation between *the head and the hand*. Nevertheless, in the future the Vigyan Ashram intends to move into the area of information communication technology by developing and applying computer software applicable for rural development programmes. Various kinds of software have already been used

as feasible and efficient media of instruction. However, computers do not replace instructors, nor will they reduce the importance and necessity of practical work.

## V. The Lok Jumbish Project: Education for Girls

If primary education is a matter of concern for the whole of India, it is a major worry for the state of Rajasthan, whose literacy rates are the lowest in the country. In 1991, the literacy rate for men was around 60 per cent but only 19 per cent for women. In other words, only one of five women in Rajasthan was able to read and write. In rural Rajasthan the situation is even worse, with only 11.6 per cent of the women being literate. In this context, a project like Lok Jumbish becomes essential. The Lok Jumbish Project aims at achieving the goal of Education for All through people's involvement and participation. (The name, *lok jumbish*, combines the Hindi word for *people* and the Urdu word for *movement*.) While many evaluations and reports have appeared dealing with Lok Jumbish and its success in the spread of primary education, here we focus on its work with respect to innovative programmes for the spread of education among girls. Although the project's efforts in improving enrollment and retention through intervention in the formal education process have been widely recognized, the emphasis here is on the various *non-formal methods* of education that are used to target marginalized populations, especially girls.

### *Project objectives*

The Lok Jumbish Project (LJP), an offshoot of earlier efforts, began in 1992 with funding from SIDA and support from the state and federal governments. The philosophy of the project is based on the belief that the mere provision of physical inputs is not sufficient for ensuring universal access to primary education. Instead, a strong partnership between parents, children and teachers is essential. The basic aim of this project is the universalization of primary education, with emphasis on both formal and non-formal education for all children up to 14 years of age. Non-formal education was indeed considered as a necessary tool for the spread of literacy to remote villages and socially conservative communities.

The LJP has developed a three-fold approach: 1) improving the quality of education through training teachers and overhauling the curriculum, 2) changing attitudes and developing trust in education among communities that are resistant to education due to socio-cultural values, and 3) creating an environment for women to participate in the system, thereby increasing girls' access to education. The long-term objectives of the LJP are:

- To provide access to primary education for all children below age 14
- To ensure that all children complete primary schooling
- To emphasize the quality of education
- To bring girls to the same level as boys and make education an instrument of women's equality
- To enable the poorest sections of society to participate equally in basic education
- To provide opportunities for lifelong education
- To effectively involve people in education management

The LJP's primary strategy has been to mobilize and involve the local community in the demand for better delivery of education services. The idea behind this is that in the course of time it becomes the community's own agenda and therefore sustainable. The LJP achieved these objectives by *environment building*, school mapping and micro-planning, improving existing school facilities, producing and supplying textbooks and learning materials, training teachers, and promoting non-formal education and women's development. The village education committee (initially the *village core team*) in each community is ultimately the body responsible for the long-term education of its children.

Starting up in 1992, the LJP completed its first phase in 1995. The second phase began in 1995 and ended in 1998. Unfortunately, the third phase, which was planned to begin in 1998, is still not yet under way. The total project expenditure over the five-year period amounted to Rs.1,524 million of which the SIDA contributed half, the Government of India one third and the State Government the rest.

The project is implemented through *blocks* or sub-districts, each block divided into clusters of 25-35 villages and with an average population of 150,000. Altogether, 75 blocks were covered under the Lok Jumbish Project by October 1999 comprising more than 12,000 villages, 305 clusters and about 11 million people. By that time, 529 new primary schools and 540 Shiksha Karmi schools were opened, 268 primary schools were upgraded to upper primary schools and 5,010 NFE centres (see below) were opened to supplement the formal system.

At present, LJP is winding up its activities in some areas, which will be soon taken over by the Government. After the SIDA stopped funding, activities have almost come to a standstill. Another international funding agency has already agreed in principle to take its place.

### *Lok Jumbish strategies for educating girls*

The LJP has tried to influence formal schooling in the area it serves through teacher training and curriculum revision. Specifically, the aim has been to make both teachers and curricula much more gender sensitive than before, so that schooling becomes a more positive experience for girls.

In addition, the LJP has introduced a number of innovative institutions related to non-formal education. In addition to village NFE centres, these include education camps and forums just for girls and workshops for adolescent girls and boys together.

In all these efforts, the principle of gender sensitivity is woven into the fabric of the Lok Jumbish educational approach. It serves the cause of education for girls indirectly by changing attitudes, challenging social stereotypes, and redefining girls' roles paving the way to the empowerment of women through education.

### *Breathing life into schools: intervention in formal education*

Lok Jumbish took over malfunctioning government schools in backward areas for implementation of its agenda. The schools remained as they were in terms of structure and personnel. The intervention took the form of teacher training and introduction of a revised curriculum. The entire exercise was intended to improve the quality of education in government primary schools and make them attractive to village children and parents. At the same time, village committees and core groups worked to raise awareness of the importance of education amongst the villagers.

One important outcome of these efforts was an increase in participation, especially of girls in primary education. The average percentage of overall participation in primary education increased from 46.7 per cent in 1994 to a substantial 76.8 per cent in 1998. The girls' participation rate also jumped from 29.4 to 68.1 per cent. The following table provides a brief summary of the improved participation rate in primary education over the years.

Other data show improved school retention rates among girls attending LJP schools, as well as higher test scores in Hindi language and mathematics. In addition, it appeared that the single most important component was teacher training, which not only led to better teaching techniques, but also increased the motivation of teachers to perform well. Along with the new curriculum, this motivation contributed a great deal to improvement in quality.

## Improvement in Participation Rate in Primary Education in Blocks under LJP

	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998
Total	46.7	59.8	69.2	76.8
Boys	61.1	70.0	77.5	84.3
Girls	29.4	47.9	59.5	68.1

Source: Lok Jumbish, The Seventh Report. (January, 1998)

### *Bringing learning to the village courtyard: Sahaj Shiksha Centres*

These NFE centres initially started in 6 blocks and eventually spread to around 33 blocks, with an increase in enrollment from 8,336 in 1993 to 45,839 by the end of 1997. By October 1999 there were 5,010 centres serving children who could not attend formal schools. The dropout rate was negligible. It was heartening to find that 6,835 (out of the initial 8,336) moved on to formal schools after completing the non-formal curriculum. The ratio of enrollment of boys to girls was 3:5, which indicated that the girls benefited more from this non-formal education opportunity than boys. In addition, an evaluation study found that the programme had been successful in attracting the target segment, namely girls belonging to scheduled tribes and castes.

The *Sahaj Shiksha* centres, unlike formal schools, were usually located within the boundaries of the hamlets and literally brought learning to the doorsteps of the girls. Most of these centres operated for two or two-and-a-half hours in the evening. Parents or grandparents were often present, which imparted seriousness to teaching-learning activities at the centres. Smaller children too young to go to school sat nearby with their sisters and became familiar with the process of learning. The teachers were members of the local community who spoke the children's own dialect. They were recruited for the job by the village education committee or core team, who was also responsible for enrolling the children at the centres.

### *Short-term interventions*

In addition to the regular ongoing education programmes, the LJP also organized education camps of shorter duration. For example, the *Balika Shiksan Sirvirs* were camps held for adolescent girls who could afford neither formal nor non-formal education. The first camps were four months in duration but as they became more popular their length increased to six-and-a-half months. In addition to teaching the girls how to read and write, the camps provided opportunities for them to increase their self-confidence. One positive result was that 75 to 80 per cent of the girls from the camps went on to formal schooling.

In addition, the LJP held workshops attended by both adolescent girls and boys. The purpose of these residential workshops, which lasted five days, was to help girls overcome their shyness, develop self-confidence, learn about their situation in society, question social stereotypes, and acquire information about the emotional and physical changes occurring during adolescence. Girls involved themselves in a number of activities, including traditional male ones like riding bicycles and playing cricket. They also participated in public excursions and mock elections. By the end of the workshops, most participants had developed the capacity to enter into dialogue with their peers (including boys) and had begun to acquire a new self-image.

Finally, the Lok Jumbish organized a variety of activities and institutions for specific purposes. These included arts forums for adolescent girls, camps for children with disabilities, empowerment forums for women teachers, hostels for girls, and the Women's Residential Institute for Training and Evaluation (set up in 1994), whose purpose was to train women in rural areas to be teachers.



## Conclusion

In spreading literacy and primary education in a poor, undeveloped state like Rajasthan, Lok Jumbish's initiatives were successful basically because of its belief in participatory planning and implementation. Although the ultimate aim was to bring children into the mainstream education system, the focus has been on non-formal education in a variety of forms (centres, camps, etc.) according to the needs of each community. The most significant feature in this approach is the respect given to the needs of the community and an understanding of social, economic and cultural constraints.

The Lok Jumbish Project was able to transform village schools with its touch. Teachers from the primary school in Radhanagari, who were all praise for Lok Jumbish, were asked how they could believe that the LJP's intervention had changed education. Weren't they after all the same people as before? They replied unhesitatingly, *"Within all human beings there exists goodness and the spirit of work and dedication, but it has to be woken up [jagrithi, which literally means awakening], and that is just what Lok Jumbish did"*. The transformation was evident in the manner in which they went about their daily routine work, in the enthusiasm with which they spoke of the movement and in the concern they showed about the school. It seemed like the movement was theirs. And that was what made the difference. The teaching-learning process also had changed with the new training. It had become child-centred and life-centred. The child had become an active participant in learning and the curriculum was made relevant to the immediate life experience.

## VI. The Integrated Abujmarh Tribal Development Project: Sustainable Development for Ethnic Minorities

The Bastar District is a remote plateau located in the extreme southeastern part of Madhya Pradesh State. The western part of the district, rugged and watered by numerous streams, is known as the Abujmarh Hills. If any part of India is still *terra incognita* to nearly all travellers, it is Abujmarh, which has the reputation

of a land free from rules and regulations, inhabited by the *Hill Marias* as popularized in the anthropological literature. Abujhmarh, comprising 250 villages, is described as a *tangled knot of hills*, a back-of-beyond that remains cut off from the rest of the world for nearly half the year. Because of their extreme geographical isolation, the Hill Marias have a very primitive economy, their mainstay being the slash-and-burn cultivation practised on the steep hill slopes. Traditionally, they have bartered forest products (resin, cocoons) for trade goods like salt, chillies, tobacco and cloth. The barter system is still prevalent, and the tribal people are most unscrupulously and liberally exploited by traders.

The main problems of Abujhmarh, apart from extremely poor communication, are 1) the lack of medical facilities and a high mortality rate, especially among infants; 2) the lack of education facilities and extremely low literacy; 3) economic exploitation by various agencies; and 4) unwillingness on the part of government officials to work in the area.

In August 1985, the Ramakrishna Mission established a *base camp* or ashram at Narainpur, an administrative headquarters in Bastar District which is also the gateway to Abujhmarh. The objective of this centre was to direct activities aimed at eradicating illiteracy, ill health and economic deprivation amongst the Hill Marias of Abujhmarh, enabling them to eventually join the mainstream of the nation. With this objective in view, the Mission set up the Integrated Abujhmarh Tribal Development Project at Narainpur. The project serves an area of 3,905 square miles and a population of about 26,000. Despite adverse circumstances, the Mission has successfully started making major inroads against poverty, ignorance, sickness and economic exploitation. In addition to its own resources, the Mission relies on liberal grants-in-aid provided by both the state and federal governments.

A 60-acre plot of land provided by the state government is the setting for the Mission's model school, a 100-bed hostel for boys, a fully equipped modern 30-bed hospital, a vocational and agricultural training centre, an NFE centre, and a *fair price shopping complex* for local people.

### *Project activities*

The activities of the Mission, using innovative approaches, fall into the general areas of literacy and education, health, and economic development.

### *Literacy and education*

Missionaries of the Ramakrishna Ashram (both men and women), assisted by a devoted band of qualified and dedicated staff members, look after a number of education institutions that serve the needs of the tribespeople. Foremost amongst these is a model residential school exclusively for tribal students, whose current enrollment is 341 boys and 161 girls. In addition, the Mission operates five residential co-educational schools currently serving 325 boys and 123 girls. Students at all six of these schools receive training in agriculture and horticulture using land that is part of the school premises.

The Mission also provides services for younger children. In collaboration with VISHWAS, a sister organization managed by devotees of the Ramakrishna Mission, the Narainpur centre administers 69 preschools located in the far-off villages of the Abujhmarh Hills. The purpose of these preschools is to prepare children 3 to 6 years of age to enter the regular school environment. Many of these preschools also have classes for girls and women between 11 and 65 years of age. Here they learn the *three Rs* and skills needed for everyday life.

It is an outstanding feature of the Mission schools that once students are admitted they continue to study uninterrupted until the completion of their studies. This dedication, which includes taking on additional schoolwork during summer vacations, may account for their success in formal examinations at both primary

and middle levels. In the last five years, the examination pass results have been almost 100 per cent, extremely positive for ethnic minority students. It was also heartening to note that out of 66 students who completed their studies in the Mission school, as many as 15 of them sought admission to engineering courses and 4 of them succeeded in securing admission to medical, veterinary, polytechnic and Ayurvedic courses respectively. About 20 entered graduate courses in arts, science and commerce, and 9 obtained regular employment.

### *Health and nutrition*

Activities in this area include maintenance of a 30-bed hospital and health centre, 5 clinics located throughout the district, a mobile dispensary, and a project in community health services for remote villages not reached by any of these.

### *Economic improvement*

Project activities in this area include the operation of a tribal youth vocational training centre, an agricultural training and demonstration farm, and the Central Sector Scheme for Agricultural Extension. The purpose of the latter (begun in 1994) is to introduce the tribal people to modern, scientific methods of farming, thereby reducing their reliance on traditional shifting cultivation. In addition to the standard functions of extension services (demonstrating and supplying new inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, technology, etc.), the Project is involved in organizing village self-help groups, training farmers to use new technology, and promoting linkages between farmers and agricultural institutions in India (government agencies, universities, research centres).

Finally, in connection with agricultural development in the Abujmarh Hills, there is the Rajiv Gandhi Watershed Project. The purpose of this project, which covers an area of 3,140 hectares, is to improve irrigation and reduce the effects of flooding. Since 1995, 54 tanks, 11 percolation tanks, 14 check dams and 6 stone weirs have been constructed. In addition, a number of trees were planted and fruit tree saplings distributed amongst 3,400 villagers.

### *Conclusion*

The various activities undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission Project have ushered in a new era in the life of the tribal communities. This success has occurred largely because of the holistic, integrated approach taken by the Mission, targeting the interrelated problems of illiteracy, poor health, economic exploitation, and ineffective agricultural practices.

Looking at education, we find that the project adopts a similar integrated approach for the all-round development of learners. Children are admitted first to the preschools at a tender age and continue on to the primary and secondary boarding schools. They generally do not go home even during summer vacations. They learn how to lead well-disciplined and healthy lives under the guidance of a group of teachers who are dedicated and entirely devoted to their noble work. Education is totally free of charge. The quality of the graduates of the ashram schools is high and brings a good name to their efforts.

The project initiated by the Ramakrishna Mission at Narainpur is playing a vital role in achieving its objectives. But the Abujmarh Hills is only a small corner of India and a single project does not touch even the fringe of the problem. Replication of this project in other similar parts of the country is a genuine and urgent need. Several ashramites observed that the State Government wanted the project to extend its activities to the entire district of Bastar. But it was not possible for them to take up the offer because their resources, especially in terms of devoted and selfless workers, were rather limited.

Keeping in view the approach adopted by the Integrated Abujmarh Tribal Development Project, we can safely recommend that there is an immediate need for policy makers to bring under one umbrella the various activities affecting the welfare of tribal populations. The project is thus a worthwhile one to be adopted as a model.

There is also a need to create a sense of confidence amongst tribal people before launching any programmes for their welfare. Anything imposed on them will certainly not be successful unless they themselves are convinced that the programmes will be of real benefit to them. The agencies functioning for their welfare must enjoy the full confidence of the target group. Moreover, the twin factors of dedication to work and devotion to duty are absolutely necessary.

## VII. The Agramee Kishipur Project

In another corner of India, other ethnic minorities struggle with hunger, disease, landlessness, illiteracy and a situation characterized by a lack of basic services, leadership, and political will. The present-day district of Rayagada in the state of Orissa is inhabited by a mixed population of tribal groups (Kondhas, Parajas, Souras, etc.) and scheduled castes.

In 1981, the NGO Agramee undertook its first experiment in the *block* (sub-district) of Kishipur, fascinated by the overwhelming response and initiatives on the part of tribal people towards economic development opportunities. A group of tribal youths supported the project team and joined them during the second year of project activities. At present, the Agramee Kishipur Project carries out a variety of education and economic development activities in six blocks of the district. Some of these have been replicated in other tribal districts of Orissa State.

### *General objectives*

1. To develop an alternative model of education for tribal areas to be replicated elsewhere
2. To make elementary education universal throughout inaccessible tribal areas
3. To encourage community participation in order to sustain programmes in the future
4. To link education with development
5. To increase literacy and classroom learning
6. To make education a medium for the empowerment of tribal students

### *Specific objectives*

1. To use both traditional and mass media to generate awareness in the community
2. To ensure community involvement and participation in operating village schools by forming village education committees to assume responsibility
3. To develop and implement a child-centered curriculum
4. To help children develop a spirit of co-operation and mutual self-help
5. To strengthen classroom learning through practical experience
6. To introduce children to basic economic activities
7. To generate, with the people's co-operation, the initial capital for sustaining schools and NFE centres in the future

### *Significant activities*

Agramee intervention for tribal development combines educational inputs along with economic development activities for a holistic development of the community. In addition, the project has made systematic efforts to enable primary school age children to acquire literacy, numeracy and other basic



skills. This is necessary because the majority of tribal children cannot benefit from the existing system of education provided by the Government due to a combination of reasons, including poverty, the need to work and the inadequacy of government schools.

In response the project has initiated a variety of programmes to meet the needs and priorities as identified by local tribal communities. These programmes include Non-Formal Education for Elementary Children (70 NFE centres in two remote blocks), Innovative Education in Remote Tribal Areas (100 additional centres with curricula focusing on village economic development), district resource units for NFE teacher training and materials development, an *education complex* to improve the literacy rate amongst tribal girls, *children's festivals*, creative workshops for children, vocational training, science exhibitions, parent-teacher workshops, health checkup camps, and *Bal Sansad*, which is a programme to educate tribal children about the existing political system in India and their rights in regard to voting and other forms of participation.

### *Elements of innovation*

Ethnic minority communities have found it difficult to relate to the prevailing system of formal schooling. They require a different model of education that meets their own needs and priorities. The Agramee Kashipur Project has attempted to provide such a model that includes a number of innovative features.

First of all, members of the community are involved in selecting their own teachers for the NFE centre serving their children. This enables better rapport and communication between teachers and pupils, and bridges the language barrier. Parents and other village elders are encouraged to come to the classroom to share and learn. The village is also expected to provide a building where children can study.

Second, the curriculum is relevant to the local situation of the children. Teachers do refer to the formal school syllabus, in so far as it facilitates the learning process. But they also make use of additional material relating to the lives of the tribal people. Regular feedback from the teachers ensures that the material is being used and is acceptable to both the students and the community.

Third, teachers are encouraged to use the folk media of songs, dance and legends to enliven teaching and help the children learn faster. This method also helps to ensure the perseverance of tribal folk traditions, as well as helping the people identify more positively with the education model they are adopting. In addition, the teachers encourage children to participate more actively in the teaching-learning process by teaching each other, with older boys taking charge of small groups of younger children.

Finally, realizing that the process of education cannot be taken up in isolation, Agramee's intervention combines economic activities with education and there are attempts to link education with the socio-economic change and development activities in the villages. Children are encouraged to participate, even if as observers, in the planning processes, and issues related to development are incorporated into the NFE centre's curriculum. The teachers introduce topics concerning the children and their surroundings. They are not only teachers as such but have also received training to initiate participatory action for social change in the village.

### *Achievements*

At present, Agramee is managing 233 NFE centres in 7 tribal districts of Orissa. All of these institutions are operating with the active participation of the village communities. Currently, 7,584 children are enrolled, of whom 3,293 (about 45%) are girls. Village education committees have been formed and are responsible for the regular functioning of the centres. Of the 1,351 members of these committees, 559 are women.

The educational process has helped to increase the self-confidence and capability of students to a great extent. In many of the villages where the NFE centres function, former students have taken over the teaching duties. In many instances, these people are doing much better than their counterparts who have undergone formal schooling. In some of the villages, youths who studied at the centres have now organized youth clubs.

Currently, there are 48 youth clubs and village development committees, 18 irrigation user societies, 15 education organizations at the *panchayat* level, 5 such organizations at the block level, and one at the state level. At each level of these forums, Agramee tries to ensure people's co-operation. The youth clubs and village committees closely monitor the education programmes run by Agramee in the villages. They also take initiatives for increasing enrollment at the centres. At the *panchayat* level, members of the forum work together as a pressure group to ensure that the government schools in their own area are run more efficiently. They are also mobilizing parents to send their children to school. The state-level forum, the Adibasi Shakti Sangathan, tries to influence policy matters related to education in the tribal areas of Orissa.

### Conclusion

The programmes of education for tribal areas developed by Agramee have found wide acceptance amongst other voluntary organizations in the state. Four such organizations have received funds from the Government to initiate education programmes based on this model. The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), a national-level voluntary organization, has also adopted this model, as have 125 NFE centres located in other underdeveloped areas of the country.

The success of Agramee activities demonstrates that NFE programmes are more successful than the formal school system in making primary education universal in tribal areas. Therefore, it would seem that additional salary support and training for NFE instructors is highly desirable, especially in areas with low literacy.

## VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations

These six examples of NFE programmes in India demonstrate the success of using innovative, unconventional methods to reach populations mostly excluded from formal schooling. This success rests largely on two factors. First, the programmes feature non-standardized, locally developed curricula that correspond to the priorities and life ways of both children and adult learners. Second, innovations in programme content and delivery occur directly in response to the needs of the local community. Instead of directives from government bureaucrats, demand as expressed by local community members largely determines the input of the NFE programmes.

The six projects and their activities clearly show the urgent need to contextualize and decentralize education, especially in the rural areas. In this connection, there should be rural development centres established at the grassroots level to facilitate decentralization and to make the education system more relevant for sustainable development. Similarly, more funding is needed for materials development at the local level, especially in regard to the preparation of appropriate science materials.

Finally, these projects illustrate the importance of reaching out to those who have previously been neglected or under-served. Whether they are ethnic minorities in remote parts of Orissa or Madhya Pradesh, or rural women and girls in conservative Rajasthan, the marginal sections of society deserve the same opportunities for education and social betterment that others in more favourable circumstances already receive.

