

Paper Presentation

Topic: Social Capital and Volunteering

Transformation of Communities through Volunteering

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Abstract

India won her independence from colonial domination in 1947. Since then planned action for development took roots. Through five-year development plans India has become a noticeable player in the field of development in the world arena.

Education received top priority to meet up with the tremendous scientific and technical advances in the world. However, education of the poor and marginalized population was neglected. Primary education received low priority. Thus, there was a large backlog of illiterate population who was ill adapted to advances made in the country and outside.

Over decades, the Government became conscious of this enormous population that was neither participant nor recipient of scientific progress. Thus, the Government envisaged a scheme of non-formal education that was almost entirely based on volunteering. The scheme involved teaching children up to V and VIII standards.

I had the opportunity of leading a team of one hundred volunteers who worked every day of the year over six years and has been a most invigorating experience of my life.

I will take a minute to briefly narrate the experience and results of this endeavor. It was not always smooth sailing. Every day, there were problems that had to be sorted out with 2,500 children and twice that many parents and, of course, the local Government situation was complex. In my paper, I will try to narrate the nature of these problems, but it will suffice in this small space to celebrate the success that is in the hearts of countless people.

Each Non Formal Education (NFE) Center was supported by a committee of parents, villagers who provided support to the Center and in time transformed into development committees looking over development of the village.

The permanent advances that have been achieved are just listed below.

1. Students and parents became interested in education and continued to run the Centers through voluntary effort even after the Government scheme was withdrawn.
2. Many teachers that had only school level education have taken to higher education.

3. The teachers have been performing the role of change agents.
4. The incidence of child marriages has substantially reduced.
5. The greening of the area has taken place noticeably.
6. Environment regeneration, adoption of new crops, has taken place.
7. Sustainable agricultural technologies are increasingly being used.

Innumerable other positive effects of conducting the program have come to be observed. I will touch upon some of them in my paper.

We are volunteer organisation named People's Institute for Development and Training or PIDT in short. The area where about I am focussing your attention today viz. under Deoghar District in Madhupur Block was initially a part of Bihar State in India. However since 2001 it has been separated as Jharkhand which means "the land of trees or forested land" The parody is that inspite of it's name the area where we work was practically a desert due to excessive felling of trees, when we started working there. Most of the population are tribals or backward communities. We started our work in remote villages. The literacy rate then was 13.5% and only for women it was 3.5% officially which meant that virtual literacy was negligible. In short it was backward in all respects socially, physically, politically. We started our motivational work for Development of the area holistically, with a variety of development inputs with a focus on awareness generation and education as the main motivational agent to change the society towards growth.

We started with morning processions, marching from village to village with posters, slogans and songs related to information about utility of education. We held several camps which combined training and dialogues related to the need of transformation towards developed societies. Volunteers were trained to become social animators who started influencing the community on various aspects. One of their major tasks was enrolling primary non-formal schools with children who do not attend any school or dropouts. The parents started paying them small amount of honorarium. This was the development of a binding relationship with parents to think about their future through their children. The communities were then motivated to understand about themselves, question and analyse their situation and to find out the way to get onto the road of self-reliance . Most of the communities considered it their fate to be in a state of impoverishment and it was developing an attitude towards self action which was the primary drive to eliminate poverty and look for an overall better future.

Thus these social animators started rapport building with different communities though they were from the same villages but may be from different hamlets, their mindset was differently oriented. In our field area we work with Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Tribals all of whom often live in the same village. In time and through continued motivation we developed Education collectives known as "shiksha samiti's" of parents alongside volunteer based non formal education centres.

Appreciating our initiative the Government supported 100 such education centers. Here we taught children of villages who either do not go to school or are dropouts. Our responsibility was to link them with the Govt. primary and secondary schools so that they can have their proper basic education. This program was very useful and timely for us. The Volunteers were 100 youth (both men and women) who have finished their Secondary School Examination. The Volunteers taught the children upto the primary levels at minimal honorarium of \$4.2 monthly. These Volunteers served as our contact base in the villages and helped us motivate the communities for holistic development i.e., socially, economically, culturally and politically. The results of this project was excellent. The Volunteers received 3 monthly training and were divided into 8 regions under 8 supervisory volunteers. Thus we were organizing free education for 2500 children and linking them to secondary education after one year of intensive coaching. A mobile library where the volunteers, parents and students could borrow story books or general knowledge books for few days. The children were given not only textbooks but were also involved through educational games. We even wrote special text books which were appropriate to the region and helped a better gender understanding and environment consciousness.

The effect of this program was tremendous for the district as well as in NFE system at Jharkhand State. Village women started participating as Volunteers and also the demand for education increased. Schools being in their hamlets, many girls could get opportunity for education which they would otherwise not have got. So their number steadily increased. PIDT also made it possible for distance education through the National Institute of Open Schooling and women started passing their middle and high school which was almost unheard of earlier in the region.

The education Collectives became also development collectives and became the centres where all disputes or problems were solved on social issues such as quarrel for landholdings, problems for superstitious, divorce, dowry etc. Some of the irreversible dimensions of change have been observed due to advances of this education program which are listed below:

1. Students and parents have become interested in education and have continued to run the centres even after the government scheme was withdrawn through voluntary effort.
2. The number of school drop-outs has become negligible.
3. Many Volunteers that had only school level education have taken to higher education.
4. The Volunteers have been performing the role of change agents.
5. Age at which the child marriage used to take place has substantially retarded.
6. The greening of the area has taken place noticeably.
7. Environment regeneration adoption new crops have taken place.
8. Sustainable agricultural technologies are increasingly being use.

The most important positive effect is the area where we are working, 100 Collectives have been formed and these are having group meetings regularly and have converted themselves also into savings groups for interlending within the community which will help in economic

growth. We are making linkages with banks so that they can start or develop small enterprises and get helped economically.

These samities are going to make federations and co-operatives which they are in process.

Conclusion

We can see in the communities, their bright future to become more and more self-reliant as they grow in their thought physically and mentally. There is a turn around in the attitude that they are fated to the fact that they can write their fate. Continuous support is needed so that more and more persons come into the fold of this thought so that sustainable transformation may be achieved.