

# Intervention and Initiatives in Development: Some Strategic Options

**A**N INTERVENOR assumes that his intervention is necessary. He also assumes that he is equipped for it. On this basis, he makes his entry into the lives of poor people, bringing in such resources-material, moral and mental-as happen to be his to command.

Using whatever powers of persuasion (and sometimes coercion) that are at his disposal, he goes about the business of improving, according to his light, the lot of the poor. The result sometimes is great and truly spectacular success, forever a beacon for others similarly inclined; but more often, failure, leading to personal embitterment, and leaving the poor in a much worse state than they were in.

Every government in independent India has attempted to intervene on behalf of weaker sections of society. Such interventions have taken many forms -from direct delivery of benefits to development of infrastructure. In recent decades, non-governmental agencies have become increasingly active and visible.

A very large number of non-governmental voluntary organizations, foreign agencies, missionaries and other groups with a variety of ideologies and agenda are attempting to change the course of the lives of poor people in this country. It is this latter class of intervenors, and their efforts, on which this article focuses.

At the individual level, the prime movers of intervention are usually persons of considerable intellect and moral fibre. Their employees, their instruments of intervention, are mostly ordinary persons with no greater ambition than to make a living as best as they can.

It is only too well known that only a very small proportion of all interventions has resulted in any degree of success, even allowing for latitude in defining success. It is not our present purpose to engage in the semantics of such definition. For our purposes, it would be far more practical to try to understand some of the common causes of failure of initiatives and intervention in development. It is very far from the intention of this article to discourage or disparage 'intervention'; the very opposite, in fact. It is to show that intervention is a professional matter, to be studied and applied carefully and rationally, taking into account as many aspects of the matter as may be possible for the moment and, above all, learning from the experience of others.

A good place to begin would be to examine the common causes of failure of intervention (which usually takes place through the medium of a formal organization, agency or society, sometimes religious, but mostly secular). Such failure can, of course, occur for a wide variety of reasons, too numerous to list here. The most common are those listed below. (The

discussion is restricted to non-governmental intervention, since that is the relevant field for our purposes. We shall refer to organizations engaged in such intervention collectively as 'intervention organizations', or IOs.)

## Common causes of failure of intervention

1. **Interference by legal and statutory authorities:** A very large number of interventions take place through the medium of organizations registered under laws that govern 'Cooperative' or other types of "Societies". These laws empower government officials to interface at will in the affairs of such organizations.

The rationale of such laws dates from colonial times, when any association or group of common people was viewed as potentially subversive. It was therefore the policy of the colonial power to exercise close supervision and control over such groups. There are many such legislations remaining to this day on the statute books of independent India.

The result is that even petty officials, who may have no stake or interest whatsoever in development of poor people, and are bound only by bureaucratic procedures, have the power to interfere with, change the course or otherwise control the affairs of any organization falling

within their ambit – i.e., those registered under Cooperative or Society laws. The record shows that exercise of power by officials is frequently arbitrary, sometimes motivated by extraneous considerations, and has often resulted in the suffocation or death of institutions.

The number of cases in which higher courts and tribunals have intervened to reverse or nullify orders issued by such officials should be sufficient testimony.

Any organization, therefore, that registers itself under these laws runs the risk of being arbitrarily derailed.

2. **lack of adequate control by Board of Directors:** The board of directors of any organization are the final authority, the source of all policy, and are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that their organization fulfils its purpose. It is however an observed fact that in the case of a good number of IOs there is little unity of purpose among the members of the board, and there is consequently much conflict of ideology and doctrine, with results only too predictable.

In other IOs (many more in fact) members of the board privately view their positions as sinecure, and are therefore quiescent and tolerant of inefficiencies (or worse) in the management. Such boards tend to avoid any involvement in the affairs of management, even in the face of evidence that demands it. In yet others, it is observed that it is the interest that each member (of the board) represents that dictates the line he takes in board meetings. Narrow considerations all too often override the main objectives of an IO.

Another phenomenon of board-room politics is the attitude of representatives of financing agencies. All too often, they are employees of the latter, and their main concern is the latest fashion in 'development theory' that happens to be in vogue in the higher circles of their parent organization. The last thing on the mind of such a representative is the

poor whom the IO was set up to serve. His main concern often is to be as non-committal as possible. He seeks to convey, through speech and demeanour, restraint, caution, wisdom and access to information not available to others. His attention is on gathering such information or gossip as may be regarded as delectable by his superiors, and will look good in his 'report' to them.

The composition of the board of directors of any IO is obviously extremely crucial to its future success. In constituting a board, it is easy to fall into the trap of trying to represent every section or interest. This often results in the creation of an arena for conflict rather than one for making policy. Professionals – both technical and management professionals -with a clear mandate, and accountability for results, are an essential component of any board.

3. **Absence of criteria, indicators, targets:** The criteria for the success of intervention are seldom defined. Nor are indicators of success identified, or targets laid down. In the absence of such objective parameters for validation of approach of the IO, anything and everything may be and often is claimed as success. Frequent review of these parameters is also strongly recommended to ensure that they remain relevant and realistic.
4. **Attitude to credit, recovery of loans, and promotion of healthy financial practices:** IOs, unlike business 'organizations, need to constantly remind themselves and their beneficiaries that all credit has a cost, that commerce is impossible in an environment where loans are not serviced or repaid regularly, and that management of funds 'is as important as management of material or any other resource. It is important to build into IOs these attitudes from the very beginning.

The concept of sustainable development is very rarely understood properly by intervenors, although almost all of them mouth platitudes in this regard. Insistence

on prompt repayment of loans is often perversely viewed as harshness, rather than an attempt to inculcate responsible behaviour, without which no economic system can work. The all too easily available support from donors in the form of subsidies, grants, and 'soft loans often serves to enervate and destroy any ability in the poor to survive. IOs thus frequently only serve to undermine the rules of the economic game that the poor must abide by in the long run, after the intervenor has departed with his baggage

Credit it is one of the most powerful agents of change available to an intervenor if used intelligently and imaginatively. Its role must be understood clearly in the intervention, appropriate norms developed in consultation with the people involved, and enforced.

5. **Attitudinal issues related to the intervenor:** The intervenor, in certain cases, falls into the error of acting as 'big brother', or a 'know-all'. Education in management or technical matters alone is not enough. An understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of the processes involved in the intervention is just as important. For this, there must first be a willingness to learn.
6. **Professional training and knowledge base:** In many other cases, it is lack of knowledge of management principles and/or technical matters that has contributed to failure of intervention. Many well-intentioned but ill-informed intervenors have floundered on these rocks. Production may, for instance, be undertaken without reference to availability of markets; or mere 'selling' may be taken to constitute marketing; or again, consumer preferences may be ignored; or yet again, quality parameters of a product may be given too little attention. All these, and many similar mistakes, have occurred and

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# Fish Production and Consumption Levels: A Survey

**I**N SPITE of the gradual increase in fish production, consumers of fish complain about a lack of fish availability in many areas. Surprisingly, the traders feel that they cannot market the fish in Andhra Pradesh; hence they are dependent on Calcutta.

The Calcutta market is a highly fluctuating one. The market price is influenced by the number of lorries that arrive each day. The seasons also have an impact on the price of fish. The price of fresh fish per kilogram will generally be Rs. 50 on a normal day; this shoots up to Rs.150 during the festival season.

Bengalis are large consumers of fish. They consider fish as a vegetarian food. Without fish, many of their traditional festivals cannot be celebrated.

Coming back to fish marketing, in spite of the demand for fish in the Calcutta market, there are at present many problems-and further problems are also foreseen.

The long distances involved in transporting fish is a major constraint. Whenever a strike or *bandh* begins, the movement of fish is affected. This in turn leads to spoilage of fish, which could mean a loss of as much as 90 per cent. The long distances also result in cheating by the middlemen in terms of weighing, prices, payments, etc., since the producer cannot afford to go to Calcutta every time. Fish production in Andhra Pradesh from the sea, reservoirs, tanks, rivers, etc., is increasing. The fish exploitation levels have increased following the introduction of mechanization in craft and gear, and also due to the irrational management of fishery resources. Though, in the long run, this mode of exploitation leads to depletion of resources, for the time being fish production has registered a steady growth.

The largest source of fish production in Andhra Pradesh is ponds. The total production from ponds is 120,000

tonnes, compared with a production of 20,000 tonnes from natural sources (excluding the sea).

In the coming years, Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal will be competing with Andhra Pradesh in the Calcutta market, because of the steady growth of fish production in these states.

## Alternative markets

Under present conditions, what can be done for the fish being produced in Andhra Pradesh? We have to think of various alternatives to market our fish at a good price, or else our total fish production will reach a stagnation level, resulting in slumps from time to time.

Compared to the prices for fish in the state of Kerala, our fish is marketed at a much lower price. For instance, medium-size mackerel, which is being sold at Rs.15 per kg in Andhra Pradesh, sells at Rs.5 for *each fish* in Kerala. That is why fish is being bought and transported to Kerala in insulated vans. The Kerala traders make advance payments to the agents in Andhra Pradesh.

Andhra Pradesh does not have many fish exporting firms. The fish is being sent by train all the way to Madras from Kakinada, exclusively for the export market. Unlike inland fish and cultured fish production, sea fish is not in the hands of producers (fishermen). The fisherfolk do not have any aptitude for marketing. Fish marketing is in fact controlled by the traders, through their agents in the fisherfolk community.

Increasing the fish consumption levels within the state will be the ideal step to sort out the problems in fish marketing.

Because of our food habits and culture, our fish consumption levels are very low. Chicken is sold at Rs. 50 a kg, and mutton at Rs. 85 a kg. The costs are increasing at the rate of 10 per cent

(a year. Fish is available at a price 50 Per cent that of meat, but the market for fish is a much smaller one. People in Andhra Pradesh should be educated about the value of fish as a cholesterol-free food rich in protein. The low price at which fish is available has also to be made known to the consumers.

The campaign for fish consumption cannot be pursued by the producers in isolation. The producers need to be organized at the mandal, district and state levels. The campaign may be on the lines of the National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC). The consumers can be reached through the print and electronic media. Necessary funds can be raised from the producers as membership fees, and a small percentage of the contribution can come from the profit margin.

Apart from the campaign for more fish consumption, the producers' organization can also help in searching for new markets, through information collection and dissemination, better marketing management, packing and distribution methods, etc. The NGO' sector can play a crucial role in organizing the producers; it can also offer liaison and lobbying services in dealing with resource organizations and the Government.

## Infrastructure

The second requisite for fish marketing is infrastructure. Unlike eggs and vegetables, fish cannot be easily stored or transported. Cold storages, refrigerators, coolers or at least ice blocks are necessary for the storage of fish. The creation of these facilities involves considerable expenditure. The absence of storage facilities at the points of production and marketing contributes to fish spoilage. Icing of the fish after spoilage by some unscrupulous traders led to a misconception among lay consumers that iced fish is not tasty. Thirdly, hygiene levels in fish storage are poor.

Innovative packing methods have to be introduced to increase fish consumption.

In creating an infrastructure for fish storage, the problem is fluctuations in supply. Sea fish supply cannot be predicted. The investment levels are high. Hence the storage infrastructure needs to be used for both fresh water fish and sea fish. Research in economical storage of fish is essential. Hygienic methods of fish handling, dressing and packing are also to be improved. At present, only ice boxes

are economical and are a hygienic mode for the storage of fish. However, the use of such boxes is not popular among the producers.

The producers should pay especial attention to the infrastructure to supply quality fish to the consumers. The NGOs could collect data about the fish species available in each area. They can also, through liaison and lobbying services, help to raise the necessary funds for the creation of the infrastructure. In dealing with financial institutions and the Government, they can help the

producers to form companies! cooperatives to market the fish.

Once the producer is freed from the hassles of marketing, he will concentrate more effectively on fish production. The NGOs should take the responsibility for helping the producers to create a decentralized marketing system.

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# Training Programmes for Women in Fishing Villages : An Analysis

**O**DA (Overseas Development Administration) partner NGOs in the post-harvest fisheries technology project were four in number, covering a total of eight villages in the state of Tamil Nadu and five hamlets in Andhra Pradesh. A review of the training programmes undertaken was made in July-August 1994.

The review made an analysis of the approach to women's development in general, and training programmes for staff of NGOs and women in fishing villages in particular. This paper gives a brief account of the findings. The basic approach to women's development programmes in the fishing villages, irrespective of the implementing local non-governmental development organizations, seems to follow a definite pattern:

- Organizing poor women around their occupation, especially fish vending, is seen as an important basis for strengthening women. Hence there is emphasis on the formation of women's groups (Madar Sangams or Mahila Mandals). This is the entry point.
- Savings and credit are seen as crucial, as women generally are attached towards these as a means

of improving the economic situation in their occupation and hence improving the living conditions of their own families. This surely brought the women together.

- Regular, frequent meetings (mostly weekly meetings) of the members of women's groups and discussing the issues arising out of 'savings and credit' bring women together often enough to see the relevance of other related issues. These related issues are often social issues that are responsible for keeping them in doubly oppressed conditions. They come face to face with the social system that is not in favour of the poor in general and poor women in particular. Slowly they come to recognize the social dimensions of poverty and gender.
- Organized efforts in analyzing their life situations (poverty and gender analysis), identifying problems that are immediate as well as basic, considering the solutions, taking decisions for action and carrying out actions as a basic mode of operation in dealing with their problems help in strengthening the group, and in the process strengthening the individuals constituting the group.

- Rights of the poor women are talked about. Campaigns for fighting for their basic necessities have been reported.

Considering these basics in the approach to women's development, the **training programmes** in fishing villages centered around:

(a) **Information inputs** in terms of:

- the need and value of Sangams;
- accounting techniques of receipts and book entries;
- government schemes for the poor in general, and poor women in particular, and modes of availing themselves of these schemes for their own development;
- nutrition, health and hygiene for women and children;
- child bearing, child birth and child rearing; and
- women's control over their bodies, population and family planning.

(b) **Skill inputs** in terms of:

- capacity building** in the form of communication skills in expressing

oneself orally in groups, listening, observing and understanding others in the group, giving a feedback, participation in group discussion, decision-making for group action, planning for actions and carrying out actions, additional skills in reading and writing the language of the community/state;

- **occupational skill development** in post-harvest fisheries technology such as fresh fish handling, drying, preparing/manufacturing value-added products, planning and implementing projects promoting value-added products, and marketing;
- **group building/team building** through developing attitudes and values that would underline the development of human relationships within a family, within a women's group, within a community as a whole; this would mean creation of an atmosphere reflecting the values and attitudes of self-respect for others, mutual trust, cooperation and humility,

## Variations

In spite of the common pattern found in the basic approach to women's development and the training inputs that are comprehensive, there are variations in the training programmes organized. The variations were with regard to the following:

- the number and frequency of training programmes organized;
- the continuity of the programmes, and hence continuity of contact with the women;
- the follow-up measures—their existence and use;
- the gender perspectives in the information inputs;
- the content areas selected and the relative emphasis placed on different selected content areas and the reasoning involved in the selection and emphasis;

- the approach and methods, though considered to be participatory by all the organizations: it was not easy for all the staff in all the field situations to be participatory.

Practising participatory methodology means emphasis on the process of learning and not on the product. (**How**

you learn is more important than **what** you learn.) Hence it is essentially attitudinal in nature and implies the trainer's deep faith in the capacity of the learners. This, to a large number of us, is difficult because of our patriarchal family system and also of our formal educational background, which is product-oriented. There could be wide variations in the conceptual understanding of the participatory approach which gets reflected in practice. Drawing conclusions for the learners is one example of non-participatory methodology which was observed in practice.

- mode of integration of the various types of inputs mentioned in creating an understanding of oneself in relation to others and to the village situation as a whole;
- ensuring availability of resources—either persons or materials—with the right slant for facilitating participation in training programmes within organizations and among organizations.

The analysis pointed to some essential learnings out of the experience in training. These suggest some directions for future training programmes. They are:

- The training has to be intensive.
- The medium should be the language of the people.
- The training should be practical and the theory is to be linked to practicals.
- The approach to training should be participatory, focusing on the process of learning.

- Methods and materials should be developed and/or selected with the emphasis on building the capacity of the trainees.

- The people should be enabled to identify their own needs, verify and prioritize them using a variety of techniques. Needs identification

process is to be emphasized in the training.

- The curriculum should be planned based on the needs identified by the people themselves.

— The curriculum could have two parts: one basic and the other based on the needs of the community.

- The basic curriculum could include broad areas of self-analysis, problem analysis, communication skills, approaches to availing government schemes for the poor, sea resources and environmental analysis, skills in post-harvest fisheries technology, project planning and management, and developing skills in monitoring and evaluation of small-scale units in post-harvest fisheries.

- Rural social analysis and gender analysis should pervade all the training activities, as they help develop the attitudes that are important.

- Networking process among development organizations and women's organizations should be consciously planned and implemented.

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The views expressed in the articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors/contributors concerned, and not necessarily of the Overseas Development Administration.

## In Sri Lanka

# Ice box boost for pedal power fish trade

**M**any of Sri Lanka's several hundred small-scale retail fish traders are mobile traders. Many of them carry fish in containers fixed onto the backs of bicycles,

The typical bicycle trader will buy about 20-30 kg of fish from auction at beach landing sites or at wholesale fish markets such as St. John's, Colombo. These cycle traders transport fish daily to urban and rural consumers throughout the country, travelling up to 15-20 kilometres per day. They operate on an individual basis in a high-risk business marketing a very perishable commodity.

There is no available data on the number of cycle traders involved in retail fish trade in Sri Lanka. However, from surveys that have now been carried out it is evident that about 800 bicycle (and some motorcycle) traders are operating from St. John's market, Colombo, and a similar number has been estimated at the Negombo beach landing site. Cycle traders also operate from the Dodanduwa beach landing site in the southern coast, and a smaller number from the Kandy fish market in the interior.

The cycle traders play a very important role in the distribution and marketing of fish in Sri Lanka. Mobile trading means consumers do not have to travel to the fish market, which is particularly important in households where families do not have a refrigerator and have to buy fish on a daily basis.

In 1991 the ODA (Overseas Development Administration) Bay of Bengal Post-Harvest Fisheries Project identified the traders as a target group for further investigation into the social, economic and technical conditions under which they operate.

The study was undertaken by a local development support group, Development Innovations and Networks, with supervisory inputs from

the ODA's scientific unit, the Natural Resources Institute (NRI).

It aimed to gather information on cycle traders related to their geographical distribution, social and economic status and identify their problems, needs and priorities,

against the time taken to reach his key middle-class customers before they leave for work or other traders reach his customers first, if marketing territories overlap.

Once the traders have bought their fish, they mix them with a



*A group of retail fish traders seen with fish containers fixed onto the backs of their bicycles.*

These cycle traders reach the beach landing sites and fish markets from various sites, and some travel from a distance of up to 25 kilometres. When they come from distant areas, they often arrange for a lorry to transport them and their bicycles to the beach or market.

They usually arrive at the landing sites or market early in the morning to buy fish caught during the night. The peak trading hours are between six and seven o'clock in the morning,

The cycle trader must quickly decide how much fish to buy, and his judgement and experience are invaluable in determining what varieties and size of fish his customers may require, and the price to pay.

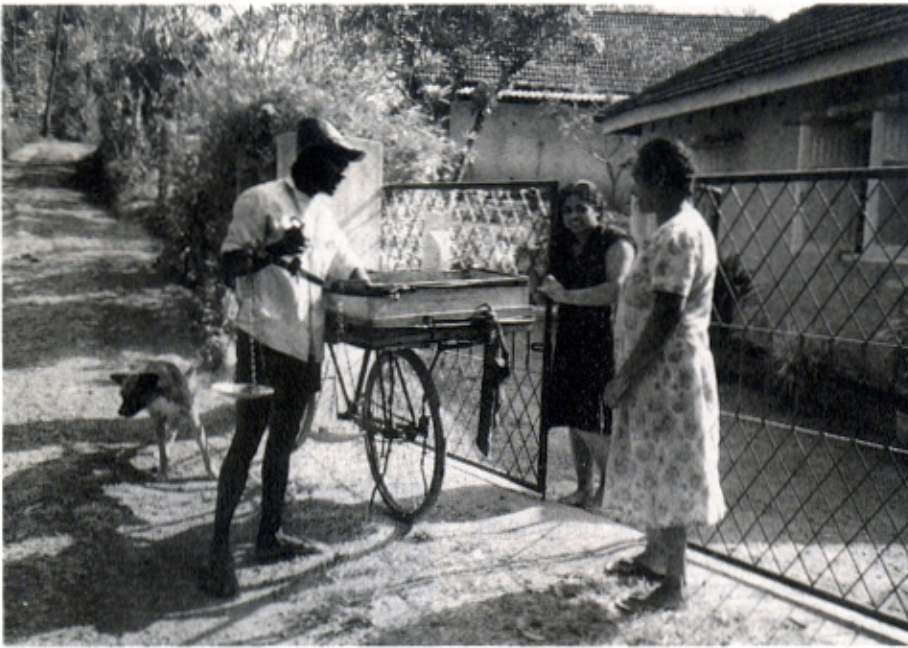
He must balance the need for obtaining a good price for the fish

small amount of ice in order to maintain the quality and freshness. They usually buy about 7-10 kg of crushed ice which they sprinkle over the fish. This is sufficient to keep the fish in a reasonably fresh condition until they reach their first customers. Some traders will stop by the roadside to cut, fillet and prepare their fish for marketing

Traditionally these traders use a variety of containers to store fish and ice (e.g., rattan baskets, wooden or galvanized boxes).

In addition to the box, knife and scales are the main tools of the trade. However, research identified an urgent need for an improved container in which to transport fish.

During the day the quality of the fish slowly deteriorates as the ice melts, and



*Fish at her doorstep : a housewife buys from a cycle trader on one of his regular rounds.*

as a result the price of the fish has to be discounted, particularly as cycle traders generally carry the fish for quite a distance.

Several problems with the type of boxes currently used were pinpointed, including high meltage rate of the ice; durability of the boxes; fungal contamination of boxes; and corrosion of bicycles due to leakage of water from the boxes.

As a result of the study, it was agreed that an effective and acceptable insulated box in which to carry fish and ice was needed.

Advantages to the traders of using insulated boxes would be an increased market area; more time for selling fish; a better way to maintain fish quality for a longer period; reduced risk to the consumer from poor quality fish; and reduced losses and spoilage because of ice melting.

In order to reduce these problems, a number of prototype boxes were designed and shown to groups of cycle traders.

Subsequent discussions and comments pointed out that they were too heavy and had poorly fitting lids. As a result of this participatory exercise with the traders, the requirements of the boxes were established in terms of

weight, capacity, shape and ancillary fittings.

A modified version was designed in coordination with the traders and a local manufacturer. Several early design faults were put right, and costs, weight and durability finally settled. The box is made up of an outer container with

a semi-insulated, fitted lid made of expanded polystyrene and covered in plastic.

This design was more acceptable and met the technical needs of the traders with a minimal additional weight factor.

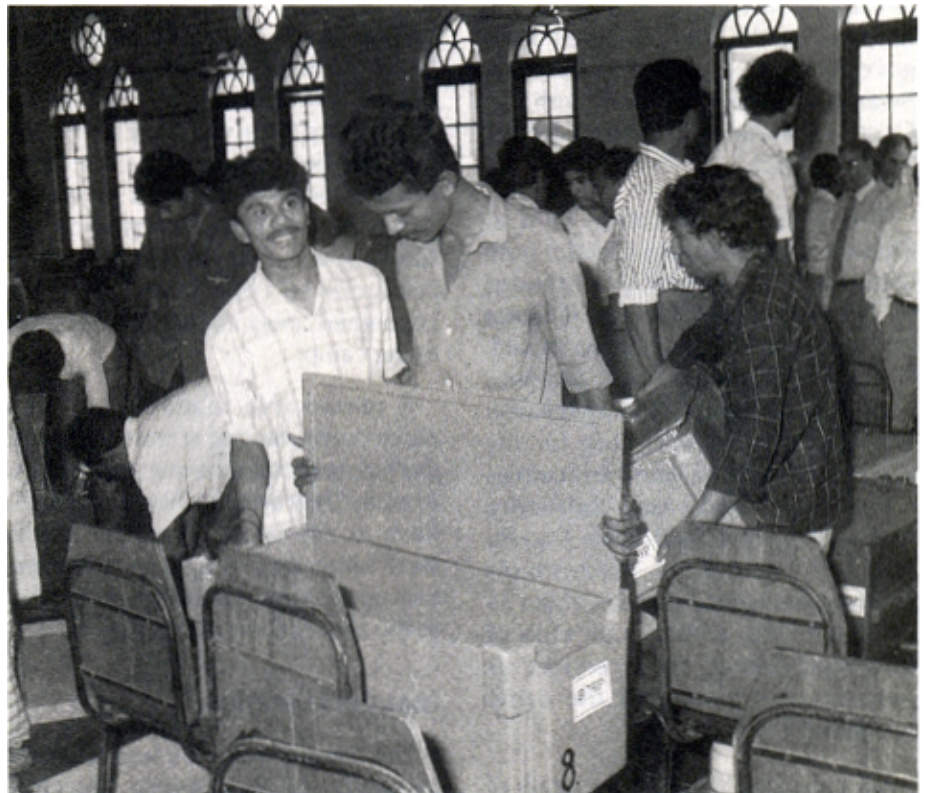
The ice-melting rate of the new container was assessed by the Post Harvest Technology Division of the National Aquatic Resources Agency (NARA). The study showed the melting rate in the new container was as much as 50 per cent lower than in traditional boxes.

Significantly, for the trader this means that he can either reduce the amount of ice he has to buy or ice will last longer, keeping the fish chilled and reducing spoilage during trading.

With an insulated box any leftover fish can be stored overnight with some ice and then sold the next day.

Further studies to assess the benefits of insulated boxes were carried out in early 1993. This demonstrated that hardly any fish were unsold by traders with the new insulated boxes.

Customers have reacted very favourably to the boxes and commented on the design and the fact



*The new insulated boxes maintain the freshness of the fish. Any leftover fish can be stored overnight and sold the next day.*

that it maintains the freshness of the fish. An insulated box is perceived to improve the appearance of fish at point of sale, and presentation and quality are considered to be very important attributes when marketing fish to customers.

There is a tendency for the fish trader to increase his investment after receiving a box, and this indicates that the trader is able to contact more customers or they are buying more fish.

Although the technical performance of the box was effective and acceptable to the traders, the price was seen as being too high for the majority of the traders. Accordingly, links have been developed between the cooperative and an individual entrepreneur to produce an insulated box at a reduced cost.

The first of these boxes has been produced at half the cost of the original, and the quality is comparable to the original boxes.

The cycle traders operate individually without any assistance or association with the Government or any other outside organization. They are usually migrants who come to the city in search of work and often do not live in the local communities.

The need for some form of organization was recognized if the traders were to make any effective impact through collective bargaining power. This would improve their status and self-image within the society and bring them into contact with organizations which could offer them a range of assistance,

The approach taken was to focus on encouraging participation among the traders and demonstrating the opportunities that can exist through group formation.

During this exercise, the most active traders were encouraged to form cluster groups according to where they lived. Eight of these cluster groups have now been established, covering the entire marketing area of the cycle traders operating out of St. John's fish market.

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## Paralegal Training Camps for Fisherwomen in Orissa.

**T**WO paralegal training camps for fisherwomen were held in Orissa recently (in October 1994 and January 1995 respectively) under the auspices of the Cuttack-based non-governmental organization Project Swarajya in collaboration with the Orissa Legal Aid and Advisory Board, also of Cuttack.

The first training camp, held at Kharinasi (Jagatsighpur District) from October 22-25 last year, was attended by 60 women activists from different villages of three gram panchayats: Kharinasi, Ramnagar and Jamboo. Local collaborating organizations who extended their cooperation for the success of the camp were the Kharinasi Gram Panchayat, Maa Subhadra Fisherwomen's Cooperative Society and Jay Jagannatha Fishermen's Cooperative Society. Besides, about 25 boys and girls of the youth club of Kharinasi offered their services as volunteers to look after the camp arrangements.

Mr. H.B. Das, Member Secretary of the Orissa Legal Aid and Advisory Board, took personal interest to ensure

proper execution of the programme by Project Swarajya. Mr. Das and Mr. K.K. Kar, Law Officer of the Board, played a supervisory role all through, besides attending the inaugural session on October 22. All the participants in the camp, who were in the age group 16-45 years, were voluntary activists in their respective villages for the cause of integrated development of marine fisherfolk. They were chosen on the basis of a house-to-house survey conducted by Project Swarajya in the concerned areas about a month prior to the camp.

A remarkable feature about the participants was that at least 10 among them were mothers having small babies in arms. They brought their babies with them to the camp, where the infants were taken care of by the volunteers, thus enabling the mothers to participate in the proceedings undisturbed.

### Inaugural session

The inaugural session was attended by nearly 500 local people. The chief guest was Mr. Justice Jugal Kishore Mohanty, retired Chief Justice of the

Sikkim High Court. Mr. Narayan Haldar, Sarpanch, Kharinasi Gram Panchayat, presided over the public meeting.

In the introductory speech given on the occasion, Mr. Chitta Behera, Director of Project Swarajya, spoke of the problems of the marine fisherwomen of the concerned areas, who were not only poor and ignorant but subject to various kinds of indignities at home and outside. Whatever fish they got, they did not get a remunerative price for it. Living in a remote interior rural area, these women were also not able to avail themselves of the Government schemes and projects meant for them. Their area also lacked in minimum health care facilities. Most of the inhabitants of the area being resettlers from East Pakistan, they were subject to certain subtle ethnic discrimination.

Added to all this, the cases of desertion, polygamy, illegal deprivation and conjugal disharmony were also growing, resulting in increasing woe and agony among the womenfolk. The number of orphans and abandoned

children, who were mostly born outside wedlock, was growing apace, for whom there was no scope of rehabilitation,

Once upon a time, these areas were filled with dense mangrove forests, which were felled extensively by the new settlers for their construction, timber and fuelwood needs. The process of deforestation continued even today. The local people were not at all aware of the dangerous consequences of their tree-felling practices on the environment in general and on their life and habitat in particular.

Project Swarajya, as an NGO, had been involved with marine fisherfolk for a few years now, and had come to realize that the women activists of the area, if given proper education and training, could work as vanguards of the overall development of the area. The objective of the paralegal training camp was just to achieve this purpose, Mr. Behera said.

The chief speaker at the inaugural session, Mr. H.B. Das (Member Secretary of the Orissa Legal Aid and Advisory Board), elaborated on the concept of legal aid. He said that unlike in the past, when people used to run after courts and lawyers for months and years to get justice, every attempt was now being made to take justice to the people's doorstep. Through Lok Adalats, certain categories of litigation were now disposed of summarily in the presence of the parties concerned. The law was no longer a ploy in the hands of the rich few to keep the poorer strata of people subdued. Destitute persons could also take advantage of the special fora and procedures created by the Judiciary to assert their rightful claims vis-a-vis rich and powerful adversaries, including the State itself, observed Mr. Das.

He further said that despite all this the common people in the rural areas were still unaware of the special provisions and concessions extended to them by the Government. Applauding the role of NGOs like Project Swarajya, Mr. Das said that it was the NGOs through whom the necessary awareness among the people could be generated on an extensive scale. The Orissa Legal Aid and

Advisory Board was very keen to provide legal help to the poor on the one hand, and to support the NGOs working for such people on the other. Mr. Das hoped that the women participants in the training camp would acquire the necessary knowledge and skill from the resource persons, to help them to champion the cause of the poor and destitute people in their area.

### **Focus on women**

The chief guest, Mr. Justice Mohanty, delivered his speech in both Oriya and Bengali. He said that women were now the focus of almost all the policies and programmes of the Government. While taking advantage of these, women should make their participation in political institutions and processes increasingly felt. In the coming Zilla Parishad elections, there would be seats reserved for women candidates. Properly motivated women in large numbers should come forward to fill these seats.

Justice Mohanty said that the NGOs who were already working among the poor and downtrodden sections of society should help the Government in expediting and streamlining the delivery of justice. He concluded with an appeal to the participants to learn as much as possible from the deliberations of the four-day training camp.

An exhibition of posters and banners on the themes of legal aid, drug abuse and alcoholism, environment and women's rights was arranged around the venue of the public meeting. Documentary films on drug abuse! alcoholism, mentally retarded children, and the environment were also screened during the lectures, to enable the participants to have a better understanding of the subjects.

The major topics covered by the resource persons during the training camp included schemes relating to fisheries; fishermen's cooperative societies; juvenile justice and orphaned and abandoned children; vocational guidance to young and unemployed women; public interest litigation; laws relating to forest and environment protection; legislation pertaining to gram panchayats; and the treatment

and rehabilitation of mentally retarded and physically handicapped persons, drug addicts and alcoholics.

As a result of the training camp, the women participants are now more aware and informed about the various schemes and projects of the Government for their development. Secondly, they are now more articulate and active than before in their public life. Thirdly, an informal network among the women activists belonging to different gram panchayats has taken shape.

### **Second camp**

The second paralegal training camp was held at Astarang, a block headquarters in Pun District, from January 5-8 this year. Most of the population of the block are fisherfolk by caste and occupation who belong to Scheduled Castes and are engaged in both marine and inland fishing.

The training camp addressed itself to the following specific objectives as related to the situation of the fisherfolk at Astarang:

- to identify and further develop 60 educated women belonging to the fisherfolk community, who would work as promoters of desirable attitudinal change in the community;
- to impart to the trainees basic lessons concerning legislation and regulations affecting their life situation and occupation;
- to impart to the trainees basic lessons in mother and child health, hygiene, family planning, sanitation, and prevention and cure of diseases;
- to impart necessary ideas to them about the need and scope for switching over to alternative productive / remunerative occupations in view of the present-day non-remunerative nature of marine fishing;
- to impart to them basic lessons on the Cooperative movement and Mahila Samitis, to enable the

fisherfolk to augment their level of earnings and avail themselves of Government schemes/concessions in a better way;

- to impart to them basic lessons concerning the protection of the marine environment; and
- to impart to them basic ideas about the role of NGOs as facilitators of desirable change in the outlook and lifestyle of the fisherfolk community.

While the majority of the 60 registered women participants in the training camp belonged to the fisher community; a few others worked among the fisherfolk as NGO activists. It is worth mentioning that as many as 60 other women from the fisher community also took part in the camp as 'listeners'. The enthusiasm for the camp was so great among the community that it was not possible for the organizers to deny these women entry or participation in the camp.

To elicit full-scale participation by the women trainees in the proceedings of the camp, a participatory method was adopted. After a preliminary talk by the resource person on a particular topic, the house was thrown open for discussion and a question-answer session. It was found that all the participants became vocal and could put forward their points, doubts and questions before all the members.

The results of the Astarang training camp can be summed up as follows:

- A minimum necessary level of awareness and orientation could be created among the participants to serve as paralegal workers with the fisher-folk of Astarang block.
- The participants felt encouraged to form cooperatives and Mahila Samitis to avail themselves of the Government schemes and concessions.

- An informal network relationship has been created among the participants, who are now ready to pursue social welfare activities in their areas in a collaborative manner.

- A direct, face-to-face interaction between Government officials and fisherwomen during the camp-the first of its kind in the area. After the camp, the participants felt confident of meeting and speaking to these officials to get their grievances redressed .

- The Government officials have also benefited by interacting with the fisherwomen participants and learning about their problems.

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## Intervention and Initiatives in Development....

*(continued from page 2)*

continue to occur, leading to predictable disaster.

It is extremely important to bring in technical and managerial expertise into the intervention right from the conceptual stage, either in the form of consultants or, better, as employees. The latter course, however, may not always be practicable, given the shortage of talent in the field.

7. **Lack of leadership:** It is all too well known that IOs, like Cooperatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), do not attract the best technical and managerial talent, mainly (but not only) because of their inability to pay what the market can. This inability to pay well comes from the very nature of grassroots-level economic systems which are incapable of generating surpluses on the same scale as organized industry or commerce. Few good leaders or professionals therefore venture into IOs. Hence

the shortage of leadership and the low rate of success of IOs.

8. **Information:** The importance of information and intelligence with regard to markets, production systems, environmental conditions and a host of other factors that have a direct bearing on any trade or activity is too well known to bear repetition here. Intervenors, particularly non-professionals, however often ignore the importance of such information, or fail to act on it when available. They may also fail to take into account the cost and time required to gather such information. As a result, decisions are based on erroneous or inadequate information, are taken too late, or cost too much.

9. **The costs of intervention:** Economic sub-systems at the grass-roots levels are, by their very nature, extremely low cost and cannot be compared with markets

and other systems that exist at higher levels of the economy. IOs, however, exhibit a distinct tendency to model themselves on the latter. They adopt styles, procedures and systems more appropriate to higher levels of economic activity than to the grassroots-levels at which they seek to intervene.

They come with their offices, their cars, their telephones, their electronics, their hotel bills and a host of other expenses which grassroots-level economics is incapable of sustaining, and which must therefore be subsidized by someone else, typically a donor who is all too ready to deal with someone who speaks his language and shows familiarity with the ways and gadgets of the modern world. This condemns the IO to forever be dependent on external support. The IO is unlikely to rise to levels of operations and profits where it can support such an expensive superstructure.

Employees of the IO are usually the first to perceive this, and soon lose all motivation to make operations viable. Cynicism is soon institutionalized, which turns into corruption. The funding agency or donor is usually among the last to know what is going on. By then it is usually a matter of prestige for someone somewhere to keep the IO alive, which is what keeps the IO going long after it has lost every justification for existence.

While planning an intervention, therefore, these matters must be given very careful consideration. Infrastructure, capital investment, staffing and systems must be appropriate and modelled on what a prudent businessman with an eye always on profit would have chosen. The only difference between an IO and a businessman should be on the question of who takes the profit.

**10. Initial losses:** Some losses and setbacks may be inevitable in the initial stages. They must be realistically estimated and provided for, and treated as part of the setting up' costs of the venture. The responsibility for providing for this reserve, which must be distinct from operational and other types of reserve, must be specified before commencement of operations, failing which the IO will start with an inherent weakness.

**11. Risks:** Any commercial activity, by its nature, involves risk. An organization engaged in business or commerce must do so on terms set by the market. The ability to absorb risk gives the organization resilience and the ability to survive; and this implies a reserve of capital or funds to cushion the effects of mistakes or the vagaries of the market.

Intervenors frequently ignore or gloss over this aspect. The result is an organization inherently lacking strength to survive in a competitive environment.

**12. Suitability of NGOs for commercial activity:** All too frequently, NGOs rush into commercial activity without the

necessary training, knowledge and expertise. Unless a thorough reorientation precedes such intervention, which must include attitudinal reorientation, the chances of success are remote.

**13. Rigidity of organization:** IOs are more often than not hierarchical, and equally often headed by bureaucrats or people with bureaucratic tendencies. Their decision-making processes are therefore rigid; power and authority are concentrated in a few pockets, if not at the top, which often excludes the people who are intended to be the beneficiaries. There is rarely any meaningful delegation or diffusion of authority.

This inherent rigidity inhibits and constrains functionaries of the organization, who have to deal with realities on the field. Even minor decisions are referred to headquarters or higher authorities. Attempts at delegation are often resisted on the grounds that people in the field are not capable or are not to be trusted, which may well be true in many cases. The result is an unresponsive and slow set-up, unable to react to fluid situations quickly enough to make the organization viable or profitable.

Once an organizational structure has been created and put in place, the effort needed to make changes is usually very large. It is necessary therefore to build into organizations, ab initio, the capacity to adjust, change and modify as the situation demands. It is usually advisable to start with the 'team' approach, which evolves into a more formal shape as the programme gathers momentum.

**14. The 'top down' approach:** The best intervention models in existence are those which have evolved organically from the grassroots, as an articulation of the aspirations and urges of the people. The process is slow but sure. (It need not necessarily be slow.) The AMUL example in Kaira District, Gujarat, is a classic example of success. Equally classic are the failures of

such models when transplanted 'top down' elsewhere. It is important to realize and admit that no grassroots organizations can grow unless it has its roots in the soil. This is not to say that external intervention has no role, but more on that later.

**15. Source of funds:** The source of funds for any intervention is an all-important factor. The ideology, concepts and intentions of the funding agency always find expression in the organizations and initiatives that it supports. This could have a synergetic effect. On the other hand, as can be observed in many cases, the effect could be quite the opposite. Such is often the case where a distant donor insists on preconceived approaches or ideology.

Such then are some of the common causes of failure of intervention, not usually to be found in more formal literature on the subject.

We now proceed to a discussion of certain other issues that an intervenor must, in our opinion, address before deciding on his pattern of operations. There will always be the usual issues relating to economics, sociology, production systems and the like that need to be considered, in the context of the specific situation before the intervenor. It is necessary, however, to go beyond these and examine the underlying logic of intervention strategy.

## Models for intervention

Broadly speaking, there may be said to exist two models or approaches to intervention. The first is 'direct' intervention, which has been the subject of our discussion so far. Such intervention is easy to start, but difficult to sustain and make a success of. A host of factors militate against the success of such IOs, not just those discussed – which are only a few common causes of failure. Underlying all of them is the basic problem of transplantation of external ideas and approaches into local soil.

The history of 'direct' intervention is not very encouraging. Any success that

does result can in the main be attributed to the 'organic' growth of institutions from the soil. Such growth is promoted by a number of factors: like, for instance, the macro-economic environment, the social and political conditions, availability of appropriate leadership, and a host of other issues, many of which have already been discussed. Natural or organic growth usually results in an organizational structure and methods of operation that are best suited to local and prevalent conditions.

It is thus empirically observed that when intervention is the result of transplantation of a foreign model into local soil, the results are generally unsatisfactory.

There is another type of intervention, which may be called 'facilitative' intervention. Simply put, it seeks to create and promote the conditions required for the emergence of organic institutions from within the soil; it either makes no attempt at direct intervention, or postpones such intervention until the appropriate time. Such facilitative intervention may take the form of education, training, dissemination of information, promotion of growth of grassroots organizations (which may involve setting up 'self-help' or 'affinity' groups), identification and fostering of potential leadership material, technical and management consultancy, or development of general infrastructure of various kinds.

One of the main differences between the direct and facilitative forms of intervention is that while the former seeks specific benefits for a defined set of beneficiaries the other targets a community or an area in which it seeks to improve conditions for the emergence of economically self-sustaining and socially equitable systems and institutions. This latter type of intervention is not only more appropriate but also more likely to

produce good results in the long run – results that are socially beneficial, although they may be less tangible.

An intervenor could therefore choose, for instance:

- to set up an information/data collection and dissemination network on radio, so that producers like farmers or fishermen may be informed in advance of prevailing market rates, to put them in a better bargaining position when they bring their produce for sale;
- organizational development to facilitate growth of strong grassroots groups of poor people;
- training people in techniques of production, preservation and value addition which are superior and more efficient than existing practices;

training people to absorb and manage credit from banks and similar institutions;

- and as people's organizations grow and extend their fields of activity deeper into existing commercial and marketing channels, the intervenor could step in with more sophisticated but appropriate consultancy in, say, management, marketing, preservation and transport.

At all times the effort would be not to hand out subsidies, or to deliver benefits, but to enable people to become self-reliant within the existing economic framework. It is beyond the mandate or power of an intervenor to change the overall economic situation in an area.

There is no denying, however, that in specific circumstances the conditions may favour direct intervention. In such cases, the Cooperative or Society models are best avoided, and replaced

by another model which is available under existing Indian law.

Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 envisages 'private limited companies' for charitable purposes in which the directors do not draw any remuneration or have a share in the profits; they merely act as trustees. Such a company would have all the advantages of a commercial organization while remaining free from unwarranted interference by government officials. It could be completely insulated from political, bureaucratic and other extraneous influences. It would be subject only to regulations and norms applicable to commercial and trading establishments in general. It would have the added advantage of exemption from income tax, if a suitable case could be made out.

It is not the purpose here to further elaborate on these and other advantages, or the laws applicable. Suffice it to say that a company under Section 25 of the said Act offers a viable and practical alternative, which holds much promise but has rarely been taken advantage of. It should be possible to give representation on the board of directors of such a company to the interest represented by the funding agency, to NGOs involved with the targeted population, to technical experts as well as management practitioners, who together should be able to exercise the necessary control to keep the organization 'on track'. As time passes and the people intended to benefit from the intervention are educated and empowered, they could also be coopted into the board.

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