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## Mobilization of Human Resources for Sustainable Development: The Future Generations Arunachal Initiative

\*By Dr. Tage Kanno

*Arunachal Pradesh is in a state of dormancy at present. A massive exercise of community mobilization is necessary to initiate the process of sparking the human energy off.*

Development, in today's context, should be sustainable and something which the common man can relate to and leads to a future which they can own. Arunachal Pradesh in the North East of India has a relative advantage as a late starter in the developmental arena. It still can learn from the mistakes of other regions, which had fallen prey to a skewed perception of development. Under the context, how can sustainable development be brought about in the face of fast depleting natural resources and tendency of the community today to depend on somebody high up or powerful to initiate the process?

It is increasingly being recognized that sustainable development can be brought about with more active participation of the community, which effectively means by use of human energy. Having used to being passive onlookers and looked upon as 'beneficiaries' of various government welfare schemes, however, the communities in

Arunachal Pradesh is in a state of dormancy at present. A massive exercise of community mobilization is necessary to initiate the process of sparking the human energy off. Therefore, a large-scale mobilization of human energy is the key to bringing about a sustainable development in the state.

### Arunachal's Development Path

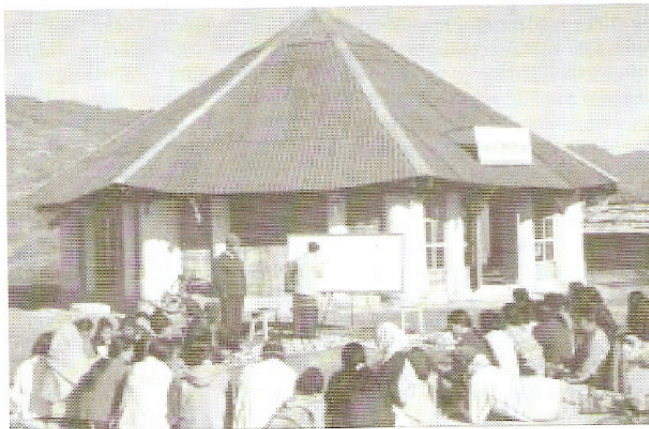
In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the world was witnessing the industrial revolution, Arunachal Pradesh was complacently basking in a self-contained subsistent agricultural economy. However, the sense of community participation was alive and kicking. Be it the building of a bridge across the mighty Siang river by the Adi Tribe, construction of traditional platforms called *lapangs* by the Apatanis or construction of community fencings by the Nyishis, every individual made their contribution for the common good. After the 1962 Chinese aggression, the nation was jolted to the realization that the strategically located border

area needs to be brought to the national mainstream. Developmental packages started coming in slowly and Arunachal Pradesh became a full-pledged state in 1987 in the backdrop of protests from many quarters on the ground that the state will not be economically viable. Various government developmental schemes came with their share of side effects too, of which making the people dependant has been the most serious one.

### Future Generations Arunachal (FGA) Intervention

Future Generations Arunachal (FGA) took upon the task of demonstrating an alternate way of bringing about development in 1997 when it was registered as a society with the government of Arunachal Pradesh. It started with rural women as the change agents. The underlying principle is to mobilize the community to actively work for their future using available local resources – both human as well as natural. This paper will look at the way FGA mobilized the communities in its pilot sites. It will argue how large-scale mobilization of human energy is possible and at the same time, desirable for sustainable development of the state.

FGA started working with the communities in the three sites – Sille, Ziro and Palin. These sites were selected on the basis of their differences – culturally as well as topographically. Sille in the foothills of the state by the Siang River, Ziro in the beautiful Apatani plateau and Palin in the rugged hills in Kurung Kumey district, were together seen to represent the whole diversity of the state while still strongly bounded by



## Initiative

cultural and spiritual common links. The principles of SEED SCALE<sup>1</sup> were applied from the beginning, though it had not taken a concrete shape as yet. The SEED-SCALE process utilizes human energy as the currency of developmental activities and activates community participation by building capacities of communities to improve their quality of life. Four principles underlie the SEED-SCALE approach:

1. **Build from success;** find what is working and build from that rather than starting with problems which dampens human energy;
2. **Create three-way partnerships:** Bottom-Up (energy of communities); Top-Down (typically government, to provide a conducive environment); and Outside-In (change agents bringing new ideas and expertise);
3. **Make decisions based on data** (factual evidence), rather than dictated by power or opinion;
4. **Seek behavior change as primary outcome,** rather than physical achievements.

After multiple sessions of self-evaluation exercises in the three sites, health and education were

selected as the entry points. FGA, initiated training motivated village women on basic home-based health care and development to become Village Welfare Workers (VWWs). Initially, the women were trained in the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP), Jamkhed in Maharashtra under the guidance of Dr. Raj Arole<sup>2</sup>. Now, FGA is managing a Primary Health Center at Sille in East Siang district<sup>3</sup> and the VWW trainings are conducted there. The women are trained on basic health care on the premise that diarrhea, pneumonia, tuberculosis and malaria account for almost 80% of all disease burdens in the state. More than 200 VWWs have been trained till today and they are making visible differences in the morbidity and mortality patterns in their areas. Early works in the three sites is exemplified by the Palin diarrhea program. Epidemics of diarrheal disease were an annual feature every summer in Palin area. FGA, instead of providing any medicine, started teaching the women to consume boiled water and importance of personal hygiene and environment sanitation. The women were slow to accept the idea but once they accepted it, they quickly saw the

changes – drastic drop in cases of diarrheal diseases and almost no death.

After five years in 2002, the three initial sites of Sille, Ziro and Palin were declared Scale Squared Centers. Expansion to other areas started from these sites. Simultaneously with geographical expansion, qualitative improvements were taking places in the three initial sites. In addition to health care, women were learning some income generation activities like vegetable gardening, pickle making, weaving, candle making, etc. When they realized the importance of account keeping, they arranged non-formal education for themselves and started learning how to read and write. Soon, men joined hands by forming Farmers' Clubs. Women further consolidated themselves by forming themselves into Self Help Groups.

### Evident Changes

Changes are beginning to be seen at different levels. At the first level are changes the individual participants in the programs brought about in their own lives. The story of Biri Mema (Box story) of Palin in Kurung Kumey district typifies that of hundreds like her. Similarly, Byabang

### Story of Biri Mema

"My name is Biri Mema, wife of Biri Tarang of Palin. I don't know when I was married, but I must have been six or seven years old, because I remember my teeth falling when I was in the house of the in-laws. I was extremely shy and introvert and couldn't utter even a single word in front of other people. I didn't know the going-on even in my next-door neighbor's house, let alone the outside world. Moreover, I was addicted to alcohol, always taking local beer with my husband in the fields and at home. I had lost two children as babies and one was stillborn.

"One day, while I going somewhere, I saw some people having a meeting. What drew my attention was that most of the persons were women. They were talking about keeping one healthy, taking care of the children and keeping fit during pregnancy. I was pregnant at that time. The meeting had been organized by Future Generations Arunachal, a nongovernmental organization. They asked me to join the group. As I started working with them, I started to see the world around me and I found myself changing slowly.

"One day there was a talk of a training program being organized in Itanagar. I was selected as one of the members to attend. It was very useful for me, but when I came back to Palin, my husband was very angry at my having stayed away from home for so long.

"In 1999 some women were being sent to Jamkhed for further training. I was again selected. I didn't know that Jamkhed was on the other side of India. I was illiterate so I refused to go. Even then, my friends forced me to go. The trip was an eye-opener. The women there were also illiterate, but they were doing an excellent job. When I came back to Palin, I was much more confident. In the meantime, the Site Team Coordinator of our Palin group was unable to continue her job. So, all the women selected me. Hesitantly, I started working for my community with renewed vigor. I was even successful in persuading my husband to give up drinking. Today my husband as the leader is the head Gaon Bura of our village. He is proud of me and I am proud of him." Biri Mema today leads the people of her community in their fight against illiteracy, child marriage, alcoholism and domestic violence.

Takya (black) is no longer what his name implied ten years back – an alcoholic man looking for trouble everywhere, but is Byabang Rocket today. He is a prominent public figure in his area and leads the community in various social and political events. As a result of capacity enhancements at individual levels, the living conditions of the communities as a whole have improved.

At the next level, communities are taking concerted efforts to improve the qualities of their lives without waiting for an outside agent or the government. Sangram is a circle headquarter in Kurung Kumey district some 150 km from Ziro the headquarters of Lower Subansiri district. The women of Sangram were trained on basic health care and they began to understand the importance of immunization. They approached the District Medical Officer (DMO) at Ziro to do something on it. After prolonged discussion, the women and the DMO struck a deal – the DMO will send an immunization team every month on a fixed day to Sangram and the women will ensure that all the eligible children and pregnant women turn out in the camp. Regular immunization program took off thus and now, 60% of children and 45% of pregnant women are immunized.

The Talley Valley Wildlife Sanctuary is 30 km southeast of Ziro in Lower Subansiri district. It is the habitat of many endangered species including the elusive clouded leopard, which was discovered in a study led by Future Generations in 1999-2000. In the late 1990s, hunting was rampant in the protected area. Though a forest division exists at Ziro and in spite of legal provisions, it was difficult for the government to control illegal hunting. As it was realized that the number of animals, including a certain species of monkeys (Assamese macaque), used during traditional festivals like Myoko, was rapidly declining, the people of Siiro village decided to impose a ban on hunting in the areas surrounding their village. With their intervention, the wildlife sanctuary is a better-protected area today.

When FGA started working with the elected Panchayat members in 2005,

its emphasis was mobilizing local resources and taking up developmental works by the people themselves. One of the greatest hurdles for the Panchayat members to function is their difference due to the political affiliations of the elected members as they are elected on party tickets. FGA encountered the same problem of mobilization in Mangnang village in East Siang district. However, after multiple sessions of facilitation, the four Gram Panchayat Members (GPMs) who represented two major political parties was persuaded to divide the areas of work among themselves. Four members were allotted four areas – health, water supply, electric supply and education. With such clear division, works could be carried out more efficiently.

In the traditional Nyishi society, child marriage was the norm. Many of the women now associated with FGA had been victims of such practice and were married to the household as the third or fourth wives. They took upon themselves the task of bringing an end to this practice and they have been more successful than any other attempt by anybody in the past.

### The Dawn of Changes

These are some of the visible changes in the approaches of the people FGA is working with. As pointed out earlier, the ultimate outcome of a developmental program is the kind of positive behavioral change that it has been able to bring about. A recent study by FGA on this issue, as an illustration, shows significant difference in the location of toilets in the respondents' home. More respondents in the control areas (38.33%) have no toilet but use open areas. Only 11.67% use open areas as toilets in the intervention areas. Similarly, more houses in the control areas (25%) have their toilets inside in the traditional way, which is not considered sanitary. Only 1 out of 60 (1.67%) has toilet inside the house in the intervention areas. Most respondents (86.67%) in the intervention areas have a sanitary latrine outside their houses while only 33.33% in the control areas have such facilities. This change has

come about because of awareness of the people and their felt-needs rather than gifted by any agency or welfare scheme. They will grow and be sustained forever.

### The Drawbacks of a Conventional Approach

The tragedy of conventional approach to development has been the remoteness with which the people, for whom such activities are carried out, look at the whole processes. Deteriorating conditions of a road, a dilapidated school building or a non-existent health service are, for them, the failure of the government; they have nothing to do with it. So is the fast disappearing forest coverage or rampant hunting. People tend to look at all these as belonging to the government as they did not participate in the decision to construct the road or the school building. Similarly as people do not get a chance to participate in implementing the programs of health service delivery or environment conservation, these activities belong to the government. Therefore, the immediate success of community mobilization for sustainable development lies in its role in instilling a sense of ownership among the people.

### The Task Ahead

The seed of a process to bring about sustainable development has been sown in Arunachal Pradesh. The task ahead lies in scaling up this seed - making it grow and spread to other areas as well. The works of FGA has amply demonstrated that increasing community participation is a sure way to sustainable development. The future direction should be to give ownership of their future to the people. While demonstration of successes can be done by individual organizations, the government will have to step in to take the process forward. The approach of the present Arunachal Pradesh government with the slogan "People First" is a step in the right direction. It has to be seen whether this remains yet one more slogan on paper or concrete steps will be initiated on the ground.

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