

Of latrines and videocassette recorders: Inroads on development

by David Drucker

On my way to Pakistan again...after 14 years. I started my journey in Geneva and crossed the 'frontier' into Pakistan at Kuwait, where the plane filled with kurta-clad men with fierce faces and headdresses that conjured up images of the wild North-West Frontier. Nearly every passenger carried a large cassette radio.

At Karachi, mountains of packages and bundles were retrieved with television and video machines much in evidence. Here then were the foreign returned. I was to learn later that this large force which came from its recruitment to the oil-rich, work-rich countries, was having a profound effect on the style and economy of life in Pakistan.

In the villages, these returned built good houses and launched small businesses. New local elites emerged and many families tried to keep pace.

Even latrines (the focus of my present journey) built by the returned had a keeping-up-with-the-Joneses quality. Sometimes, I was told, extravagance in their cost and design destroyed any incentive for the less fortunate to follow. I had seen similar ambiguous change and disruption of community cohesion before.

Signs of development

The physical signs of development can be seen everywhere in Pakistan; it is more difficult, however, to know what is happening to the people like the farmer in "The Road" (see panel, page 12) to appreciate the pluses and minuses of the way they relate to and work with each other.

Now I was visiting Matua, a village not far from Rawalpindi. Here I was to see the Punjab Sanitation Programme which UNICEF has assisted. Sanitation, it should be noted, is everywhere one of the most

difficult of development activities and here too government interest was initially very low. All the more reason to demonstrate what could be done – so seemed to be the argument.

UNICEF, for its part, has financed in approximately 275 selected villages, a number of demonstration projects like bio-gas plants, soakpits, and rainwater collection tanks. As one policy statement said: "Today the perspective of the rural population is that all development starts with the construction of water supply schemes".

A tank I saw was dry because there was no rainfall this year. The major hydroelectric schemes were barely operating, leading to demands for release of what water there was, as crops withered.

Matua, whatever the problems, is galvanized by such as Mr. Munsah, product of an earlier generation of development thinking, trained as a multipurpose development worker. Today he is responsible for a group of villages under the auspices of the Rural Development Department – the present version of the more ambitious plans of times past. He shows with pride the unusual brick-paved alleyways of his village. There is a gully in the centre, in which (when it does rain) water running off the tidy lime-washed walls of the houses helps disinfect the drainage.

Friday has been designated Cleanliness Day and each householder is required to clean his portion of the alleyway (especially the droppings of cows and goats). Area

Sanitation is one of the most difficult of development activities, with latrines viewed as the entry point and opportunity for health education.



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leaders supervise such activity. There are signs on the walls, exhorting villagers to hygienic practices. In this village (as in many) I heard the insistence that "in Islam, cleanliness is 50 per cent of godliness". The village has set up a proper garbage dump.

The Punjab programme depends a great deal on the recruitment and training of 'promoters', both male and female. Clearly where there is a Mr. Munsah much can be achieved.

The Revolving Fund

A foundation of this programme is the Revolving Fund, which makes loans for the purchase of materials for latrines (the labour must be provided). The loans are to be repaid and 'revolved' to the next family which wants to build a latrine.

Latrines are viewed as the entry point and opportunity for health education – and not vice versa.

In Matua, this fund is now into its third cycle. About one in five households now has a satisfactory latrine. Mr. Munsah and his fellow villagers seem to have had no difficulty in recovering the loans. In addition, the village raises an 'essential fund' – a periodic five-rupee tax on all married men; there are also donations.

Other villages in the programme have much more trouble with financing and this is a subject of controversy and concern for auditors.

Another village had successfully surpassed its target of latrine construction but had only recovered the equivalent of six loans out of 70. The promoters thought they might now actively try to persuade people to repay. However, the village committee seemed to think that promoters should not be seen as money collectors. As persons of status in the village, the committee members themselves would now certainly renew efforts to recover the funds and re-allocate them to more families.

I wondered out loud whether other families were not waiting to get the funds and whether this would constitute community pressure on those selected first to repay loans.

On what priority basis was selection made in the first case? Wouldn't those who did not get the initial loans feel resentful if their turn did not come? The answers were not clear, but I was assured that all would be well now, especially as the villagers were no longer busy with elections.

Politics seemed to be very important. I heard a great deal about the way people responded to each other according to the

highly-charged political perspectives which animated them. When a programme is supported by one group, a change of leadership (which seemed to happen frequently) often results in the new incumbents showing little interest in maintaining continuity. This was true also for changes in official positions.

One government official, however, held out hope. From the recent local election, the first in a long time, had emerged a 'new-type' leader – not the traditional kind. "These elected leaders", the official said, "must interpret to government what their community needs...and take back to their constituents a realistic idea of the limitations on government. It all depends, however, on regular elections."

What about the very poorest?, I wondered. Latrines, I learned, cost about one month's earnings for some families, and perhaps the very poorest need sanitation more than anyone. A village committee member suggested *zakat* as a remedy to help finance the neediest. (*Zakat* is the Muslim two and one-half per cent contribution expected from the wealthy.)

I couldn't follow the complicated discussion around whether latrines were 'rehabilitation' in the proper *zakat* sense or merely 'amenities'.

Although there was encouragement for each community to act according to its own wishes, I thought that some kind of 'how-to' guide might be utilized by the promoters – a guide to various ways in which a viable system of selection of loan priority and methods for recovery might be handled,

Pseudo participation

In a paper presented at the UN-organized International Seminar on Popular Participation held in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia in May 1982, Jacques Bugnicourt of the organization known as Environment and Development in the Third World, summed up 'pseudo participation' with the following vignette:

"...the arrival of a leading citizen, a speech to the assembled population, acquiescence out of courtesy – and work started without anyone having found out whether the people concerned have really understood what is being asked of them and are volunteering to do it". ■

with concern for those too poor to be expected to repay.

Perhaps a comic strip type of booklet might be useful, showing how some communities handle these matters, depicting some of the more usual pitfalls, and activities overlooked in setting up such plans. The response was one of inflation of such an idea: "Why not a regular newsletter?"... I remembered an earlier comment: "Our people love to plan...actually doing things is another matter".

Mr. Munsah is a very good planner. He shows the detailed proposals he has drawn up for a whole range of developments in his village. He has, in addition, a very important skill. He knows and keeps abreast of where possible resources are available. He actually makes the wheels turn between those organizations which are formal or governmental and those of the community.

UNICEF was one of these resources and an impressive range of his proposals had been forwarded. UNICEF had responded, commending his efforts and pointing out that a great deal was beyond its terms of reference, but that the organization would like to discuss further some of the ideas with the community.

'Going to scale'

UNICEF has demonstrated (often very well) what it is possible to do in field-based programmes. Now it is emphasizing 'going to scale' – that is, nationwide efforts – in critical child survival areas such as immunization and the use of oral rehydration.

There are many hurdles, however. Working with communities and bringing about people-change has a different time frame from that of our set-piece, five-year plans. It requires much more of the face-to-face relationship between the professional and the villager.

The growth of community oriented work is more biological than mathematical. As one observer puts it, "'Growing to scale' would better describe the necessary processes".

In the Punjab sanitation programme, government, to some extent, has not been in a position to realize some of the often unspelled-out assumptions about its role. But review is now well under way. The idea of a government province-level cell to carry on the programme is finding acceptance, with UNICEF meeting only some of the cost and government absorbing the rest.

An even greater achievement is the apparent willingness of government to employ a new group – women promoters. Given

the cultural, social, economic and political situation of women at this point in Pakistan's evolution, the commitment here is remarkable.

One relevant factor is the work and example of a UNICEF health educator, Margarita Cadanas. This is perhaps another instance of how communities can and will respond if professional inputs are good enough. It is remarkable, also, because governments (especially in these dark economic times) are not willing or able to take on new staff with all the accompanying long-term costs required.

Other concerns centre around the relatively single-purpose (sanitation) functions of such workers when multipurpose staff seem to broaden development possibilities.

Already, however, the promoters are being trained in widening health education activities. Water-related matters are the obvious ones. But nutrition is already on line and immunization and the like cannot be far behind.

Toward such ends UNICEF supports the orientation and training of local government officers. It is in these directions that the critical relationship of governmental and community efforts are being worked out. There has been much careful and dedicated work, but much more remains to be done: to streamline, for example, the flows of cash from source to project, which has

been a problem for maintaining community involvement.

Essential, too, is some solution to the perennial problem of transport — how to best use and share the available transport so that promoters may actually get to the villages in order to promote!

Such difficulties are compounded here because despite change, women are not free to travel without some provision for their protection.

Maintaining mobility is crucial. If, for any of the many predictable reasons, it is not possible, all the planning and training in the world will not bring the workers and the community face-to-face and to the true partnership that community participation necessitates.

No instant solutions

It was Ramadan, the holy month, when I visited Matua. Heat and fasting had stunned the landscape and its people. Yet a group of girls and women had waited patiently to greet me under the shade of the community-contributed *shamaiana* (festive awning). They applauded me (as an incarnation of UNICEF) as I arrived.

They could not be persuaded to speak to me directly or to ask me questions.

The local teacher, who takes six weeks to earn the equivalent cost of a latrine, hoped

I could tell them how to run the community more successfully. But they were puzzled and not a little disappointed that as 'expert' community worker I could not tell them that there are no instant solutions to problems.

They are the experts, I told them. Experts, that is, in knowing their own community needs. Experts in knowing what is possible for them.

The teacher explained that the women and girls could do much but "it is up to the men to release and encourage the women". The group applauded again as I left.

We bumped across the raised earthwork and the surface of carefully-laid broken stones that the community had worked on. Mr. Munsah had succeeded here too.

He had secured a matching grant, the community had provided the labour and some money, and the contractors would complete the link road in a few weeks.

The community and Mr. Munsah deserved commendation for their genuine accomplishments. But there were still so many questions. I kept wondering about the ambiguities of development... about community efforts, relationships among people, about hardware and replication of projects. The image of the despairing farmer in the story "The Road" (see panel, below), returned to haunt me as I reached the main highway and eventually the airport. □

The Road

(ORDACER)

In the early 70s I picked up an anthology of Pakistani short stories in Peshawar. One of them, "The Road", begins with a peasant farmer in quiet fury, pick-axing and systematically destroying the new feeder road to his one-time remote village. He had not been in favour of it from the beginning, especially as it meant giving up a strip of his family's hard-won land.

The farmer had made a meagre but regular living; he was happy with his young bride. What more did he need?

But the development worker and the young men of the village kept saying how good it would be for everyone to open the way to the main road, to grow more and sell their products in the big town, to share in the better, modern times to come, and to build a strong new nation.

And so he had finally agreed, along

with the elders in his village. With much hard work and assistance from the development fund, the metalled road eventually stretched like a dusty vein to the main transport artery of the district.

The road had not easily released the village and led it out of its remoteness, for the available animal power was slow and cumbersome. But the town merchants with motorbikes and vehicles were much more successful. They found their way into the village, bringing in temptations like coloured cloth and trinkets. He was soon in debt, unable to deny his wife the fascinating wares his neighbours' wives coveted from the peddlers. One day the farmer returned home to find his wife had run off with one of the itinerant merchants.

Thus it is we find him, in the tale, destroying the road where his own land had once been.

How rare or common such development-turned-sour is, I don't know. Such matters are not the stuff of

official development records and evaluations. But I often ponder their implications.

The road existed — a development project in which the community had participated. A seeming success.

And yet was the village better off, its people wealthier, happier? Were relationships in the village stronger, more binding? Did the road give the villagers an appetite for more development projects?

Or was it like such experiences as those in West Africa, where enormous outlays of labour and resources had gone into expanding the cocoa crop only for falling world prices to leave those farmers as badly off as they had been before.

Development which does little to change — perhaps even exacerbates — the discrepancies between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' brings disenchantment. Avoiding that consequence is the challenge for true community participation, real development, everywhere. ■

