

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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FORUM OF FREE ENTERPRISE

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O U R achievements in the field of community development have been puffed and praised by so many and so frequently that I would not mind performing the less pleasant but more necessary task of pointing out the extent of our failure. The sources of inspiration of community development are so utterly different and various as the Father of the Nation, the Indo-American Technical Co-operation Programme, the Grow More Food Committee, the Ford Foundation, the late Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and some original thinkers among the senior officers of the Planning Commission. With such mixed parentage one would naturally expect the idea to be anything but clearly defined. And lack of clarity in the basic approach has been its principal feature.

Very often we are asked, "Has there been no improvement at all then in the past 9 years of planned community development?". Of course, there has been, but planning implies the best use of limited resources. Two years ago the Government of U. P. appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of a veteran congressman. That Committee made a prolonged review of community development work all over the State. It reported that the C.D. programme of the Government had not accelerated the process of social and economic transformation. My complaint is that community development has been ill-planned, if planned at all, and as regards the best use of limited resources — the less said the better.

Recently, the Prime Minister mentioned that the functions of the Planning Commission were not merely to plan

"People must come to accept private enterprise not as a necessary evil, but as an affirmative good."

EUGENE BLACK
President, World Bank

but also to evaluate the execution of the plan. Attached to the Planning Commission is a Programme Evaluation Organisation whose primary duty is to assess the progress made by the C.D. activities — a sort of annual audit. The Seventh Report of this organisation was published in April, 1960. It contains a general review of the progress of planned community development over a period of seven years. And "in the emerging picture shades predominate and the reader is left with the impression of an inadequately coordinated endeavour, governmental rather than popular in character, and sustained more by hope than by achievement". These words of the report convey the views of many other objective students of C.D. as well.

Later, in June, the "Economic Review" of the A.I.C.C. took editorial notice of the Development Commissioners' Conference; they hold one every summer in one of our hill stations; this one was at Srinagar. The *Economic Review* said: "They will have to shed complacency. For the community development programme despite initial success has of late revealed weaknesses which must be removed." The editor raised certain fundamental questions to which the answer should have been available much earlier. He asked, "Why has it failed except in specific areas in lifting agricultural production from stagnation? Why has it failed to whip up that measure of popular enthusiasm and local initiative it initially expected to? What is wrong with the co-operative movement and what measures are called for to give effect to the Nagpur decisions? Have the village Panchayats — the one institution to which it assigned so vital a role in rejuvenating the rural economy — come up to expectations?"

The "Economic Review" is the mouth-piece of the party in power in the centre as well as in the States. If that

magazine could raise these questions there must be some thing seriously wrong with the way community development has been planned in the past nine years.

The Seventh Programme Evaluation Report was ready in April. That was fifteen weeks before the draft outline of the Third Five-Year Plan was published. Why is it that the draft has completely ignored this report? The First Plan had referred to the setting up of the Evaluation Organisation. The Second Plan took cognisance of the third evaluation report which was the latest then available; and it proposed that the drawbacks pointed out in it should be remedied. The draft Third Plan indicates a refinement in planning methods, viz., ignoring all inconvenient criticism. The section on community development ignores the Evaluation Reports even though the Prime Minister thinks that they are important; it ignores the criticism of the A.I.C.C. *Economic Review*. Why? Not because these criticisms were frivolous or unfounded but because the Planning Commission knows that with the backing of the Prime Minister it can get the Parliament to approve anything it puts forward. And the Parliamentary debates on the draft outline of the Third Plan have shown us the extent of the interest which vocal M.P.s felt in this part of the draft.

Planning requires priorities to be prescribed as much in the rural sector as, say, in the industrial sector. For instance, one village may have three wells supplying it with drinking water; a fourth may be added for greater convenience. But another may have no well at all and the villagers may have to trudge three or four miles before they reach a reasonably safe source of water supply. Now it has to be decided which should have the priority. Then again, the agricultural production in a particular village may have progressively decreased because the irrigation

tank in the locality has gradually silted up; at the same time, the school-master wants the thatched roof of his school to be replaced with a tiled roof; the surpanch wants a community hall to be built because the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting is sanctioning a radio receiving set. If there are to be priorities in the matter of investing money and endeavour, which of these should have precedence over the others?

The First Plan recognised agricultural production as the most urgent objective of the C. D. programme. But at the same time, it listed nine activities ranging from agriculture to housing and social education as the main lines of activity. There was no attempt, no talk of fixing priorities. Clearly advance was intended all along the front. The Second Plan confirmed this. It mentioned the list of what is called development activities: agriculture and allied activities; co-operation, and land reforms; village and small industries; rural electrification and social services; and the welfare programme for backward classes. All these were mentioned in one breath. In the sphere of community development, there were to be no priorities, no warrants of precedence; nor was there to be any attempt at distinguishing economic development from welfare. The Commission did not realise what would be the inevitable consequences. What has been happening in the past nine years has been described in a report of a team appointed by the Committee on Plan Projects.

This is what it said in 1957: "The tendency in the past years has been to stress the welfare activities more than the economic development activities. This is because the former are popular, easy of achievement and impress the casual observer; the villager himself gives a full measure of his admiration and gratitude to the people who have brought

him these amenities." The report added that the emphasis should shift without delay to the more demanding aspects of economic development. This utter lack of priorities has struck foreign observers as well.

The Ministry of Community Development had requested the United Nations Technical Assistance Administration to send a mission. This mission was distressed to find that in one development block the village streets had been paved with bricks, undeniably, an amenity to be appreciated during the rains; but with a little greater appreciation of priorities this money, material and labour could have been diverted to the very urgent requirement of draining away the excess water from the fields. This would have benefited the cotton crop and the farmer's general economic condition very much indeed. But none had bothered.

Improvement in agricultural production is to have the first priority in the community development programme for two reasons. First, because it is time the country got out of the compelling necessity of importing foodstuff. Secondly, because it is time that the farmer had a little more money in his pocket, not money given to him by the inflationary tendencies but by an actual increase of the fruit of his labour. Once he has that extra economic strength, he will have increased confidence in himself; his felt needs will increase and he will have the desire and the energy to get those needs met. And then the Government can come in with adult education, social education, community listening sets, community centres and even training camps for 'village leaders'. The draft outline of the Third Plan indicates the decision to allocate a greater portion of the community development funds to agricultural development. This is a step in the right direction. Only it is a pity that

the draft outline does not explicitly abandon its old policy of simultaneous advance along the entire rural front.

For the first time in eight years, we now find the Planning Commission noticing the need for fixing priorities and giving agricultural production precedence over welfare activities. But the pattern has been set and followed for eight years. A revision of attitudes and budget provisions may be made difficult if not impossible by political pressure and public demand. And here we come to the rural public.

The First Five-Year Plan as well as the second were eloquent about public participation in rural development programme. We were told that the Community Development Programme aimed at the establishment of a suitable organ to ensure participation of villagers at the planning stage. This is in regard to planning, and not the execution of plans. Nothing could have better indicated that Delhi is aware of the diversity and variety of our villages. But Delhi has its own views of what is or what ought to be good for the village and, therefore, simultaneously with this declaration an administrator of community projects was appointed and was made responsible for planning, directing and co-ordinating community development work throughout the country. He was not merely to co-ordinate, but actually to plan far away from the villages.

The Second Plan mentioned that "the participation of people in planning and execution of rural schemes is an essential feature of the movement and in this the results achieved are promising". That is what the Plan said. But the Administrator was meanwhile upgraded into a Minister, his staff and status appropriately enlarged and also his power of issuing instructions to all and sundry on all

aspects of planned rural development. The fruit of nine years of people's participation is, according to an official publication: "On the whole the people's attitudes and reactions in most of the blocks are not yet generally favourable to the success and growth of the community development programme. The majority of villagers do not regard it as their own programme and seem to rely mainly on the Government for effecting the development of rural areas".

If there is a Ministry of Community Development, it has to have some work to do. So, under the name of co-ordination and integration, it poaches upon the preserves of Agriculture, Health, Education and Culture. Recently, the Union Minister of Agriculture is reported to have wondered why in Punjab the Package Plan for improving agricultural output is being dealt with by the State Minister for Community Development and not by the State Minister for Agriculture. It is time that the Union Minister realised that the Ministry for Community Development is an anomaly. I said so in a rather notorious minute of dissent three years ago. Recently, the Indo-American Export team pointed out that the existence of that Ministry as a separate unit leads to overlapping and confusion; it did not mention the waste of scarce resources.

The draft outline of the Third Plan mentions that the principal test for the community development at the present juncture must be its practical effectiveness as an agricultural extension agency. Last year, the Agriculture Ministry set up a vast extension organisation with the help of the Ford Foundation. It is not clear whether the draft plan implies that this should be taken over by the Community Development Ministry, but the creation of this new machinery clearly implies that nine years of extension have been unfruitful.

With the Ministry doing the planning in Delhi, the planning by the villager simply cannot take place; all planning is concentrated in the capital; whatever little is left to be done, is reserved for the State Secretariat. A block officer told me that for a youth welfare centre in one of his villages the local people had raised funds for a harmonium, tabla, etc. Under the rules he had to obtain the State Development Commissioner's permission before buying the articles and the permission had not been received even after a year of waiting.

The other aspect of people's participation is equally interesting. Because they have no part in planning, they have little interest in execution and the moment the official pressure is relaxed "there is a tendency to decline in the later years both in the N.E.S. and C.D. blocks." We used to hear a lot about this *shramdan* business. The UN Mission observed that now *shramdan* seldom exceeded one day in the year. The reason is that when the plan comes from far far above and has little relation to the actual needs of the villager, he does not have his heart in it. If we are really going to plan community development, this has to be done not in Delhi, or in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Madras or Lucknow but much lower down. And priorities should be clearly understood. The first priority — and only priority for years — will be the increase in agricultural production. If anything is to take precedence over it, it is the supply of drinking water.

One need not subscribe to the Nagpur Resolution of the Congress on co-operative farming. Yet one can hold that development of rural service co-operative is essential for improving our agricultural production. Provision of credit, distribution of seed, fertiliser and implements and marketing of produce has to be done by some organisation. Even in the industrially advanced capitalistic countries, co-operatives are the main institutions which do this. They are the service co-operatives. I wish that in the Nagpur Reso-

lution, the Congress had not clouded the issue by talking of joint co-operative farming when even the first step of service co-operatives is still far off — very far off. Before starting a service cooperative, we must decide what should be its size; and the size has to be reasonable. Two important persons in the Planning Commission have always held by the slogan, "One village, one co-operative." Even when the Reserve Bank's Rural Credit Survey team recommended and all the State Governments accepted the idea of a viable co-operative, these two did their utmost to fight it. They failed for a time and the Second Plan had to pay lip-service to the idea. Then right in the middle of the Second Plan, they obtained the Prime Minister's support to their view; and they turned the tables on the Minister of Agriculture who was then in charge of co-operation. Without a reference to Parliament and without consulting the States, the policy was reversed. Later still, the National Development Council was hustled — actually hustled — into putting its rubber stamp to it. Differences arose with important persons with life-long association with the co-operative movement. So they appointed a team under Mr. Vaikunt Lal Mehta. Unfortunately, this team also vigorously recommended that the co-operatives should be viable in area, in membership and in turnover. They suggested that in the average conditions the population covered by a co-operative might be 3,000. The Planning Commission refused to agree. The draft outline deliberately ignores all this and gives an unusually long dissertation on the slogan, "One village one co-operative". It permits deviation to the extent that groups of villages with a total population of not more than 1,000 can have one co-operative. What surprises one is how it arrived at this figure. On what is it based? What has happened in the Planning Commission is that the member in charge of co-operatives and his senior official adviser have been reduced in importance. The subject is actually dealt with by a different member and a different officer. Repeated examination

of the problem in the past six or seven years has indicated the futility of very small co-operatives, but still the country is being forced to accept outworn slogans. Why? Because two persons entirely out of touch with the rural conditions think that they are good for the country. It is time that the general public and its representatives in Parliament took up this matter a bit more seriously.

This brings us to the apparently small but rather important matter of the allotment of funds at the block level. We have been told more than once that the intention is to integrate all development activities in the block, co-ordinating the staff and budgets of all the development departments. One would then ask why should there be a separate C.D. budget for each C. D. block when each State Department is going to spend in each block area on agriculture, health, etc. The question becomes all the more pertinent when we are told in the draft outline that by 1963, the entire country is to be covered by C. D. blocks. From the common sense point of view there can be no answer to this question. But the draft outline has found one. It tells us that the main reason for providing special funds in the schematic budget is that each block should have certain funds at its disposal for local development which can serve as a nucleus. That means the State Government cannot be trusted to take care of its people in the different parts of the State without the compelling hand of Delhi guiding it. That is what it actually means, if it means anything. The Central Ministry of Community Development and the Planning Commission know better what is good for the farmer, better than the State Government or the farmer himself!

Agricultural production directly involves the cultivator. We have also the large class of the landless villagers; apart from the shopkeeper, school-master and others we have among them the village artisan and the landless labourer. The village artisan may in many cases be under-employed;

the landless labour always is; and often too, the small farmer. Not all our efforts at increasing our agricultural production will provide full employment for more than some of this village population. If, therefore, the increase in agricultural production is the primary problem from the point of view of the farmer, the increase in employment is the problem of a larger section of the rural population.

A few months ago, the Planning Commission circulated a brochure to the Members of Parliament on finding work for the unemployed and the under-employed in rural areas. This has now been incorporated in the draft outline in a section called "Utilisation of Rural Manpower". What are the avenues of work the Planning Commission can think of? They are — one, work projects included in the plans of the State and local bodies involving the use of unskilled and semi-skilled labour; two, works undertaken by the community or by the beneficiaries in accordance with the legal obligations; three, local development works towards which local people contribute labour while some measure of assistance is given by the Government (this is unrequited labour which is not my idea of employment); four, schemes to enable village communities to build up assets; and, five, supplementary works programme to be organised in areas of high incidence of unemployment.

The draft contains wordy explanations and solemn adjurations of the most elementary nature. One does not need a highpowered body like the Planning Commission to tell us that "Work Programmes on these lines should be planned for execution in the slack season"; or again, "The services of the Panchayats and co-operatives and other voluntary organisations should be fully used." But we find nowhere in the draft an estimate — even a rough estimate — of the existing or expected volume of rural unemployment or under-employment. Nor does it tell us the extent to which these five avenues will solve the problem. If the Planning

Commission has any plan to solve unemployment, then it must give us at least a rough idea of its size. It has told us that the investment by the private sector on agriculture, minor irrigation, etc., is going to be Rs. 800 crores. Everyone knows that this is a sheer guess and that in this matter their guess is as good as anybody's. But it was necessary to show how big our plan is going to be. Hence Rs. 800 crores have to be spent. The Planning Commission apparently felt no need to make a similar guess in regard to rural underemployment and unemployment. The absence of data in a plan cannot be made up by platitudes.

This problem of rural unemployment and underemployment has another facet-cottage industry. Pilot projects had been started in a number of C. D. blocks during 1955-56. An evaluation of their work was made by the Programme Evaluation Organisation. Its report is depressing. The various all-India bodies and commissions concerned with cottage and small industries "have not evolved the practice of thinking together to" establish local projects to meet the local needs; and for two reasons: first, the love of centralisation and the habit of planning from above; and, second, intolerance. The result of it all was that only 37% of the trainees in these pilot projects took to the crafts which they were trained for. The wastage was 63% and many of these had received stipends. And the stipends ranged from Rs. 7 to Rs. 75 per month.

The draft itself mentions that during the first three years of the Second Plan, the village industries encouraged by the State have not been able to provide full remunerative work or to attract young men with some measure of training and education. It tells us that utilisation of funds has been slow and only a small impact could be made in improving techniques or marketing facilities. May be, because of this poor showing, there seems to be some desire to be realistic. There is a proposal to use improved techni-

ques and use power for many of the processes involved like making pulp for paper, crushing non-edible oil seeds, manufacture of gur and sugar from palm. Of course, the *ghani*-crushed oil and the khadi will be kept unpolluted by electric power; and in spite of the admitted marketing difficulties. It is only by rural electrification accompanied by starting of power-operated rural industry that we can hope to tackle under-employment and unemployment of the underprivileged sections of the rural community. It does not appear that the Third Plan is going to lay the requisite stress on this.

I have tried to distinguish between rural development and rural welfare. I have pointed out that in our C. D. programmes the latter has so far had precedence over the former. I do not mean that community welfare should be completely neglected. It cannot be "jam tomorrow" policy; such a policy cannot satisfy the voter in a democracy. All that I suggest is that the emphasis on development should be greater.

I have already said that the supply of drinking water should have precedence even over agricultural development. The First Five-Year Plan called it a basic requirement. The draft outline of the Third Plan, however, describes it as one of the many desirable amenities. One does not understand this shift in emphasis. It is surprising that even today, ten years after the Planning Commission was established, it has no data on this subject; for that matter nor has the Ministry of Health. And they have yet to think out the minimum standards of distance, quantity and quality.

Social education and the programme for women and children under Community Development deserve some examination.

In the Second Plan, there is a provision of Rs. 15 crores

For social education. Of late, social education is called fundamental education. The programme consists for adult literacy classes, organisation of community centres, women's organisations, youth clubs and village leaders' camps. The Planning Commission has described it as a comprehensive approach to the solution of the problems of the community through community action. This most wonderful thing seems to have flopped, if we are to rely on the various evaluation reports. Appreciable numbers of those made literate have lapsed into illiteracy; the running of the recreation centres has been generally unsatisfactory. The rate of mortality among youth clubs, women's organisations, etc., has been very high—as much as 57% in the blocks studied by the Programme Evaluation Organisation. The leaders' camps are intended to train up members of the panchayats and co-operatives efficiently to perform their duties. I have no doubts that the Ministry of Community Development, of course with the assistance of the Ford Foundation will soon open similar camps for our M.L.A.s & M.P.s to help them to perform their duties efficiently—duties which are surely more demanding, more difficult and more important than those of the village panchas.

One would have expected the draft plan to take note of these evaluation reports and suggest new lines of action; instead, it blandly remarks that some progress has been made in this field in the Second Plan period and as in the case of co-operative farming we are merely told to wait for further particulars. That is a pity. Social education is a good thing but a correct medium for it has yet to be evolved. It is wise to try new ideas in pilot projects rather than let loose on the country-side social and educational organisers of the type which we have seen in the past seven years.

I have referred to the programmes for women and children mainly to show that like the Community Develop-

ment Ministry, the Central Social Welfare Board was created as a co-ordinating agency. It utterly failed even in this respect. The Community Development Organisation came into the field first and had its women's and children's welfare programme. A few months later the Central Social Welfare Board was established. The clash of interests of certain personalities made peaceful co-existence difficult from the beginning. It was, therefore, decided that their areas of operation should be exclusive — the Board would not operate in Community Development Blocks. But as the community development blocks increased in number, so did the welfare projects, and gradually their workers began to raid the same villages. Insistent tales of confusion and waste and overlapping began to reach Delhi. And the Central Government ordered an integrated pattern of activities. That was in December 1956. Today almost four years later, that decision is still on paper. Last year it was agreed that *as an experimental measure* 100 blocks should have an integrated arrangement; and an attempt is being made to give effect to it in only 20 blocks. Each party blames the other. One has become a Minister and the other hopes to be one. Meanwhile, the nation's money is being spent, a lot of it wastefully. The study team on community development appointed by the Committee on Plan Projects had suggested certain practical measures which could have produced some useful results, had they been implemented. These concerned the organisation, the approach and the work pattern. These suggestions were angrily brushed aside. Then the P. E. O. made a study which pointed out the terrific centralisation in the Central Social Welfare Board; it suggested that what was needed was a co-ordinated pattern of work. Then there was another team appointed by the Committee on Plan Projects which also recommended some sort of co-ordination between the two organisations. Nothing has happened, and perhaps nothing will, till we have a Ministry of Social Welfare!

Originally, it was not contemplated that the Central Social Welfare Board should start its own welfare extension projects on a uniform pattern with centralised direction. The Government resolution adjured it "to promote the setting up of social welfare organisations on a voluntary basis in places where no such organisations exist". What has happened is something similar to the community development machinery.

On this organisational aspect, the draft outline of the Third Plan still talks of co-ordination between different agencies instead of trying to reduce the multiplicity of overlapping organisations. And after deciding on co-ordination four years ago, it still talks of pilot projects for co-ordination. The vested interests which have grown up in the past six or seven years are too strong even for the Planning Commission.

The U.N. Mission which reported on our community development programme had discussions with the Chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board and also saw the work of several Mahila Mandals. This was in addition to what they saw and discussed in regard to women's work in the community development programme. They recommended a completely changed approach to the programme for rural women exactly as an earlier Indian team had done. The draft outline is silent on this; it does not propose any change in the content of the programme. Ultimately, the problem of the village woman is the same as the problem of the man — economic need. No programme which has within it the seed of additional economic well-being can fail to find a ready response. Everything else, like literacy, flower gardens and interior decoration, has to come much later, if it is to leave any permanent mark on our village society.

In the task of helping the people to develop their villages,

the participants are the Central Government, the State Governments, the District Development Council, the Zilla Parishads, the Block Advisory Committees, the Panchayat Samities, the Panchayats and the co-operatives. We have been repeatedly told that these representative bodies at the lower levels have been created mainly as instruments for community development. Every one of them is or ought to be presumed to be a people's representative organisation. But apparently some do not agree. So we have separate representation in this field for "people's organisations" or "voluntary organisations." And of these, the one which is attempting to thrive under the patronage of the Planning Commission and of the Central Government is the Bharat Sevak Samaj. Till not long ago the Planning Commission used to — I do not know if it still does — retain a portion of the allocation for local development works. This it sanctioned for schemes directly approved by them without the intervention of the State Governments. And these schemes, almost without exception, were those sponsored by the Bharat Sevak Samaj. As for the lines of its activities in the third plan period, we hear the creation of a new type of Block, the Lok Karya *Kshetra*. One of the items in the programme is propaganda against the 'vice of smoking' — not as an anti-cancer measure but to create a moral atmosphere] But the question which arises is: in spite of all representative institutions functioning from the village upwards, is it necessary for the Central Government to bring into being a new organisation, invest it with status and funds, and assist it to build itself up?

In a huge country-wide endeavour, there is bound to be a certain waste of resources—financial as well as human. But where such waste is avoidable and is deliberately permitted that is inexcusable. The existence of the Ministry of Community Development with a large staff of experts on health, agriculture, education, irrigation, etc., is certainly

an avoidable waste, because there are other ministries who have been assigned these several departments of administration and who maintain large staff of experts. The frequent conferences of state officers which the ministry holds and the gala annual development conference held every summer in one of our hill stations are not merely wasteful but almost demoralising. It is disgusting to see officers of different departments in the states putting forward their claims to be included in the state delegations. The latest device to silence critical senior officers is the Community Development Institute located in lovely Mussoorie. An officer from one of the States told me that his colleagues queue up for an opportunity to go to the Institute and that their criticism of the Community Development programme has been very considerably muted by this device.

People who are in positions of power and authority and people who have a political or economic voice loud enough to be heard have so far taken little interest in examining the Community Development programme. The villager is still patient enough with our plans for him.

The views expressed in this booklet do not necessarily represent the views of the Forum of Free Enterprise.

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"Free Enterprise was born with man and shall survive as long as man survives."

—A. D. SHROFF

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