

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN THE MAHAVELI AREA

Shraib Sultan Khan
UNICEF Consultant, Mahaveli

The farmers problems which remain unresolved mainly fall into the category of water management and remedial action in this sphere is immediately needed. Although considerable work has been done and most of the problems have been identified, resources should be made available to tackle the problems on an emergent basis. The farmers disenchantment with the implementation of village programmes reflects lack of collective action on part of the farmers as well as inadequacy of the present government programmes.

In Kalawewa area of 'H' system, where nearly 10,146 families have already been settled and are cultivating over 25,000 acres of land, and some since early 1974, it was quite apparent that only some settlers had derived the full benefits of development, the large majority is lagging far behind. The provision of services very often is done without monitoring its accessibility to the target group. The Mahaveli Project area 'H' is no exception to this common phenomenon. Irrigation water was flowing in abundance; only 25,000 acres of the projected 71,000 acres had been brought under cultivation at this point of time, in the miles and miles of main and branch canals, distributary and sub-distributary channels but it was not available to all the farmers in the required quantity.

Agricultural Extension services were well organized but little benefit was derived by the bulk of the peasantry; community development staff was plentiful but there was no fostering of communities and there was little community participation in the development of social and welfare services. The reason for this

state of affairs was not too difficult to discern. Attempts at individual servicing with an acute absence of productive and managerial human skills in the villagers renders Government services ineffective or only benefits the few who possess these skills. Effective servicing is only possible through group action. Group action is also the key to upgrading of human skills on which depended not only productivity but community participation as well. Communities seldom stay organised around social and welfare provision. It is therefore imperative that social programmes should be closely linked with productive programmes.

A critical analysis of the contemporary studies on 'H' area of the Mahaveli Development Project showed that community cohesiveness was poor and that there was not a single existing village level organization capable of playing the role of community development. There was clear need for forging a partnership between the farmers and the project administration through a comprehensive programme of Community Development. Community Development effort in fostering of village programmes is weak and clearly reflects farmers disenchantment in this regard. It is a clear case where hopes have been aroused without commensurate satisfaction.

On the basis of experience gained so far, among the directions a training programme should prescribe are the following:

Formulation of an urgent and immediate plan to solve Water Management problems of the farmers; and a systematic plan for fostering of village programmes by Community Development staff.