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NATIONAL EXTENSION SERVICE



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Community Projects Administration
Government of India

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I propose to talk today on the National Extension Service in India—its fundamental aims and scope. Our Prime Minister has called this movement a revolutionary movement and a recent mission organised by the United Nations has referred to it 'as the most significant experiment in economic development and social improvement in Asia at the present time'. What is its real significance?

The people of India are building up a new life for themselves. They are seeking to create a new pattern of society. The National Extension movement is the agency for bringing about this social change in rural India. The aim is that there should be owner-cultivators, making the best use of the land, water and other resources by scientific agriculture, and finding supplementary occupations in cottage and small-scale industries so that there may be a diversified rural economy and a richer and fuller life. What is required is a change in the mental outlook of the people, instilling in them an ambition for higher standards of life and the will and the determination to work for such standards. This is essentially a human problem—how to change the outlook of the 70 million families living in the countryside, arouse enthusiasm in them for new knowledge and new ways of life and fill them with the will to live a better life. As the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee said, this is one of the most difficult problems that ever faced a nation in the history of the world.

Basic Principles

In the past, Government's efforts to bring about improvement in rural areas have been directed through fairly well organised development departments—such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Co-operation, Health, Education. These worked independently of one another following their individual programmes without a sense of common objectives. Each department approached the villager through its own hierarchy and the weakest link in each of these departments was usually the last official who had to be in touch with the villager. This official was, in most cases, inadequately trained and incapable of providing guidance to the villager. The villager hardly felt his presence. The activities of these departments were also not linked up with those of Revenue Officers which touch village life at many points, or with the local bodies which, under the law, are responsible for welfare services in the rural areas like communications and water supplies. The result was that there were no concerted efforts to improve all sides of village life, to change the outlook of the farmer and to mobilise local initiative and resources for the betterment of rural conditions.

The basic principles on which the National Extension Service movement lays stress are three:—

Firstly, all aspects of rural life and inter-related programmes of improvement should be comprehensive, though there might be emphasis on special sides of it.

Secondly, the motive force for improvement should come from the people themselves. Self-help is at the root of all reform. The State only assists with supplies and services and credit. The vast unutilised energy lying dormant in the countryside should be harnessed for constructive work, every family devoting its time not only for carrying out its own programmes but also for the benefit of the community.

Thirdly, the Co-operative principle should be applied, in its infinitely varying forms, for solving all problems of rural life.

The broad directions in which change in outlook is needed and is to be worked for are:—

Firstly, increased employment and increased production by the application of scientific methods in agriculture, including horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries etc., and the establishment of subsidiary and cottage industries;

Secondly, self-help and self-reliance and the largest extension of the principle of Co-operation; and

Thirdly, the need for devoting a portion of the unutilised time and energy in the countryside for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Welfare State in action

Let me emphasise another point. The movement is not an official movement. There is an administrative organisation for it. This of course is necessary. It is linked up with officers at all levels working as a team. It is the Welfare State in action. But it is more than that. Alongside the administrative organisation, the N.E.S. programme aims at the closest co-operation with the best non-official leadership at every stage. In essence the organisation is both official and non-official; both have to work together. Development programmes are drawn up after the fullest discussions with the people and their representatives at various levels. At the village level, the Panchayat is utilised in the planning as well as the implementation of the programme. In areas where such Panchayats do not exist, efforts are being made to encourage the growth of *ad hoc* non-statutory village development councils called variously as the Gram Vikas Mandals, Gram Mangal Samitis, etc. Through these bodies effective participation of the people in the planning and the implementation of the Plan is secured. Plans drawn up by the

village are considered by Advisory Committees at the block level and the district level on which non-official leaders are associated. Thus, at every stage the official and the non-official organisations are working side by side for evolving and implementing the programme. The whole movement is based on self-help and the active interest and support of the people has, therefore, to be enlisted in the task of bettering their own condition. The Central Government is assisting the movement by giving a permanent grant of half the additional cost of the staffs and by organising through the Co-operative movement and other channels the short, medium and long term credit required. The National Extension movement is thus essentially a people's movement. It should not be allowed to deteriorate into a series of official projects or schemes but should continue to be a dynamic movement representing the efforts made by the people to improve their own condition. The role of the officials is to guide the people; to advise them regarding the technical and other measures for increasing production; and to organise the finance, supplies and services needed to enable the people to implement programmes. In all other matters the initiative should be with the people themselves.

Four stages

There are four stages in the spread of the movement:—

- (i) The pre-extension stage. During this stage local development programmes including local boards' programmes should be so organised as to prepare the people for the National Extension Service. These programmes should be prepared in consultation with the people and should be regarded as their programmes to which they make a contribution in the form of labour and/or money. This is the stage of preparation.
- (ii) The next stage is when the National Extension Service is introduced in an area. This will be the permanent structure.
- (iii) The period of intensive development known as the Community Project programme for three or four years follows as the third stage.
- (iv) After the Community Project stage the area reverts as a National Extension Block.

At present the National Extension movement and Community Projects cover nearly one hundred thousand villages. By the end of this year 120,000 villages will be covered. The intention is to spread the movement throughout the country by the end of the second Five-Year Plan, viz. 1960-61. Training schemes for this programme have been organised and are in operation.

How is the success of the movement to be judged? What are the criteria for the assessment of results and for gauging the

extent to which the movement has brought about a change in the minds of the people? In my view the following should be the tests:

Firstly, have we given a plan of improvement to every family in the countryside and are we assisting these families to implement their plans? To achieve the target of doubling the production in ten years, works of permanent improvement have to be initiated by every family for making the optimum use of irrigation facilities, for consolidation of holdings, for contour-bunding etc. The aim should be increased employment not merely in agriculture but also in cottage and small-scale industries etc.

Secondly, is every family made fit to become a member of at least one co-operative society in its own right? The co-operative system should be integrated with the National Extension movement. An essential point is how the sections of the community which are not represented on co-operative societies because they do not satisfy the tests laid down for creditworthiness, can be rehabilitated and made creditworthy. Unless such rehabilitation is achieved, the entire movement will be condemned as benefiting only the well-to-do families and cannot become a people's movement in any sense.

Thirdly, to what extent do the families in a village utilise a portion of their time for voluntary work for the benefit of the community? A fair measure of success has been achieved in this direction. There should be intensification of these efforts and the aim should be to have *permanent* works of public benefit like village forests, improvement of grazing grounds, drinking water wells, roads, school buildings etc., constructed with people's participation. It should also be emphasized that such works as are constructed should be maintained by the village community.

Fourthly, is there an active women's and youth movement in the villages? It is most important to bring these i.e. the women and the youth into the movement fully. Only so can its usefulness be maintained.

Social change

Unless these four questions can be answered in the affirmative for practically every rural family, the objective of the movement cannot be said to be achieved. Briefly, the aim of the National Extension and Community Project movement is to bring about a social change—an awakening in the countryside and to release the dormant energies of the nation for the achievement of a fuller and richer life. It is by the extent to which this social change is brought about that the movement has to be judged.

I have heard it said sometimes that this movement has been borrowed from outside. This is not correct. It has taken shape from the experience gained in several parts of the country in the

working of intensive schemes of rural welfare. The Planning Commission has suggested an organisation for it but this is not to be rigid. The States are asked to make changes in the pattern as they find necessary from time to time. The reason is that this should be a living movement. Similarly, the programmes should be adjusted to meet the more essential needs of individual areas. The test is—what are most important for that area? A N.E.S. block in an area under a medium or large irrigation project, for example, should have as its main programme preparing the people for taking all steps needed to construct the canal system as speedily as possible through their own labour; to make their lands fit for irrigation and to use the water without delay; to have village and other roads and markets; to see that betterment levies are made: in these ways ensuring that the entire area will make the best use of the project. For other areas, other kinds of programmes will easily suggest themselves. For example, programmes for backward areas, hilly tracts etc., should be devised to suit the local people and conditions.

The Planning Commission regards an evaluation agency as a necessary part of the National Extension Service movement. This agency works under the Planning Commission at present. Its duty is to watch the working of the movement—especially from the point of view of quality—and report how far the fundamental aims are being achieved. The Evaluation Organisation has issued reports which are valuable as they indicate the strong and weak points of the movement as it has developed in different parts of the country. As the National Extension movement spreads, this Agency should also be strengthened.

I have attempted to indicate, in broad outline, the National Extension Service programme as embodied in the Plan. It is based on the dignity and worth of the individual. Its main idea is to bring about a change in the outlook of the millions of families in the countryside and to assist them in their efforts to build up a new life. The foundations are thus being laid for the Welfare State in action, which will cover the whole country by 1961. A pattern of social and economic life has been placed before the country which it will be the aim of the Welfare State to bring into existence. There are instances of communities organising themselves on this pattern but nowhere has the experiment been tried for a vast rural population like ours and in an under-developed economy with so many intractable problems. The results so far obtained have been on the whole encouraging: and as the administration and non-official leaders gain more and more experience, there are grounds for the hope that the movement will gather momentum. What is essential is that the movement, basing itself on the application of the principles of self-help and co-operation, should always retain its vigour and dynamism, and adapt itself speedily to the new demands and new situations that will arise. Here is an exciting adventure in which the whole country is engaged.