

Report on Ulashi: A Self-Help Project

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a) Researcher's Identity

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b) Objectives

After completion of the project, the inhabitants of the surrounding area of the canal will be motivated to bring them under overall development programmes of adopting various measures.

The main objectives of Ulashi-Jadunathpur project are summarised as follows:

- i. To attain self-sufficiency in food production by at least 40%;
- ii. To achieve universal education upto 80% literacy;
- iii. To reduce birth rate from 2.8% to 1%.

Besides the 3 broad based objectives the plan includes a 9-point programme for development. It consists of:

1. To maintain the law and order and full security.
2. To produce surplus food.
3. To double all other productions.
4. To adopt measures for family planning and population control.
5. To remove illiteracy.
6. To introduce primary education compulsory.
7. To control common diseases for improving health and sanitation.
8. To attain full employment opportunities for all.
9. To introduce justifiable distribution of the gains from increased output.

In order to attain the objectives, the following steps are to be taken into consideration:

- a. To form four committees, (i) Union and Village security, (ii) Agriculture development, (iii) Education and Health extension, and (iv) Family Planning to work in their respective places of the project area for satisfying the needs of people.
- b. To set up one Agriculture Centre in each Union of the project area. The educated and honest unemployed youths will be engaged with the responsibility of these centres. Arrangement will also be made to impart them training. From this centre a farmer will get the supply and services of all his necessities from poultry to medicines. Commercial banks will provide necessary credit facilities to this centre.
- c. To introduce Muktangon education and undertake necessary arrangement for removing illiteracy in the project area in co-operation with the Education Department.

c) Executive summary

Starting on 1 November, 1976, the digging portion of the project was completed as per schedule on 30 April, 1977. It was a self-help work and not voluntary mass participation. About 92% of work of the excavation project was done by the local people on self-help basis which was unprecedented in the country.

The programmes which are being undertaken on self-help basis in Bangladesh, the Ulashi-Jadunathpur canal excavation with multifarious programmes is no doubt a path-finder to the general mass in the field of self-help. The underlying philosophy of this project teaches as to what type of leadership and working procedure is needed for maximum possible utilization of human resources and to turn them into active and viable working force. If we can utilize people of all sectors under proper leadership, we shall be in a position to overcome many problems, especially in the field of agricultural infra-structure development. Exact Ulashi-type project can not be possible to undertake elsewhere because of different scope, opportunity, environment and situations but the philosophy of its human resource mobilization can be followed.

Viewing the experience of Ulashi-Jadunathpur project, it is hoped that this type of project could be replicated elsewhere with certain conditions:

1. Comprehensive plan and organisation for implementation of a project will be well thought out before undertaking a project. This is required to avoid hesitancy and resulting loss of time. The implementors should have clear ideas on the process of mass participation.
2. Self-help project has to be undertaken with the principle of swanirvar as a movement. The scope may be limited depending on mass participation and support.
3. There should not be any difference of opinions in identification and co-ordination of projects. The project has to be accepted by the participants on realization of its potential benefits.
4. Mere government planning in papers would not solve the problems unless the people in those programmes are mobilized and involved. In this regard, the Union Parishad chairmen (leaders) should be called upon to motivate, convince and mobilize people in their respective areas to take up big and small self-help projects for agricultural development.
5. Conditions for self-help mobilization like strong and effective administrative machinery is to be created through a political cadre service, otherwise continuous administrative support must be provided.
6. The work-load has to be distributed as per benefits receivable. If the project is for irrigation, flood control and drainage, the load has to be distributed among the land owners/beneficiaries at a progressive scale.

The project plan is of two years starting from July, 1977. Only 7 months have been passed. It is not yet time to evaluate the Ulashi project and nothing could be stated on its success now. Benefits will be obtained if the government investment in the form of inputs like electricity, deep tube well, shallow tube well, power pumps, fertilizers, seed, credit, training and other technical advisory services are provided for implementation of development programmes. However, as per our visit during the period from 4th to 6th of February, 1978 it seems that the people are enthusiastically working for their development. Some deep tube wells, shallow tube wells and power pumps have already been set up and have started irrigating the lands. Quite a significant area was found green with wheat crop. The inhabitants were also seemed to be optimistic of the project. It is assumed that after completion of the project in 1979 the Ulashi-Jadunathpur project will be a fruitful one for the seven unions of Sarsa and Jhikorgacha thanas.

The people can therefore be urged to initiate Ulashi-type projects in their respective area for agricultural development and attaining self-sufficiency in food. Ulashi-type projects can be prescribed as a measure for solving the pressing food problem. It is believed that it would not only help in achieving food security but also turn Bangladesh into a food-grain exporting country.