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Indian Social Institute

SELF-HELP AGAINST POVERTY

Projects in India

Documentation and Evaluation of the "Exposure Programme India",
1 - 10 March 1985

Editor: Clemens Jürgenmeyer

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Self-help against Poverty

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P R E F A C E

Poverty is not pre-ordained. It is a consequence of economic and in particular socio-political developments. In a world of growing prosperity, in which agricultural surpluses are even destroyed, the juxtaposition of desperate poverty and superabundant affluence is a political, and especially an ethical challenge of the first order. In this respect the fight against poverty and injustice is an urgent task for the churches.

The churches' congress on development in Bad Godesberg in 1979 and their preceding programme of dialogue with different social groups on questions of development policy tried to make the point that the churches are a particular champion of the poor - both in the Third World and in Germany.

The process of dialogue has continued. And it has become apparent that the manifestations of mass poverty in the Third World, its causes and the prospects of overcoming it are difficult to convey to the general public. For an understanding and assessment of poverty it is not sufficient to regard underdevelopment simply as a statistical value or a socio-scientific category. Deeds require the additional dimension of real personal experience of human and social suffering in the Third World.

An "exposure programme" was conceived as an extension of the dialogue programme, an attempt to provide direct experience of the manifestations, causes and effects of poverty through on-the-spot encounters. The aim was to give in particular political decision-makers the opportunity of experiencing exemplary situations of poverty and underdevelopment, and to learn to find approaches for solutions through dialogue with the people affected. This should reduce prejudice, create a better understanding of the causes and effects of poverty and provide stimuli for the decision-makers' political action.

The German Commission *Justitia et Pax*, in agreement with MISEREOR, carried out an exposure programme of this nature in cooperation with the Indian Social Institute (New Delhi) in March 1985. The 17 participants were divided into five small groups, each of which spent a few days in different self-help projects and tried to form

a personal impression of the living conditions of the poor.

This documentation is the first fruit, an account of the experiences and results of the programme. All in all, it is a very encouraging start to a dialogue on development policies between people bearing responsibility for the so-called First World and representatives of the Third World. Approaches for strategies against poverty have been developed, which can be applied in meaningful project work in cooperation with different state and non-state institutions for development aid. The German Commission Justitia et Pax also regards these programmes as a contribution to the initiative "self-help against poverty" of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation. In view of the positive experience, the German Commission Justitia et Pax plans further exposure programmes as an important component of practice-oriented education in development policies.

Dr. Franz Kamphaus, Bishop of Limburg

Chairman of the German Commission Justitia et Pax

APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING MASS POVERTY - SELF-HELP PROJECTS IN INDIA

The "Exposure Programme India", 1 to 10 March 1985

Clemens Jürgenmeyer

From 1 to 10 March 1985 an exposure programme was carried out in India by the German Commission *Justitia et Pax* in close cooperation with the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi. A total of 35 people from the Federal Republic of Germany and India took part in this programme. The following report attempts to explain the background and objectives of the programme (chapter I), to describe the implementation proper (chapter II), to give an analytical summary of the results of the two-day seminar (chapter III), and finally to present ideas on the future procedure (chapter IV).

I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

In his letter of invitation to the participants in the exposure programme, Bishop Franz Kamphaus described the background and the objectives of this programme as follows:

"At their development policy congress in Bad Godesberg in 1979 the Churches subscribed to the findings of the World Bank in 1978 that an increase in the productivity of the poor and their income is a pre-condition for combating absolute poverty in the developing countries. The analysis shows the great importance which the economic and social self-help activities of the poor have within the society as a whole and which aid has for the underprivileged social groups.

We all know, however, that there is a great lack of feasible proposals and ideas concerning the development of a concept of combating poverty from inside on the basis of participation and self-help of the population. Though German development policy mentions the fight against poverty and basic-needs-oriented aid in its development aid concept, it must be said that little of that concept shows in practice. Full perception of actual poverty is lacking; poverty figures as a statistical item rather than a real political and social problem. This may be due to the fact that to a great extent we are ignorant of how the poor survive, what their social and economic behaviour is, and what rank they

assume in a developing society. The prejudice that poor people are unproductive and unable to help themselves plays a major role in this connection.

Against this background a double task evolves: the problem of poverty as such and the social importance of marginalised population strata in the Third World must be drawn attention to; on the other hand concepts of how to increase productivity of broad segments of the poor populations must be worked out.

Both require facing the problem in situ: causes and effects of poverty must be experienced directly, possible solutions must be discussed with the people concerned and with intermediary groups and institutions which have been cooperating with the poor for a long time and have collected much experience.

The exposure programme is a method developed in Asia of confronting decision-makers, particularly in business and society, directly with relevant situations; the objective is to make them experience for themselves the problem of underdevelopment and poverty in its many facets, search for solutions in a dialogue with those affected and then turn this experience to account in their respective fields or responsibilities.

An additional target of our exposure programme is to work out promising concepts based on the many years of experience gathered in Church sponsored development projects judged representative for India in general. These concepts should enable in a longer-term close cooperation with competent Indian partners, a practical formulation of policy to improve the living conditions of the poor; this policy should correspond to the importance and the tasks of the Church in this important country and should become manifest in concrete terms. Furthermore, we hope that we will be able, given the relatively limited success so far of our dialogue activities, to set an example which will help provide the German society with a better understanding of the problems described above."

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The group of 17 German participants comprised journalists, politicians, banking experts, people working in the field of development cooperation and scientists dealing mainly with Third-World issues. The Indian participants included members of the Indian Social Institute (ISI) and the five self-help projects visited as well as one delegate from the Gregorian University, Rome, and one from the Centre for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (CENDHRRA), Manila. The programme was prepared and implemented in close cooperation between the German Commission

Justitia et Pax and the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi. Preparations took more than two years.

The Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute for socio-cultural research in Freiburg/Breisgau provided scientific advice. The Indian Social Institute in New Delhi is a scientific institute of the Indian Church run by Jesuits; apart from research work, this institute also advises several self-help projects in India. Its competence is generally recognized, its reputation accordingly great.

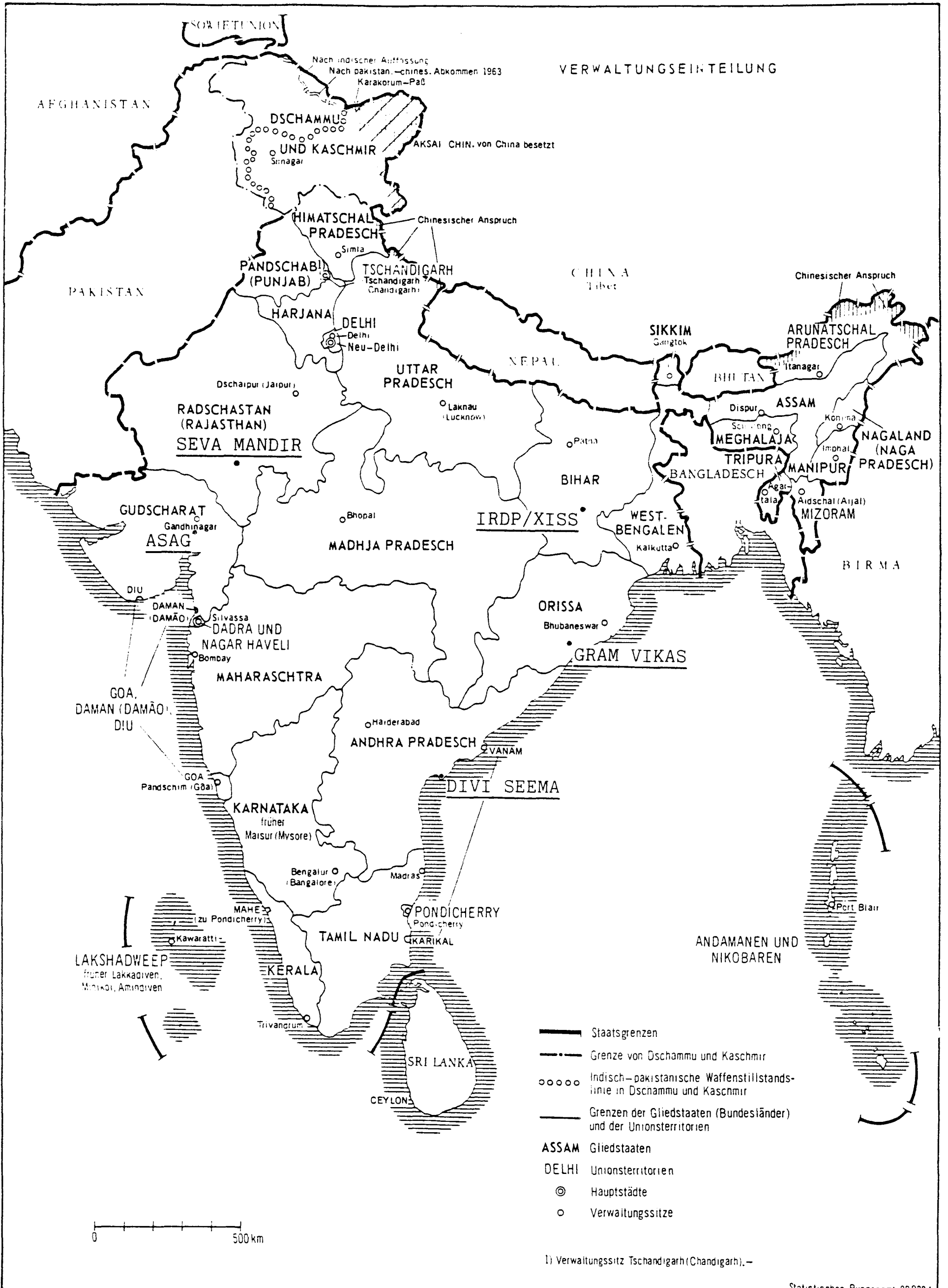
The exposure programme proper began on 2 March 1985 in New Delhi with an introductory seminar where, on the one hand, the objectives of this programme were explained in detail and, on the other, Prof. Raj Krishna gave a lecture on "Poverty in India". There are currently 320 million people in India living below the poverty line, in the year 2000 this number is expected to rise to 394 million. Prof. Krishna pointed out that poverty in India had not only an economic but also a social and cultural dimension. The key thesis of his macro-economic analysis was that India did not lack knowledge of the causes of poverty but, rather, the political will to eliminate them. Strategies to overcome mass poverty must take into account this important aspect of power policy, for fighting poverty is not only a technical matter but predominantly a social issue.

The second part of the exposure programme, lasting altogether six days, consisted of field visits. A total of five groups of three or four German participants visited, together with a representative of the Indian Social Institute, five different self-help projects in different regions of the country (cf. map of India):

1. Divi Seema, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh,
2. Gram Vikas, Berhampur District, Orissa,
3. IRDP/XISS, Palamau District, Ranchi, Bihar,
4. Seva Mandir, Udaipur, Rajasthan,
5. ASAG, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

The structures and concepts of these five projects are not identical. Despite all differences, however, they are all based on the self-help approach. This guaranteed that the visits to five different self-help projects provided a representative cross-section of possible self-help projects. (Further details on the projects can be found in the group reports).

INDIEN



At the end of the programme all participants met again in New Delhi for a two-day reflection seminar to exchange their experiences and to discuss possible approaches.

The broad and intensive discussion during this two-day seminar was based on the five group reports in which the participants expressed their experiences with poverty situations and self-help solutions. (The detailed group reports are not discussed here; cf. individual reports.) The question was also raised as to how this ongoing process of discussion and learning should be continued in the future.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE REFLECTION SEMINAR

For most of the participants, this exposure programme was their first opportunity to personally experience the reality of village poverty. Their vicarious knowledge of the matter, acquired mainly through reading and analyses to that effect, was now to be turned into a direct experience of and confrontation with the problem of mass poverty.

This special quality of experiencing for themselves day-to-day poverty was something which the participants stressed in their discussion. The field visit had offered them the possibility of acquainting themselves with problems of mass poverty which were hitherto unknown to them and of understanding these problems. The horizon of personal experience was thus substantially widened. The active cooperation on the part of the poor in the projects proved that despite all poverty, despite all obstacles to overcoming it, there were signs of hope for a brighter future.

Even though the participants visited different projects in different regions of India, there are striking similarities in terms of experience of the participants. They can be summarized under five headings:

1) Motivation and mobilization of the population

All successful development work starts with motivating and mobilizing the population; without this, a self-help project in particular is doomed to failure, since the development measures offered will not be accepted and actively supported by the people. As is illustrated by the IRDP/XISS project, motivation is needed first, then investments: "There were no visible signs of success in forming self-help groups ..." (cf. group report 3, ch.4). "The problem lies on the recipient side (among the rural poor): the corresponding absorptive capacity for opportunities of self-employment is lacking ..." (cf. group report 3, ch.6.1). One of the participants remarked very aptly that never before had he experienced so clearly that development aid designed to help people help themselves was actually a training programme working with humans rather than materials. Not technocratic solutions but motivating people to learn to help themselves is the foundation of successful development work showing the poor a way out of their poverty. (It must be noted that the German participants repeatedly underlined the high qualification and motivation of the Indian project staff.)

2) Solidarity and homogeneity

The homogeneous set-up of a group is an important prerequisite for the solidarity that must be established among the members of such a group. Existing rivalries among the village inhabitants, a prominent feature in India - the poor do not exercise solidarity just because they are poor - is something that must be overcome, or else the success of self-help activities might be systematically undermined. This was an experience which also the staff members of the comparatively successful Divi Seema project had to make: in some of the Harijan villages where group rivalries were very pronounced the staff's efforts were a complete failure. This is why the DSSSS-staff members attach such great importance to unity among the village people (for details cf. group report 1, ch.3, 7, 10). Seva Mandir, too, stresses this aspect: group formation there is deliberately limited to neighbourhood groups (cf. group report 4, ch.2.4).

3) Regional differences

The enormous regional differences existing in India - India is quite rightly considered a subcontinent - do not permit uniform strategies for solving the problems. Political, social, economic and geographical conditions vary from one region to another to such an extent that e.g. a self-help concept that is successful in parts of Andhra Pradesh might be a failure in Bihar, since the local conditions there are completely different. The social environment, in particular the position of the dominating castes/classes, must be carefully analyzed and taken into account when searching for solution strategies. Often an ability for political manoeuvring is required so as to prevent the precarious balance of power turning against the self-help project. To cite another example, the position of women in tribal societies and in Southern India is better, as a rule, than in Northern India.

4) Grass-root orientation

One of the cores of the self-help approach is that it is directed at the grass-root level in the widest sense of the term. Self-help activities that are initiated must be geared to the needs of the target groups and not to any abstract development models. Therefore, all concerned must be a part of a process of active and responsible participation in order to avoid development measures being planned and introduced which miss the needs at the grass-root level. This means that the participation of the people concerned is another indispensable part of self-help projects. This participation is designed to prevent aid measures being carried out "from above" and thereby systematically excluding those "to be developed". As such, self-help approaches are permanent learning processes of grass-roots democracy where the roles played by the teaching and the learning side are not rigidly fixed but subject to a continuous interchange.

5) Decentralization and autonomy

In order to translate the participatory concept of self-help projects into practical work such projects must not operate as disposable variables within a large-scale structure. It is precisely the decentralized and autonomous nature of such projects

which offers a chance to initiate development assistance which is in accordance with the specific local and regional background, assistance which sets out to enhance the ability of the village poor to become independent.

This will succeed only if uncontrolled interventions from outside can be largely prevented, though they may be done with the best of intentions. It has become evident, time and time again, that not the foreign or local so-called expert - in terms of self-help a contradiction in itself - but the people concerned hold the key to solving their problems. Their knowledge and their ability to withstand adverse living conditions must be used and developed further so that they may actively shape their own lives in line with their own ideas and do so on a permanent basis. In the final analysis, it is a question of activating autonomous learning processes, i.e. processes not directed from outside, which because of their very nature cannot be centralized. Herein lies the emancipatory potential of the self-help concept.

These experiences made by the participants in the exposure programme coincide with the statements by Professor Gupta (Ahmedabad) who has been dealing intensively for quite some time with the intricate problems of the self-help concept. He endeavoured to give a discerning reply to the central question of how poverty could be overcome by self-help. He referred to the complexity of the problem saying a uniform solution could not do justice to it. It was rather a matter of working out, together with the people concerned, solutions which were geared to the respective conditions. However, account should always be taken of maintaining the relationship between the micro- and the macro-level as - according to Prof. Gupta - local problems could not be solved only at the local level. The local environment was an integral part of an overall social context, reaching beyond the national to the international level. Despite all differences in the rural areas of India, a greater awareness of the poor regarding their own situation was always evident; this awareness was steadily growing. The problem consisted in bringing these people to cooperate in self-help projects so that they could develop, under their own

steam if possible, the ability to shape their lives themselves, viz. overcome their poverty. Self-help groups which offer a chance for success should possess the following four characteristics: they must be 1. autonomous, 2. democratic, 3. responsible to the people affected, and 4. controlled from below.

These four characteristics can be explained by the terms "democracy" and "autonomy". Democracy in terms of participation of the people affected means defining self-help projects as an open process of learning for all participants, a process which should preclude authoritarian, hierarchical decision-making structures (The staff of Divi Seema, e.g. attempts to do justice to this important aspect by means of an action-reflection-action method.). This is the only guarantee for a grass-root level orientation. Autonomous means that activities are not controlled from outside, e.g. by means of a centralized incorporation of such projects in state development plans and policy which might dampen the people's motivation to make any self-help efforts. Self-determination of the people concerned can develop only within the framework of a decentralized organisational structure of the projects. It is the only way of gradually learning to stand on one's own feet.

Generally speaking, self-help activities must be part of an integrated approach. Most groups started with one specific task (e.g. construction of houses) and expanded their activities gradually in the course of their joint work with the poor. They had realized that only an integrated approach geared to the needs of the poor is the right way of initiating development on a sustained basis at the grass-root level.

This goes to show that economic profitability cannot be the sole criterion for the success or failure of self-help projects; much more important is the development of strong self-reliance and solidarity among the people, which find expression, among other things, in responsible joint action aimed at shaping living conditions by their own efforts, i.e. changing them in accordance with their own ideas of what is the right and proper life for them. That is why self-help approaches, being permanent and open processes of learning, reach far beyond economically determined

development targets which, as a rule, are an outcome of the Western way of thinking.

One of the most important results of this exposure programme is the definite refutation of the common prejudice that poor people are not productive and cannot help themselves because they are poor. A German participant said quite openly that he had previously cherished this bias and had found it disproved by his experience during the exposure programme. The experience which the German participants made in the various projects has taught them the following:

- 1) Poor people can work. The myth of the lazy native has no foundation whatsoever and is nothing but an expression of rejection of and contempt for other peoples and cultures.
- 2) Poor people can save. They are therefore creditworthy and can economize and manage money with a view to the future. The example of ASAG - to mention just one - shows that tribal people saved, on their own, enough money within a period of 18 months for the construction of houses, even though this had been thought impossible.
- 3) Poor people are productive. They put in reasonable amounts of work which are target-oriented and know how to make proper use of the existing limited resources. Many have already developed a distinct market behaviour which enables them to make the best profit from the sale of their products.
- 4) Poor people can help themselves. It has become evident that poor people take advantage of every opportunity to improve their living conditions and work with great determination and courage. Often, just a small incentive from outside (e.g. in the form of a self-help project) is enough to mobilize them for self-help activities.

A participant from the Philippines coined a phrase in this connection which puts all this experience in a nutshell: "The poor has the formula for survival".

The question arises at this juncture whether the exposure programme reached the targets it set out to achieve. With the help of direct and personal experience of mass poverty a process of learning was initiated on the part of many of the German participants, which has eliminated prejudices and has enabled them to

see things in a new perspective. The quality of the group reports is evidence of the commitment and the open-mindedness with which the participants examined the problems of poverty and overcoming it, going beyond the usual clichés. None of the participants considered the programme a failure; rather, they all emphasized how much they had learned and how deeply impressed they were by what they had experienced. Many were sorry that the visits in the projects had been so short. (This aspect should be taken into account when planning any future exposure programmes.) At a time of general disillusionment about development policy they had seen with their own eyes that despite all difficulties there were possibilities to translate concepts of overcoming mass poverty into practical work within the framework of self-help projects. It seems that the more pedagogical objectives of the programme, the so-called awareness component, have more or less been achieved. The combination of personal experience and general conclusions seems to have been successful, as is clearly reflected e.g. in the refutation of the prejudice that poor people stay poor because they are poor.

An evaluation of the important question of whether the participants will turn their findings and new convictions to account in their respective fields of activities cannot be undertaken at the moment as these are long-term impacts. It remains to be seen whether the exposure programme will in fact lead to qualitatively different decisions which in turn will alter the development policy of the respective institution.

It should not be concealed that the German and Indian participants sometimes disagreed to a considerable degree in their assessment of the problems and the strategies to solve these problems. This was particularly evident when the social market economy and the question whether an integration of the Indian economy into the present world market would or would not counteract a grass-root oriented development in the country were discussed. This question touches upon a crucial aspect of the self-help concept since, according to the statements by Prof. Gupta (cf. above), the quality of the relation structures between the micro- and the macro-level must be accorded great importance. The power policy dimension of

development policy comes into play here (cf. Prof. Krishna's theses, above).

Nor was the assessment of the character of the reflection seminars always identical. One Indian participant deplored the lack of critical penetration into the matter in many of the contributions, another wanted greater account taken of the macro-level, and another summed up his assessment by saying that at present the participants were going through a process of clarifying positions but were not engaging in a dialogue.

IV. OUTLOOK

By definition an exposure programme is a dialogue between people from different countries and cultural backgrounds. It is important to maintain this dialogue, which is still in its initial stages within this programme, and to expand it so as to find ways together of overcoming mass poverty.

1) The staff members of the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi who took part in the programme attach the greatest importance to continuing this dialogue. They have underlined again and again that for them the implementation of the programme meant a lot of input in terms of work, which should bear fruit from now on.

The Indian Social Institute is very much interested in a long-term scientific and development cooperation with the German Commission *Justitia et Pax* and the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute. It is envisaged to second one or possibly two scientists of the Bergstraesser-Institute to India for a period of three months, their task will be the on-the-spot preparation of a comparative study of two self-help projects (ASAG and Gram Vikas) together with members of the ISI. The main focus of this investigation will be the conditions under which a self-help project can be successful. Once these conditions are known the next step is to develop practical solution concepts. Consequently, the conceptual discussion is to be deepened.

2) The Indian Social Institute and the self-help groups themselves want to have closer contacts with German institutions and other groups which adopt a positive stand vis-à-vis the self-help concept. The problem is not so much the financial aid to such projects, but rather the cooperation with agencies willing to engage in convincing their own and the Indian Government of the need to give self-help projects the necessary recognition and leeway indispensable for grass-root-oriented development work (cf. in particular group report 5, ch.6).

3) The long-term concrete impact of the exposure programme on the various fields of activities of the German participants should be evaluated. It has not been possible until now to gather experience in this sector, all the less so as it seems to be somewhat difficult to pin down the effects in terms of quantity. Nonetheless this matter must be kept in mind since the objectives of the exposure programme also comprise a development component in addition to the awareness component. A first step in evaluation was the follow-up seminar on 13 September 1985 in Bonn where the participants reported on their experience in turning new development concepts to good account (cf. evaluation report).

On various occasions the Indian participants expressed the view that they were unable to profit much from the preparatory discussion and had hardly received any information on the persons participating in the programme and their respective thoughts and ideas. This feeling of being less than adequately informed of what is happening in the Federal Republic of Germany is reflected in the following comment: "We are not sure what you will do with the knowledge you got during the exposure programme". Therefore it is imperative that the Indian partners are informed in detail and in time of all results of the programme and any further steps envisaged. Only then will we be doing justice to the claim of conducting a dialogue among partners.

GROUP REPORT 1

OVERCOMING POVERTY THROUGH SELF-HELP

The Divi Seema Social Service Society, Divi Seema, Andhra Pradesh

Our group - Alois Glück, Wolfgang Hoffmann, Clemens Jürgenmeyer and Karl Schoeck as well as Rudi Lobo of the Indian Social Institute - spent five days visiting various villages in the project area, an island at the mouth of the Krishna River, to study the work of the Divi Seema Social Service Society (DSSSS) on the spot. The DSSSS's aim is to motivate and support the rural poor, the small and marginal farmers as well as the landless agricultural labourers in their fight against poverty.

In November 1977 the Divi Seema area was hit by a cyclone and tidal wave which killed 8 500 people and flooded 20 000 hectares of land with salt water, destroying all crops, drowning nearly all the cattle, water buffalo and other animals and washing away most houses.

To help victims of this unprecedented disaster both national and international relief organizations moved into Divi Seema to provide the most essential services: food, clothing, accommodation and medical care. The Catholic Church in the Vijayawada diocese, in whose area the disaster occurred, also instituted a relief programme, in which a group of Jesuits played a leading role. When the other relief organizations left the area three months later the Jesuits decided to stay on to initiate a post-relief reconstruction programme. The aim of the programme was to help specifically the poor to create a basis for existence which would in the long term be viable and self-reliant. For this purpose they founded the Divi Seema Social Service Society (DSSSS) on 27.2.1978. The DSSSS began work in five villages covering 40 hamlets; today it encompasses 53 villages. The whole project is run by three people: Fr Amalraj, Fr Devadoss and Sr Henicia.

The following 12 points are a summary of our observations and experiences during our intensive tour of Divi Seema.

1.

The Jesuits who came to Divi Seema after the natural catastrophe all lacked experience in the field of rural development. They were initially driven by the desire to help the victims in their hour of greatest need. But with the foundation of the DSSSS, at the latest, it was clear to all those involved that for longer-term, successful development work a thorough knowledge of the socio-economic conditions of the region and the basic techniques and concepts of rural development was indispensable. Thus, they first made a socio-economic survey of the affected area, which revealed that although 80 % of the population depended on agriculture for their livelihood, only 15 % of the population owned about 80 % of the arable land. The second step was to invite Indian experts - mostly Jesuits involved in development work in other parts of India - to help prepare a so-called Master Plan. This plan served as a guide for their future work, but their activities were primarily determined by exposure to the concrete realities, their successes and their failures. The DSSSS saw their work as an on-going process of learning, in practice a process of action-reflection-action. In concrete terms this meant, inter alia, that once a week they met to critically evaluate their work. In this way the DSSSS tried to take increasing account of the specific conditions of the region and to find step by step practicable solutions to the immense problems.

2.

The DSSSS's chief goal was to promote self-reliance among the poor. They began by helping the people to prepare for the next crop so as to secure the food-supply. Towards this end they mobilized the people to desalinate the land, to repair, re-open and extend the system of irrigation and drainage canals and apply improved methods of cultivation. The key to this type of development work is the non-formal education of people to help themselves (education to self-help). To prepare the people to bear the cost of their own means of production in the long term they motivated and educated the people to form credit unions which would stimulate them to save and administer their savings. The poor should learn

to accumulate small sums of capital, how to handle money and how to think and act in economic terms. Above all, they should realize the possibility of freeing themselves from their traditional subservience to moneylenders, who had successfully stifled all individual attempts to break out of the vicious circle of poverty. The village credit unions are not an aim in themselves but a means of weakening the age-old structures of dependence responsible for poverty at their critical point. The overriding goal is the creation of a self-sustaining network among the village poor which should ideally be independent of external personnel and financial resources.

3.

Today the DSSSS operates with a minimal infrastructure of personnel, materials and finance. Initially they accepted financial aid, especially from Oxfam and Misereor, to cover initial equipment and running administrative costs, but since November 1981 - i.e. three and a half years after their foundation - have been able to dispense completely with outside funding. The real strength of the DSSSS lies in the commitment, dedication, application and energy of the "full-time" staff of three, who have built up and led the project. The staff themselves describe their approach as a consensual approach, i.e. based on the consent of the people involved. The project emphasizes motivating and educating the poor to organize their own and their children's lives with the aim of learning to stand on their own two feet in the near future. It is for this reason that such great importance is placed on unity among the poor. The DSSSS regard themselves merely as the initiator of this process, not as a permanent institution.

4.

The principle of self-reliance also extends to the recruitment of village leaders from the villages in which they work. As a rule, a group (e.g. a credit union) comprises 10 to 20 people with the same occupation and living in the same village. A total of 132 groups have been formed so far, each led by a so-called group leader. Several groups together form a self-administered village organization run by a secretary. The secretary is an inhabitant

of the village and has received a lengthy training for this task from the DSSSS. For example, in the village of Kammanamelu, consisting of five hamlets, there are five such groups for different occupations. Recently they merged to form one village organization, the Nava Shakti Social Service Society (NSSSS). The secretary of the NSSSS receives a payment from the members of the society so that he need be only partly dependent upon his farming income. In the NSSSS people with different occupations (farmers, fishermen, shepherds, agricultural labourers and casual workers) and from different castes sit together to discuss their common goal of self-reliance, make plans and devise the necessary concrete steps to realize it. The purpose of decentralizing the organizational structure is to encourage small groups in which individuals can easily grasp the ropes and find the incentive for permanent cooperation. The villagers should regard these village organizations as their own, for which they themselves are responsible and for which they work.

5.

The DSSSS makes explicit and specific use of available local resources, existing state aid programmes and institutions in and for development work. For example, increasing use is made of the credit and savings facilities of the Indian Bank in the nearby town of Avanigadda. The villagers should learn to deal with state institutions. They never went to the bank because they did not know how to use a bank and were not creditworthy in terms of the usual banking criteria. It needed quite a bit of convincing before the staff of the Indian Bank were prepared to cooperate with the villagers. For as we saw ourselves on a visit to the bank, this involves considerable paper-work, which not every bank in the town was prepared to do. For instance, the local Syndicate Bank showed absolutely no interest in winning these villagers as new clients. In this sense, the educational work of the DSSSS is not restricted to the villagers alone but extends to the staff of state institutions.

6.

The various programmes (credit unions, mother-child programmes,

medical care, advisory services, cattle-breeding, dairy farming, etc.) are all part of an integrated approach, in which - besides the economic aspects - the process of awareness-building and education rank highly. The aim is to include the whole range of economic activities in the village so as to create enough opportunities for self-reliant work in the village or the immediate vicinity. This also applies to landless villagers, for whom a special rickshaw programme has been devised.

7.

The staff of DSSSS treat all poor people as equals irrespective of caste and creed. This has led to many caste barriers being relaxed in spheres of practical work. The most telling expression is disregard for the prohibition on commensality among the lower castes. Given the dominance of the caste system in the villages, this is a remarkable achievement, which cannot be made too much of. The supreme goal remains the creation, then strengthening of unity in the village. In this way solidarity is promoted among the poor - an essential prerequisite for the village's development.

8.

In our meeting with the groups in the different villages we were greatly impressed by the obvious self-confidence and new self-respect of the poor. People spoke openly and critically of their achievements and failures. More importantly, they also questioned us closely about conditions in the Federal Republic. We left with the impression that the people possess a joy in living and an optimism - albeit still fragile - which is helping them to overcome apathy and awaken expectations of creating a better future for themselves and their children by their own efforts.

9.

We make special mention of the emergence of the women as a powerful social force. They have developed an astonishing capacity for leadership and action. They form independent groups led by women. E.g., they administer the savings and the repayment of loans. In discussions, even in the presence of male villagers, they spoke with self-assurance and presented their reports concisely and to

the point without concealing existing difficulties. We were particularly impressed by the women we met in a Moslem village. As visible signs of their new self-confidence they have abandoned the veil, move freely out of doors and are even doing jobs which until recently were the exclusive preserve of their menfolk.

10. Not all DSSSS activities have been successful. Some have been utter failures; in fact, in 13 of the 53 villages where they have been active. In these villages DSSSS have not succeeded in overcoming the existing divisions to create groups able to act effectively. This illustrates that great commitment and qualification on the part of development workers is not an automatic guarantee of success. The willingness of the people to cooperate among themselves is a necessary precondition for the success of any development work. Hence, in future projects the DSSSS will set as a condition for assistance that the population show a sustained willingness to cooperate.

11.

DSSSS withdrew from the Divi Seema area on 31.5.1985, in accordance with a decision of the Bishop of Vijayawada. Those responsible for the project estimate that in half the 53 villages the organizational structures are sufficiently rooted and the leadership sufficiently qualified to warrant hopes of continued, successful self-reliant work on the part of the self-help groups.

12.

We were overwhelmed by the boundless hospitality of Frs Amalraj and Devadoss and Sr Henicia. They were always ready to provide information and discuss everything, even critical points, openly and in detail. The spontaneity of the villagers' readiness to explain their way of life and their efforts enabled us to gain a first insight into the very different reality of Indian village life and the difficult, though encouraging labours of self-help groups. To all of them we express our heartfelt thanks and sincere wishes for a bright and happy future.

GROUP REPORT 2

THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY IN TRIBAL AREAS

The self-help organization Gram Vikas in Orissa, Berhampur District

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

From 3.-7.3.1985 Paul Becher, Hannelore Börgel, Peter Köppinger and Christiane Mannel observed the work of the self-help organization Gram Vikas in an area inhabited by Indian tribes. This included sharing in the daily life of the villagers. The team was accompanied by Philip Viegas S.J. of the Indian Social Institute.

On March 3rd we flew from Delhi to Bhuvaneshwar in the eastern state of Orissa, continued by train to Berhampur and thence by jeep to the headquarters of Gram Vikas. The following day the programme began with a discussion with the Gram Vikas staff. The exposure team then decided to split up in order to include the various regions of the tribal area in the limited time: the hill region (P.Köppinger and Ch.Mannel), the plain region (P.Becher) and the foothill region (H.Börgel). In the latter the first contacts were made with Gram Vikas advisors who live and work there. They acted as interpreters, translating the tribal language into English. In the hill region the local advisors were not present; a Gram Vikas team-member, who had previously worked in that area, arranged contacts and translated for us. Here we visited five villages, in the foothills two and in the plain region seven. In the foothills and the plain the team-members walked on average 15-20 km a day, in the hill region less on account of the terrain. At times some of the team-members had lengthy conversations of up to two hours with the tribal people, but often we had to rely on the descriptions of the Gram Vikas guide, especially when villages were visited during tribal working-hours. As the team spent a total of only three and a half days in the tribal areas the following report is not an in-depth evaluation but a preliminary record of experiences. We hope that our impressions correctly reflect reality and regret any mistakes.

2. SITUATION OF THE TRIBALS

2.1. Peculiarities of the hill region

The main source of income is the sale of firewood, obtained by felling trees in the forest and chopping them up. Middlemen (who often make a profit of up to 100 %) pay approx. 10 rupees for 600 pieces bound together to a bundle of about 30 kg. The tribespeople have to carry the wood long distances down from the hills because cows and bicycles cannot be used as means of transport on the narrow paths between the villages. In addition, they cultivate some rice, vegetables and fruit for their own consumption, but this does not meet their needs. They also have cows, chickens and goats, partly for their own use, partly for sale at the market. Since successfully freeing themselves from the moneylenders who took a large portion of their small income, the economic basis of the tribals has been sound enough to avoid the extremes of poverty. But the villagers face a great problem in that the trees suitable for firewood are being rapidly decimated, and the forests are in danger of disappearing completely within the next two decades. Hence, in the coming years the tribes will of necessity have to change their economic base if they want to survive in this area. Besides, as their work is hard and exhausting at present, it is more than desirable that in the future they should raise the productivity of their work in general.

The traditional ties of the tribal communities are still strong and very important for the individual members of the society. They assist each other in their daily chores and tasks (e.g. erecting houses) and share special dishes (chicken, etc.). There is still no electricity in the villages. Only a few villages have biogas for some lighting in the schools and those open spaces in front of the huts where they work in the evening. Many of them do not have clean water; the wells are often too small and too far away from the villages. The paths between the villages are often bad. The food is not nutritious enough and the general state of health is still not satisfactory. Most children still do not attend school. Women are still exploited to some extent and have to work much harder than men. There does not seem to be any great interest in exercising voting rights within the democratic system.

The reasons for this may be their isolation, which cuts them off from the main stream of national affairs, and their disappointment at the way in which government programmes have been implemented.

2.2. Peculiarities of the foothills and the plain

The situation in the foothills is similar to that in the hills. Wood is also the basis of economic activity. By contrast, in the plains the villagers have taken to market-gardening as well. Here the tribals are more aware than those in the hills and foothills. Some of the plain villagers moved from the hills seven or eight years ago to find work. Tribals in the plain are also more involved in discussions on further improvements in their situation. The exchange of information between the villages in all three regional areas has increased noticeably in recent years.

3. GRAM VIKAS'S WORK IN THE TRIBAL VILLAGES

Gram Vikas is a voluntary group with a current staff of 20. They started working with the tribals at the beginning of 1978.

3.1. Work among the women

The first important point is that the social situation of tribal women is not so bad as that of other women. They usually have more rights in their families and are respected by their husbands. Nonetheless, they have some major private and communal problems (alcohol; no free time). Gram Vikas has helped these women to become more aware of their own situation and to find solutions to their problems. Our impression was that the tribal women accept the female workers from Gram Vikas as partners.

Gram Vikas' work among women concentrates on the following:

- family problems (e.g. alcohol),
- women's work in the family and the community (a particular problem seems to be the fact that they have to work far harder than the men - work in the forest, market, housework; as they are exempted from household duties and looking after the children only during menstruation, they have less free time than the men),
- child education,
- health care, and
- nutrition.

Finally, it must be mentioned that Gram Vikas has not reserved specific days for women's meetings. There is not a formal framework for meetings and discussions because the advisers live within the community. r

3.2. Basic education: the example of the village of Toda (hill region)

In the course of their community work Gram Vikas discussed child education with the tribals of Toda. Once the villagers themselves had requested basic education for their children they began the so-called basic education programme. It should be mentioned that the government schools in this area do not function: for the most part they exist only on paper; curricula have not been adapted to the situation of the tribal pupils; the teachers, who do not live in the tribal area, draw their salaries without actually teaching. Since September 1984 one young teacher, a tribal trained for his job by Gram Vikas, has been working in Toda with 14 children between the ages of three and ten. He receives a salary of about Rs.250 p.m., of which Rs 100 is paid by the tribals and Rs.150 by Gram Vikas. In addition, the tribals themselves built a house for him which serves as the school.

The main features of the basic education programme are:

- instruction in the local language, Kwi,
- a curriculum largely adapted to the local environment,
- free and optional participation,
- flexible hours of teaching because the children have to help their parents (forest work, housework, etc.); though as a rule 7-11 every morning,
- the teacher himself is a member of the tribal community,
- teaching is job-oriented with special emphasis on vocational training such as painting, singing, dancing, etc.

The aim of the education programme is to teach the children

- to read and write,
- to develop self-confidence,
- to develop community awareness, and
- to cope with problems both within and outside the community.

Gram Vikas' long-term policy is to train tribals as teachers, as these understand the tribal way of life.

3.3. Biogas

The biogas programme has been initiated in a few tribal villages. The biogas plants in these villages have been installed by villagers assisted by Gram Vikas. The tribals use biogas for communal purposes, specially street-lighting and the school (light and cooking). There is not enough dung available for individual families to run their own biogas plants. Gram Vikas is currently developing a new model which could reduce present costs by half. The normal price of existing plants, based on a Chinese model, is Rs.5000.

3.4. Afforestation and reforestation

At the present rate of felling the area will be deforested within two decades. To avoid losing their economic base, in 1985 the villagers of the hills and foothills began to implement an afforestation and reforestation programme with the support of Gram Vikas. Each family has to plant at least one new tree for each member of the family (either fruit, fuel or timber trees). In this way they hope to solve the problem of deforestation as well as improve their economic and food situation. In addition, the tribals in the plain will try to harvest two crops a year in the future.

3.5. Money-lenders

With the support of Gram Vikas the tribals were able to organize themselves and obtain credits from a state bank, thereby becoming

independent of money-lenders who lent at usurious rates, and to whom approx. 70 % of all the tribals' fruit trees and fields had been mortgaged. An essential requirement for this success was the efforts of Gram Vikas to persuade the branch of a state bank close to the tribal area to grant small loans without security to the members of the tribes (as is also provided for in the state credit programmes). An unsolved problem is how to by-pass the middlemen and sell firewood directly to the final consumer at a higher price than the middlemen pay.

3.6. Kerandimal Grama Sangathan (KGS)

Initially, Gram Vikas concentrated their efforts on improving the economic situation of the tribals in the Kerandimals. In the course of time they realized that this was helping individuals but simultaneously hastening the disintegration of the community. For example, it was discovered that instead of reducing the evil of money-lending, it was now being practised within the community itself. To overcome this it was necessary to start reconstructing communal structures. The result has been the formation of the KGS. Gram Vikas' goal is to make the tribals independent of their (and any other outside) help, to put them in a position to demand and acquire their rights and solve their problems themselves. This requires a system which mobilizes the tribes. The KGS seems to be this key element in the Gram Vikas strategy of development. It provides the villagers with an opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes and in solving their problems. In each village a council comprising all adults takes all essential decisions. The chairman of the village-committee is no longer appointed for life (as was tribal custom) but only for a few years. Two elected representatives of each village sit in the regional KGS, in which 10 to 20 villages are represented. Each of the seven regional KGSs sends two delegates to the central KGS, which elects a president and a secretary. The KGS tries at different levels to solve conflicts between the tribals; it organizes the execution of common tasks in the communities (schooling, biogas, etc.), supports the rights of the tribals against government (education,

health, building of wells, land-ownership, credits, etc.) and promotes solidarity among tribal communities against all forms of injustice and exploitation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Over the past few years the social and economic situation in the different villages has been changing noticeably, although there are still considerable problems. The causes of change may be summarized as follows:

- increase in acreage under cultivation by taking over state land,
- better information as a result of Gram Vikas activities (health, hygiene, nutrition, etc.),
- technical improvements such as biogas installations,
- greater self-confidence through greater awareness of the tribals' rights.

We gained the impression - confirmed in discussions with tribal people - that there is a new stability in communal life and a greater awareness of community, mainly due to the feeling of the tribals that they are not only individuals but members of a social community with its own traditions rooted in the tribal areas. On the other hand, we found that much was in a state of flux, which is bound to influence future developments. Some observations may illustrate this.

4.1.

Better information on their rights and the importance of the KGS system of village committees makes it increasingly difficult for money-lenders, middlemen, contractors and government officials to exploit the tribals and take advantage of their naiveté. The question is how these people will react. They possess influence and power and could become a threat were they to combine against the tribal people.

4.2.

For the tribals absolute poverty is different to that experienced by members of the so-called scheduled castes. Tribals are not

undernourished, but there are still cases of malnutrition. Their population growth is still reasonably balanced; we did not see any signs of a population explosion in the villages we visited. For the tribals the main problem is the lack of information, the root of their powerlessness. Hence, the tribals must learn to trust in their own abilities and communal strength, to recognize their rights, to gain access to credits in order to increase their labour productivity and to sell more of a greater variety of products. These developments could be supported by government officials, by local politicians and, last but not least, by local and regional mass-media. This raises the question of whether a change in international awareness and corresponding changes in policies can promote these developments.

4.3.

Gram Vikas has concentrated on strengthening the self-confidence of the tribals, an indispensable requirement. This process has not yet been completed and sometimes the tribals still need outside support.

4.4.

This successful planning and strategy can create new problems in the future. In the short term the most important aspects (health, education, better nutrition, economic improvements, social stability, etc.) will be beneficial. But long-term question marks remain:

- Will the tribals preserve the balance between population growth and food production when the mortality rate starts falling?
- Will young people remain in the villages when the success of the educational programme qualifies them for better-paid employment in the cities?

4.5.

Finally, we felt that the information provided by Gram Vikas at the start of our visits to the different villages reflected the reality of the tribals' situation. The discussions with the villagers created the impression of varying situations and different problems. Nonetheless, in our opinion, at the moment there does not seem to be any other, more promising strategy for dealing with the tribals' problems than that chosen by Gram Vikas.

APPENDIX: SOME PERSONAL REMARKS (P.KÖPPINGER)

Members of the staff of Gram Vikas are convinced that a good part of their objectives - the genuine participation of the tribals in decisions affecting their future and their mobilization to demand their rights - has been achieved. They have reduced their involvement in health services, which has prompted the tribals to demand public health services. A similar approach is being put into practice in the fields of education, well-construction and, in particular, the provision of small loans by state banks. At the different levels the KGS is fulfilling its role as motivator and as an instrument for involving the people in the development process; they hold meetings regularly and have been accepted by the tribal population. Gram Vikas is currently planning meetings between young people of the Kerandimal region and young people of other tribal areas. They will be followed by meetings of the elected representatives of different areas and of members of the women's organizations. Gram Vikas plans to reduce their numbers in the Kerandimal region in the very near future from the present 20 to three or four staff members and to begin similar programmes in other tribal areas in Orissa. They are also thinking of functioning as an umbrella organization for other action groups, helping in their work and to overcome particular difficulties. Staff members of Gram Vikas expressed their hope that with the progress of this people's movement the poor in India will become more and more aware of their situation and their rights and will be able to strengthen the economic base of their livelihoods as well as demand and obtain their social and political rights within the existing democratic order in India. They are also of the opinion that in the course of this process it would, as a rule, not be necessary to arrange more financial aid from foreign agencies for the action groups and the voluntary agencies working in a similar way to Gram Vikas. These groups would normally have the possibility of financing a large part of their work through Indian government programmes. But it would be very helpful if western governments would use the dialogue with the Indian government on development aid programmes to state clearly that it is necessary to ensure that the financial, edu-

cational and health programmes benefit primarily the poor - and that this could not be realized without great changes in the implementation of these government programmes.