

Working Paper 47  
December 2001  
Online Version  
November 2002

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# **Perceptions Count**

**Coaching IFSP Community Mobilisers III**

INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMME  
TRINCOMALEE

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## 1. Introduction

IFSP has established a concept for community mobilisation and a community mobilisation team to practise, adjust and further develop the concept in cooperation with village communities and service providers.<sup>1</sup> The ten IFSP community mobilisers (CMs), all younger graduates with practical experience in social work and related field work, employed and trained since February 2000, are expected to facilitate services and link village communities (groups of people and families, interest groups, ethnic groups) to service providers and support them into getting integrated into the local and regional economy. Learning by doing, training on the job, feed-back and reflection of roles and functions as well as of day to day experience have shaped their professional and personal capacity. Sequential coaching has been established as a support mechanism for them. This consultancy is for the purposes of providing the third session of this coaching sequence.

## 2. Aim of Consultancy

The aim of the **sequential coaching** is to assist IFSP in its efforts to better address and to better facilitate services and efforts to implement 'poverty projects' and 'community projects' for enhanced food and nutrition security in Trincomalee. It was required of the coach to **approach adjustment of attitudes and behaviour** with the following questions to be answered; **What do people perceive? What do we perceive? How could we address needs in a way that people feel confident, and keen to join and contribute? How better could we address our and their feelings** for promoting understanding, confidence and trust?

In addition to the above questions, some topics were also flagged to be addressed, selected on the basis of the conclusions of the two previous coaching and feed-back sessions:

- Reflection of field work
- Review of community mobilisation concept on the basis of the experience gained
- Skills to improve communication, moderation, negotiation, and conflict management
- Skills to improve visualisation, presentation and report preparation
- Skills to improve the capacity to precisely describe, analyse and interpret situations and conclude alternatives and solutions for decision making. This would call for intensively focus on the strengths and opportunities of communities and stakeholders rather than the weaknesses.
- Addressing gender in a pronounced way
- Skills to strengthen group approaches, i.e. how better address collective interests amidst individual perceptions, local dominance and experience based on fear or other negative pattern

## 3. Methodology

The coaching dealt with a range of issues concerning the community mobilisers - the concept of community mobilisation as well as the practical skills they required in the field. It also touched on the need and possibilities to change structures of the project design that will afford the mobilisers smooth process in the direction of strengthening vulnerable groups. **Active learning** was encouraged, where the participants were invited to give their feed back and observations on their work rather than merely listening to the consultant.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'community' refers to i) all people living in a village, ii) vulnerable groups/poverty groups, iii) sub-groups such as women, paddy farmers, traders, fishermen etc., iv) interest groups and local leaders, v) ethnic groups in the wider sense.

The coaching began with a **reflection of the field work of the CMs**. This spread over a day as an unstructured group discussion. The CMs were encouraged to put forward the **constraints they faced** in the course of their work. Possible solutions were discussed with the aid of case studies. The following three days were spent in **visiting projects and community based organisations in villages** in the DS Divisions of Kuchchaveli, Muthur, and Gomarankadawela respectively. The meetings organised with village communities were informal, in fact, for demonstrative purposes only. At the end of each field visit, the **CMs were encouraged to give their analysis** of the meetings and of the projects. Thereafter, a **comparative analysis was presented by the consultant** which opened the discussion for possible solutions. A short evaluation followed each and every session of group discussion. A **feed back session** was held on the fifth day with each participant giving his/her assessment of the coaching and presenting the concepts learned and their practical applications in the specific field of the CMs.

#### 4. Basic Principles of Community Mobilisation

The community mobilisation concept of IFSP has been enumerated by Christine Bigdon and Antonio Engel in February 2000.<sup>2</sup> Dialogue and a first round of coaching the CMs and providing feed-back to the IFSP management on how to improve field related community mobilisation was supported by Benedikt Korf in late 2000 and further addressed in a intensive coaching session in May 2001 by Christine Bigdon.<sup>3</sup>

**Why has IFSP departed from the common and traditional idea and understanding of social mobilisation and conceptualises and practises community mobilisation?** It has been observed that social mobilisation in its traditional context does not work; it is more a top-down mechanism in the way it is commonly practised. Social mobilisation is to a certain extent discredited due to requests for voluntary work, political interference and coverage of almost all local development activities by government in the context of the welfare state. This has resulted in a kind of 'spoon feeding mentality' which discourages people becoming active and independent.

IFSP has embarked on a **three-tier approach for community mobilisation**:

- i) Developing a concept, test and adjust it in villages and at the level of the district and finally have it ready for larger-scale application;
- ii) Institutionalise community mobilisation as a concept (at least with IFSP and partner institutions) and,
- iii) Promote handing over to communities and partner institutions.

Community mobilisation within IFSP is the **entry point for a people centred development process**. It is built around and upon Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA). The process starts with approaching and addressing an entire village community and preparing them for joining a **participatory needs assessment** exercise (PNA). PNA aims at identifying the priority needs of a village as well as groups to discuss the priorities, pre-plan for projects and engage in negotiation for implementing them. Through village community based organisations (CBO), which commonly comprise established farmer's organisations and rural development societies, mosque societies and school development societies, the village communities become implementing partners of IFSP. Following the PNA, community mobilisation addresses support for project implementation through the respective CBO. This

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<sup>2</sup> Bigdon, Christine and Antonia Engel, Social Mobilisation Concept for IFSP, Trincomalee, April 2000, Working Paper 27

<sup>3</sup> Benedikt Korf, Promoting Communication and Dialogue, Trincomalee, December 2000, Working Paper 32; Christine Bigdon, Coaching of Community Mobilisers, Trincomalee, June 2001, Working Paper 34

includes strengthening their capacities in the field of management and integrating their members.

The **combination of community mobilisation and PNA** aims at:

- Making people aware of their own potentials (resources and knowledge)
- Encouraging them to make better use of own resources
- Improving self- help capacities and capabilities of selected groups

Special emphasis of social mobilisation within IFSP is laid on:

- Encouraging people to participate in the analysis, planning and implementation of projects and contributing in terms of labour and kind
- Facilitating service provision by encouraging selected groups to demand services as well as by informing service providers about villagers requests
- Monitoring and training the identified groups in self monitoring

As IFSP distinguishes between poverty group projects and community projects there will be usually several groups identified within one village. The social mobiliser will therefore focus his/her work mainly on village groups and **functioning community based organisations**. There are also **action groups** which are formed during PNA which then become implementing partners at village level for poverty group projects. Examples for **poverty group projects** are agricultural extension, home gardening, goat and back yard poultry keeping, small scale lagoon fishing, small scale trades and crafts. Examples for **community projects** are utility buildings, road construction, development of minor irrigation systems (minor tanks), water supply and sanitation. The community based organisations are those already existing at village level assessed and selected as implementing partners for community projects during the PNA.

## 5. The Community Mobiliser

### 5.1 The Role of the CM in the Project Cycle of IFSP

Roles and functions as well as understanding what community mobilisation means and how it should work has been outlined in the working papers 27, 32 and 34. The first coaching of December 2000 emphasised the need to clearly differentiate between **mobilising people for taking over** project implementation and getting actively involved in **organising and managing project implementation as CM** (and in fact, for the people who then would be recipients but not active participants aiming at enhancing ownership and capacity for a higher degree of independence). The second round of coaching the CMs of May 2001 resulted in a compendium of the **'do's and don'ts' of community mobilisation**.

Once the respective villages are allocated to the mobiliser, he/she takes the lead role in the process starting with a **group mobilisation phase** through the **project planning and implementation stages to impact monitoring**. These tasks involve **building social relationships** with individuals groups and institutions, providing **technical insights** to the projects planned by the community and also possessing expertise in **monitoring** the progress and evaluation the performance and impact. They also have to **build capacities** of CBOs and other groups and establish relations with service providers, public administration and non-government organisations. The **core task is to encourage communities to become active and to contribute to the projects and to request services** and be ready to contribute to get them materialised.

According to the tasks defined here, the varied **skills required** to fulfil all these functions are:

- Communication/building inter-personal relationships skills
- Analytical skills to identify and address social classes and interest groups and to anticipate the intended and unintended impact of projects on these specific groups, especially women and particularly vulnerable groups
- Observation/deduction skills
- Techniques of participatory training methodologies
- Sensitiveness and willingness to understand other perceptions
- Strategy planning skills
- Technical knowledge on social infrastructure and income generation ventures/small scale business and employment promotion
- Information gathering on service available and provided by government institutions and non government organisations

## **5.2 Problems Faced by the CMs in the Field**

A brainstorm session was held in order to enable the community mobilisers to express the **constraints and problems faced**:

- “Getting the beneficiary contributions to our mid-day meal project is a problem. We are stuck with dealing with attitudes of people. How can we get over this?”
- “How to sustain the participation of people in projects other than those supported by IFSP?”
- “There is a difference in the time available to spend in cleared and uncleared areas. How do we rectify programmatically the situation where we have less time to spend in uncleared areas?”
- “Initially when a project is explained the villagers are willing to contribute. But during implementation stages, their interests wanes and they drop out.”
- “We find strengthening CBOs a difficult process. They depend on us for every activity, not only the funding part”
- “There is lack of coordination between the Rural Development Societies and the villagers”
- “The participation of the people in the awareness programme conducted by the Department of Health is very low. How do we solve this?”
- “How do we reduce dependency ?”
- “How to sustain a group after a powerful personality who led the group leaves it?”
- “As the mentality of the people is geared towards struggling for their day-to-day survival, they do not want processes”
- “CBOs only want to develop themselves”
- “Other NGOs come with quick solutions which disrupt the processes that we establish”

- “People know they need something only when the problem is present. Once the season changes, they go back to their business forgetting the project”
- “We have to make the beneficiaries feel the need, as they do not have the capacity to express a particular need”

### 5.3 About the Concept of Community Mobilisation

The CMs were asked to enumerate the differences between the concepts of social mobilisation and community mobilisation. They said:

- “Community mobilisation is the same as social mobilisation, only the terminology is different”
- “Community mobilisation is working with Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala ethnic groups”
- “Community mobilisation is working with more than one village at a time”
- “Community mobilisation is coordinating between villagers, Departments, NGOs and CBOs.”
- “Social mobilisation is working with individuals; whereas community mobilisation is working with the villagers and partner institutions.”
- “Community is people, officers and institutions”
- “Community is our target group. For instance for a road construction project, the community is the whole village, but for poverty project the community is the vulnerable groups”

## 6. Assessment

### 6.1 Self Assessment

In social work, people tend to focus on the target group ‘somewhere outside’. However, the problem is ‘them’ and the solution has to therefore somehow come from ‘them’. Hence the statements ‘they do not contribute’, ‘they do not participate’, ‘they only care for hand outs’ etc. In actuality, **the problem stems from within US, and only WE could find the solutions.** This view, realisation and feeling has to be internalised in order to prepare the community mobilisers for the tasks that they have set themselves.

**Introspection is a must for every community worker.** We have to examine ourselves and our innermost values. What do we most value in life? How do we look at our jobs? What does this work mean to us in real terms? Is it the material incentives, the status it offers or the soul satisfying benefits that accrue to us? Do we have greater problems weighing in our minds that we are unable to focus on our mission? Do we have/show respect for the poor and the marginalised? Do we empathise with them? Are we prepared to develop a close relationship with them?

**It is recommended that a well structured group meditation session is organised once a week to assist the mobilisers to ‘discover themselves’. The mobiliser should look at a village through the two eyes of ‘empathy for the disadvantaged and respect for their knowledge and experiences’.**

There is a **reluctance to learn from experiences and look for solutions**. Any situation is accepted with finality. Hence the statements 'you can't do anything with government officers', 'what can you do when other NGOs persist on delivering quick relief' etc. **Learning is an ongoing process, and it is a collective action**, especially in the field of community development. An **environment for free learning**, together with a closely knit mobiliser's team should be created. A **working environment** that does not make people sit around in a stiff posture is for instance one pre-condition for getting out of the 'straitjacket' thinking and into creativity. And, in addition to the meditation sessions, **opportunities should be created for the field staff to interact with each other on a personal level and build close relationships**.

**It is recommended that the field staff meet at least once in two weeks to review their work, share experiences and learn from each other.** These meetings must be conducted in a pleasant environment (open, casual), in an **informal manner**, preferably seated on mats which give the participants freedom of physical movement.

It is helpful to dress in an appropriate manner so that it becomes easy to define the relationship with the people. There is a constant need to get away from the 'power loaded' relationship between a donor and a recipient, the educated and the uneducated, the urban and the rural, the rich and the poor. It is suggested to avoid wearing trainer shoes, flashy wrist watches etc. during field visits.

## 6.2 Analytical Skills

The analytical skills of the community mobilisers were tested in the conceptualisation (understanding and perception) of community mobilisation and the observations of village projects. In the discussion on the concept, there was generally an **inability to link the objects** (villagers, institutions, government agencies etc.) **to the goal** (self reliance), **within a process** (strengthening). There is a tendency to consider mobilisation as being equivalent to the act of connecting or linking with each of the project actors and project resources.

The **concept of participation** was visualised and perceived as the contribution of labour and contributions in kind by the people. As a result, people without a single exception understand their participation as **contribution of labour to a 'GTZ project'**.

**What, in the end is community mobilisation?** Is it **changing attitudes, developing skills and capacities** of, on the one hand **service providers** and resource persons, and on the other the **people** belonging to vulnerable groups, so that the former (the service providers) support appropriately and in timely fashion the latter (the people) that they are able to develop themselves?

It is recommended that the community mobilisers **reflect on the various elements of this definition, sift the different factors, and arrive at a common consensus**.

The recurrent question of sustainability of a programme was not juxtaposed with the inquiry into the type of skills that people were acquiring during the process of the project, without which they can never sustain any programme. There has to be **constant focus on the varied skills that people could and should acquire** at all stages of a project.

**Observations in the field** were very basic. They observed the arrangements: How people sat round, the mannerisms of the mobiliser; Whether the particular mobiliser conducting the meeting was friendly, and whether there were any conflicts/contradictions during the meeting. Observation should be focussing on the target group. A keen eye and an ear that detects the source of any problem, eliciting it from the sights and body language one sees,

and the statements uttered by the stakeholders, is yet to be honed. Deductions could be made with each and every sentence spoken, and each and every activity that takes place in a space.

**It is good practice to share with each other what each one observed, during joint field visits. This assists in honing analytical skills. It is essential to structure all the ideas into main frames such as concept, strategy and practice. This provides the required clarity for actions.**

### 6.3 Communication and Relationship

Space is a critical factor in promoting communication and building relationships with people. Taking into consideration the different attributes of the social classes present in a village, **different spaces have to be found** in order to communicate freely to them. Questions such as who will come to a public space and voice their opinions freely, who has to be met in a private environment need to be asked. PNA, due to its very public nature may not be the ideal space for the vulnerable groups to express themselves. And, even though it was observed by the mobilisers that women spoke freely in their own company, attempts were not being made to meet with them separately to listen to their representations.

**Time** is another factor in communication. The question that needs to be asked is: When can we meet which group? Is it appropriate to allocate white collar job office hours also to do field work in the villages? When is the most suitable time to meet the women?

**Open and warm relationships** have to be cultivated. If in a meeting, the mobiliser had to engage in 'forced conversation', then he/she has to seriously evaluate the relationship. People identify immediately when a relationship is artificial. If time is a constraint different tactics could be used to build relationships within the limited time. Mere words are woefully inadequate. For instance, one may have to play with the children, establish communication with them, in order to reach out to their parents.

The **introduction** provided to a meeting is very important. Take pains to explain who you are, why and wherefore, encourage them to ask questions from you the same way you question them. Although this is a difficult process in the given context of a donor recipient relationship, this rule must be followed as much as possible.

**Preaching or even too much advising is taboo.** Do not use phrases such as: 'We have told you before that all of you must participate in the project'. 'You must develop the village through your participation'. 'First you asked for this and when that is given then you will ask for that ...you must not depend on things like this'. Create the necessary mechanisms and the culture, then people will begin to act on their own.

**In public meetings avoid picking on a single individual** to question on any adverse action that that individual might have taken. This makes that individual feel ashamed and isolated within his/her group. For instance, repeatedly questioning a child in front of his classmates as to why he did not have his breakfast will make the child feel sad. Also, take care not to create discordant relationships within the community through your actions or words.

**Always emphasise the positive aspects of every individual, and their inter-personal relationships. Stress on the good and strengthen them.**

People find it **difficult to digest too much information**, especially if all of it is verbal. It is not advisable for instance to give the full details of an insurance scheme or a pension scheme to a group of farmers especially when they are kept standing in the middle of their work. Even in formal meetings, avoid giving too much information at one go, look for signs of

inattentiveness amongst the members of a meeting at which point one should change the mode of discussion.

Finally, one last important point on communication. Always, **the unspoken words are equally important if not more than the spoken words**. As much as we analyse what was discussed, it is also important to analyse why something else was not discussed.

## 6.4 Setting Objectives

The **mobilisers are entrusted** (we could also say, they might feel burdened) **with a variety of tasks and responsibilities**. The planning and implementation of programmes and activities are viewed by them as a process that has to go through certain stages such as PIV, PNA, project identification etc. etc. One has to be afraid that the overall goal of nutrition and food security becomes hazy in this maze of activities.

As a first step in their work the community mobilisers have to be acutely conscious of all the factors that led to a particular village obtaining a particular poverty code. They must know almost by heart the baseline data related to basic necessities in the village. They cannot say for instance, 'I do not know how many wells are there in this village'. The factors that are computed into the poverty code are the real impediments for that village to attain e.g. self sufficiency in their food security. And solutions to these problems could be the stated objectives in that village.

The **objectives and tasks of the work of the community mobilisers should be divided into steps or stages within specific time frames**. They could be broken down further to fit each field visit. Each visit to the field must be thoroughly planned so that the visit's objectives are set out clearly. Simply put, **there must be some little change taken place in the village from the time the mobiliser sets foot in the village and the time that the mobiliser leaves the village**. At present, the mobilisers have only the progress of the project as their main objective in their visits. Hence the questions: Was there a delivery of rice from the MPCS? How much of the channel has been constructed?" etc.

**In a people centred development, the objective of each visit should be the progress achieved by the people (communities, groups), which is monitored and supported through the progress of the project activities** (e.g. well construction, tank development etc.).

In order to tackle the problems of the village in a comprehensive manner, it has to be emphasised again that getting away from a narrow project activity focus, acquiring and using observation skills becomes essential. For instance, if in a tank development scheme, the women are engaged in the channel construction work and carrying their little children and babies along with them, then supporting them to provide child care for the young ones becomes one entry point for dialogue and for a comprehensive programme for village development. **Every aspect of people's lives should be looked into and taken into consideration.**

This brings us to another important aspect of field visit, which is that of an **equal relationship** being forged with the people in the village. Requesting them to attend many meetings which are only for the purposes of collection of information for research and other activities of the agency fosters an unequal relationship. It is only a taking and not a giving relationship. The community mobiliser could plan ahead so that any visit is also utilised by him/her for achieving certain limited objectives of the programme. **In every meeting one organises, see that the villagers also gain something.**

As a result of not setting objectives as described above while conducting PNA, PNA seems to have been practised as one of the project activities of IFSP (GTZ). The **perceptions of people** across the board was that **PNA was a forum created by GTZ** for them to put forward their various requests. They described it: “Many people from the government departments and GTZ came and asked us what we would like to do and we told them that we would like to engage in goat rearing, poultry keeping and so on....” They had **not comprehended that it was an effective planning process**.

**The transfer of the skills of planning is of utmost importance for people to take forward their own development. PNA has to be planned and performed in order that people may infer that this is a process they could appropriate for their own use.**

## 6.5 Programming

It has to be recognised that the mobilisers work in a context where the process and design of a programme is decided and controlled by IFSP in which the people participate, while they have also to ensure that in that process people begin to own it. They are not mobilisers in the truest sense, but have to be a ‘Jack of all trades’. This constraint has to be identified in order to find suitable solutions.

In this light, the **relationship between the community mobiliser and the CBO becomes pivotal** to a project. From the beginning, this will have to be defined in a way as **to empower the CBO**. In addition, to **strengthening an institution** that will continue responding to the needs of the people of that area, this will also **release the CM from being hassled for the non delivery** of any project inputs. Purposive **programmes have to be carried out to strengthen the CBOs, to enable them to have planning skills, project implementation and monitoring skills, and infuse in them a culture of transparency and accountability**. Could the CBOs take over the **purchasing and distribution** (of inputs) activities of a project that are now carried out by the mobilisers? One of the CMs suggested organising the **PNA training for the CBO before a PNA** is carried out in the area, so that when the actual PNA takes place the CBO is aware and participates with the full knowledge of the whole process. It is worthwhile trying this out.

Another suggestion that came from the staff was to **avoid touching on possible beneficiaries for the poverty projects in the same forum as the PNA**. Though the issue of vulnerable groups have to be addressed in the PNA the needs of the whole village need to be raised and discussed. If that does not happen, the whole focus would shift from the planning process to that of competition amongst the village community as to who would be eligible for assistance. At the end of the process, people tend to remember only the individual beneficiary selection activity and not the important process of project selection that happened before.

It was also recognised by the staff that **community projects are good opportunities to identify the vulnerable groups**. As there is a constraint on the hours that a mobiliser may spend in the field, this may be an excellent idea to reach out to the marginalised groups within the villages, who do not have the capacity to participate in any PNA (and who would not raise their voice even if they participate) and are unavailable during the daytime.

**Women** usually have an entirely different perspective on the needs of the villages and the community. And their priorities are almost always subsumed under the village men’s opinions. It is necessary to **organise as much as possible separate fora** for them to participate in all of the planning implementing and monitoring stages.

**All actors of a project have to be mobilised** to make it successful. For instance, in a mid-day meal project, the whole school community (the principal, teachers, School Development Society, parents and guardians, children, other school staff) has to be mobilised for the programme to be successful. To a certain extent the health volunteers and the PHI also have to be involved. Each person has to play his/her part in the success of a project, and it is the community mobiliser who has to facilitate this. It is pointless to repeatedly target only the parents.

Finally one last point on programming. **It is always exciting to have dreams.** Dreams give us the inspiration for programming,<sup>4</sup> and it is not imperative that all of those dreams have to be realised. So there is no harm in dreaming. The beauty is each one can have his/her own unique dreams in relation to the programme's objectives. But too much focus on administration requirements of a project may stifle our propensity to dream. Preserve the balance!

## 7. We Learnt

The feed-back during the coaching sessions made the community mobilisers (and the IFSP management) think and reflect. Some comments and conclusions:

- "For the first time we looked at PNA, learnt that it had to be people centred. People should take main role in the PNA..."
- "We learnt about the necessity for transparency of every aspect of a project..."
- "We initially asked about how to tackle the different programmes in the cleared and uncleared areas in terms of the vast difference in the time available for us. You did not answer directly. But I was able to get the answer from some points that you mentioned..."
- "We learnt that we had to plan each of our visit and each meeting"
- "After listening to what you said, my question is how does one supervise the meal quality of the mid-day meal programme. I have to do three schools per day and have to visit each school around 10.30 to 11.30 am."
- "We learnt the difference between social mobilisation and community mobilisation.. It is now clear who we are..."
- "More than ever I learned that we had to look for people's progress, not concentrate on the project's progress. I can confidently say now that I can make a plan for every month. You said that we had to plan every meeting. But I am not sure whether I will be able to do that as yet."

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, if one takes the mid-day meal project as example, a possible dream could be the following: In one village the SDS takes full responsibility for the provision of the mid-day meal for the school. Gradually they realise that rather than purchase the inputs for the meal they could cultivate them in their home gardens. This also spreads the cultivation of gardens and raises wholly the nutrition status of each family. When people embark on home gardens they discover that they must have continuous supply of seedlings and seeds for their gardens and establish a plant nursery. Then over time they begin to supply seedlings and packeted seeds to the outer villages too. They utilise the income thus earned for the development projects for the school. IFSP takes this SDS around to other schools as a model group. This proud group then inspires others to follow their path.

- “We realised that we are going to the field with our targets. But we can work with people to get other benefits too.”
- “We thought one communicated only orally. We learnt that body language is also a form of communication.”

## 8. Outlook

The forward plans were outlined by the community mobilisers based on what they had learnt during the coaching, and during the joint discussions with team leader:

- **Experiment the new ideas with a PNA** to be conducted in the new project village of Gravelkuli. Incorporate working with the local CBO even before the PNA exercise. Avoid the selection of beneficiaries for poverty projects during PNA.
- Evolve a **documentation method** for at least this experimental project that would enable the other team members to study the stages and the progress of the project, and learn together.
- Along with strengthening the CBO **create a group of ‘supporters’** consisting of educated youth of the village. Ensure that this group is also privy to every capacity building project undertaken in the village. This way a second level leadership is created in the village which could take the process forward
- Interact with the neighbours of the vulnerable groups in order to elicit information about the families belonging to these groups.
- Organise **regular staff discussions** to reflect on the comments expressed by the mobilisers concerning their problems/constraints. This will help to further clarify the concept of community mobilisation. Also, it might encourage the free flow of ideas going from the staff to the team leader.
- Reflect on the **possible entry points to mobilising the school community for the mid-day meal** project and plan the activities.
- When a project which is implemented through the new approach progresses to a certain level, organise the **fourth sequential coaching**, where the coach spends three days with the mobilisers in one particular village, looking at all the aspects of the programme.

### Evaluation

- "I was here for two coaching practices. But this was different. Before going to the field we had a good discussion as to what we were looking for. In the field, not only you observed us, but you demonstrated. So we learnt by observing you."
- "Earlier consultants did not understand our language. She communicated with the people and got their points of view which was fed to us. Earlier also we were told to plan. I did not know what we were supposed to plan. But now this has been made clear."
- "You are from our background; you understand our problems."
- "Earlier, they (the consultants) just observed us and said we should do this and that. But we thought it was easy to say things. We did not know how to carry it out. But you demonstrated and showed to us it was possible."
- "Initially we came with negative things about others. We blamed the people for the failure of the project. The 'brain teasing' of what participation really means and what contribution really means led us to know these two things. Rather than preaching, you did some practical things too. We learnt the value of punctuality and planning."
- "You know the background about mobilisation. You asked specific questions which made us think."
- "It was a satisfactory coaching system. Mostly because she is a local (not imported). Her demonstrations were very good and useful."
- "I changed from being concerned only with the success of the project activities. Now I feel I could adapt to anything."
- "This is my first coaching. I am very happy, learnt a lot."

## COACHING OF COMMUNITY MOBILISERS OF IFSP

Coach and Consultant: Mrs Shanti Sachchithanatham

### TERMS OF REFERENCES

#### 1. Aim of consultancy

The aim of the sequential coaching is to assist IFSP in its efforts to better address communities and to better facilitate services and efforts to implement 'poverty projects' and 'community projects' for enhanced food and nutrition security in Trincomalee district.

#### 2. Present status of community mobilisation

IFSP has established a community mobilisation unit. The ten IFSP community mobilisers, all younger graduates with practical experience in social work and related field work employed and trained since February 2000, are expected to facilitate services and link village communities (groups of people and families, interest groups, ethnic groups) to service providers and support them in getting integrated into the local and regional economy. Some community mobilisers participated in the concept development for 'social mobilisation' of February 2000 and have been since then with IFSP. Learning by doing, training on the job, feed-back and reflection of roles and functions as well as of day-to-day experience have shaped their professional and personal capacity. Coaching has been established as a support mechanism and is documented in two reports. The recent document 'coaching the community mobilisation unit of IFSP' (WP 34) resulted from the second round of coaching on May 2001. This document includes the 'do's and don'ts' of community mobilisation and has been widely distributed (CHA has reprinted WP 34 in their bulletin of Sept. 2001).

The IFSP management emphasises regular feed-back sessions, which are essential to strengthen the capacity of the individual community mobilisers in terms of professionalism, dealing with stress and risk and better approaches towards village communities as well as with respect to promote community mobilisation as a kind of new profession (there is a BSc course available in social work at one of the Sri Lankan Universities, however, it is felt that community mobilisation needs to be addressed more prominently).

#### 3. Why community mobilisation?

IFSP is not in a position to exclusively work with village communities but has to address service providers (GO and NGO) and participants of local markets. The exclusive and intensive work with and in a single village may not result in a significant change of local attitudes and capacities. To get a 'village ready for take off' requires far more external support than individuals could possibly offer. Encouraging frame conditions, trust and confidence in the civic society and in the state services in particular would contribute far more in terms of market integration than social mobilisation could ever achieve.

Why have we moved away from the common perception of social mobilisation? i) social mobilisation in its traditional context does not work; ii) it is discredited due to requests for

voluntary work, political interference and iii) coverage of almost all local development activities by government, resulting in iv) a kind of 'spoon feeding mentality'. Therefore, IFSP has embarked on a three-tier approach viz. i) developing a concept, test and adjust it at medium-scale and finally have it ready for larger-scale application; ii) institutionalise the community mobilisation as a concept (at least with IFSP and partner institutions) and, iii) promote handing over to communities and partner institutions. This is a process which requires regular consultations among stakeholders, viz. people, service providers, community mobilisers and decision makers.

#### **4. Tasks of the coaching**

The IFSP community mobilisers need regular coaching and training in different areas of their office and field work. Adjustment of attitudes and behaviour have to be approached by the coach. We want to reflect on the following: i) what do people perceive? ii) what do we perceive? iii) how could we address needs in a way that people feel confident, aspired and keen to join and contribute? iv) how better could we address our and their feelings for promoting understanding, confidence and trust?

For a sequential coaching we consider short blocks of four to five days over a longer period of time, which are integrated into the daily routines as well as into conceptual work. Based on the two previous coaching and feed-back sessions the following topics could be addressed:

- Reflection of field work, e.g. tasks, preparation for and organisation of field work, communication with people (participation from 'above or below?'), doing field work, de-briefing and documentation and, review of perceptions
- Review of the community mobilisation concept on the basis of the experiences gained
- Skills to improve communication, moderation, negotiation, and conflict management
- Skills to improve visualisation, presentation and report preparation
- Skills to improve the capacity to precisely describe, analyse and interpret situations and conclude alternatives and solutions for decision making, i.e. no discussion of problems (!) but rather highlighting potential solutions; this would call for intensively focus of strength and opportunities of communities and other stakeholders rather than on weaknesses and threads and hence, promote a positive attitude among community mobilisers and people
- Addressing gender in a pronounced way
- Skills to strengthen group approaches, i.e. how better address collective interests amidst individual perceptions, local dominance and experience based on fear or other negative pattern
- Own perception and feeling of risks, threads
- Own perception and interest of and for the future

#### **5. Expected Results**

A brief report along the lines of the previous ones is to be submitted. The report has to address practical day-to-day aspects that would allow to further qualify the community mobilisation approach of IFSP. Follow-up coaching is expected to be conceptualised for 2002 in the form of a coaching schedule. A de-briefing cum workshop is to be held at the end of the coaching week.

#### **6. Proposed Schedule**

This third coaching sequence is scheduled for 26 to 30 November 2001.