

Community Development: Rukha Model (2010)

Over the last few weeks there have been many who were interested in the Rukha Model of community development. Here is an attempt to explain in a few words what that model consists of.

Background - Rukha is a small village of 18 households, living in the western fringes of the Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. There people from here are called Oleps and number only 147. They have a distinct language that is fast disappearing and only the last fluent speaker is left. The Oleps were hunter gathers for many centuries and began their settled life only in the early seventies. The Royal Government gave them three acres of farmland and they settled in the village of Rukha in Atang Geog, Wangduephodrang.

What is this development model?

Tarayana has been working in rural development for the past (almost) six years. During this period, the local needs of the communities were discussed, problem trees jointly analysed, possible solutions sought and implemented by the communities with Tarayana taking a facilitation role. However, we noticed that the nerve point of rural development was still eluding us and that the processes were still tedious with us mediating, facilitating, cajoling, nudging and edging the communities along the planned activities that they had drawn up themselves. It took all of our patience, forbearance and greatest commitment to move along at their chosen pace, rather than imposing our ideas and pace of progress.

In implementing the “Comprehensive Community Development for Poverty Alleviation” a small project of US\$50,000, funded by UNV/UNDP, we realized that everything was coming together on their own as communities learnt new and useful skills together. They learnt skills like carpentry, masonry, earth ramming, stone wall laying, all useful in building improved homes. It was astounding to see the progress in all sphere of socio-

economic development as the community worked together in improving their homes. They drew lots to see whose house would be improved first and all worked together from morning to dusk. The progress was impressive. There was no need for external motivation. The process of personal transformation was taking place and they were driven in their activities as a community. The results of their hard work began to take shape right before their eyes. They began to appreciate the power of a cohesive community working together on a common goal.

The long hours of working together brought to the fore the many issues that confronted them both at the individual as well as community levels. It was interesting to note that the more they shared their woes and problems with each other, suggestions and ideas flowed fast and furious. Soon they were talking of their dreams both collectively as well as at the individual levels. The more they talked and questioned and debated the firmer their convictions and confidence grew. From a community who only a short while ago dared not dream, they were talking about exciting new possibilities. They talked about how they could better market their surplus produce in sharp contrast to food shortages they faced only a few seasons ago. The children were bathed and wore clean clothes, the homes became cleaner, the elders gentler and one could almost taste the positive energies emitting from the community as they worked together to better each other. It was surprising to see that the once poor were now in a position to help others and that they did so with so much humility and generosity. It would definitely change the way in which help was both sought and given, as the once food insufficient were now in a position to give. They empathised with those in need and lent a helping hand, or a bushel of rice, or a patient ear depending on the need.

Health and nutrition messages, advocacy for water management, sanitation, improved soil productivity, need to send children to school, gender sensitizing, need to improve saving skills, improving artisan crafts, market requirements, book keeping and a whole host of ideas and information were disseminated while the community worked together. Tarayana's role was purely in facilitating and in ensuring that synergies were built with all the key stakeholders who were present even by proxy to that village. The monitoring

visits were frequent for our documentation purposes, as the Oleps were skillfully taught to be masters of their own development processes. Tarayana now worked hard to move at their break neck pace so that all the facilitation services could be delivered efficiently. The different committees in the village made sure that all aspects of developmental targets that the community had set for themselves were being met.

After their individual homes had been improved, water supply enhanced so that all the fallow rice paddies were also cultivated, their kitchen gardens proudly growing a rich mix of vegetables, all their children in school and a little cash income in their hands, the Oleps are now on to their second phase in their socio-economic transformation. Demand for micro-financing is picking up to help them move securely into that next level of being productive citizens beyond being just subsistence farmers.

The apprentice carpenters are now working as carpenters in the neighbouring villages of Lawa, Lamgang, Samthang, Thaphu and Migtena, where the Rukha Model is being taken up too through upscaling support from UNDP. Just recently the Olep village representatives have approached us with a new proposal to renovate the community Lhakhang that had been in ruins ever since a fire razed it down several decades ago.

The inclusive way in which the project was designed and implemented by the community has had a big say in the success of this targeted intervention to address the many faces of poverty in the village. The Rukha Model is now in operation in most of Tarayana sites.