

# Participatory Communication

An experiment in  
reaching out ...

LIBRARY  
INTERNATIONAL REFERENCE CENTRE  
FOR COMMUNITY WATER SUPPLY AND  
SANITATION (IRC)



Experience of PSU Foundation in rural water supply and sanitation in IIP

822-INUT96-12622

# Participatory Communication

An experiment in  
reaching out ...

LIBRARY, INTERNATIONAL REFERENCE  
CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY WATER SUPPLY  
AND SANITATION (IRC)  
P.O. Box 93190, 2509 AD The Hague  
Tel: (070) 814911 ext. 141/142  
RN: BARCODE 12.622  
LD: 022 INUT96



January 1996

PSU  
FOUNDATION 



## Participatory Communication

### An experiment in reaching out . . .

#### 1. Background

The Indo-Dutch Cooperation (IDC) programme in Uttar Pradesh commenced in the year 1978 when a small piped water supply project was initiated in Allahabad, Rae-Bareilly and Varanasi districts covering 722 villages under 22 schemes. Since then the programme has substantially expanded, in terms of both coverage and components with approximately 6,700 villages spread across 15 districts of the State. The hallmark of the programme has been its constant sensitivity to the specific realities and needs of the project areas.

Thus, when a Dutch appraisal mission (1983) recommended an integrated programme in rural water supply and sanitation with emphasis on community participation and health education, an appropriate institutional set-up with particular attention to community involvement was formulated (1987). The Programme Support Unit (PSU) was established in 1988 with the specific objectives to :

- provide the necessary professional inputs in planning and implementation of the social components for ensuring community participation and health education in the rural sanitation programme (Sub-Project V);
- coordinate with the various agencies involved in the implementation of Sub-Project V;
- support the UP Jal Nigam in its ongoing IDC rural water supply programme;
- support the bi-annual Review and Support Missions.

To fulfill its mandate, among other activities, PSU needed to :

- develop a methodology for community participation and women's involvement in the rural sanitation programme, in close coordination with all departments and agencies involved in the Sub-Project. This included, among other things: dissemination of information about project components; motivation to adopt sanitary practices including acquisition, use and maintenance of household sanitary latrines (HSLs); awareness generation for the maintenance of standpost sites and reduction of drainage problems;
- identify the social aspects of rural water supply to promote community participation, with special attention to involving the women in the process of site selection, management and maintenance of water sources;
- identify and prepare a socio-cultural inventory of local traditions, customs, folklore, idioms, fairs and festivals, so that locally acceptable means of communication may be evolved to ensure better information dissemination and hence the community's involvement.

Subsequently, with the registration of the organisation as an independent Foundation in November 1993, its scope and function widened with a continuing emphasise on the primary objective of involving the community in planning, implementation and institution building in order to attain sustainability in the development process.



*"Srijan"*

## 2. Evolving an appropriate communication strategy : the rationale

When PSU commenced operations in early 1988 with a small team of professionals, the major challenge before it was to ensure the understanding and subsequent acceptance of the very concept of community participation by not only the community but also its implementing partners. The conceptual dilemma was underscored by the past experiences with development programmes, paucity of committed professionals and the far from conducive socio-cultural milieu of the project areas. Thus, even during the early phase of the project, it was realised that to enhance partnership and participation and to maximize efforts and resources an effective communication strategy was critical. Hence, communication was adopted as an integral part of the overall programme strategy, rather than an activity *per se*. As a result, the communication strategy has also evolved and matured with the programme. Further, as the organisation's activities expanded to include the water supply projects, each sub-project having different priorities, started adopting different approaches to communication.

## 3 The initial experiments

### 3.1 *Conventional techniques*

The initial forays into the communication sector were largely conventional. Posters, folders, flip charts, puppetry, street plays, songs and slogans were prepared through involvement of individuals and professional agencies. These presentations were viewed with interest but had only a limited and momentary impact. Subsequently, in the pilot project in Allahabad, a team of artists organised themselves for performances based on specific project messages.

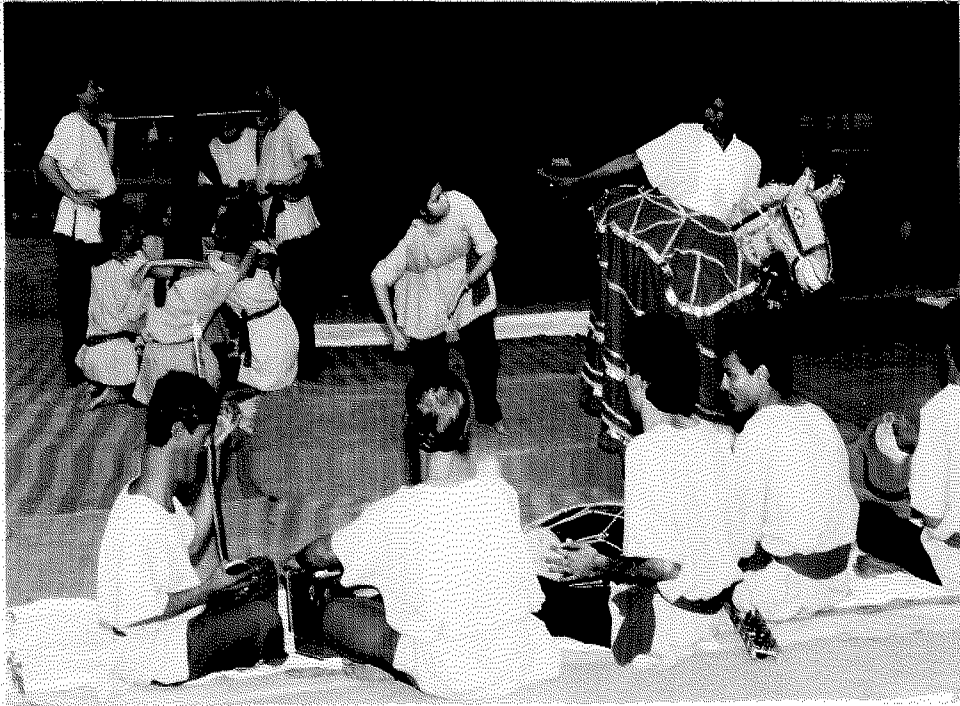
The pilot project at Allahabad was an attempt to build a model for community based maintenance of handpumps. The focus was on the formation of handpump-based water committees and development of a resource base for maintenance. The role and function of women within this framework was emphasised, a fact carefully addressed by the communication team. The prominent presence of female members in the communication team further tended to reinforce the potentials of responding to both the practical and strategic needs of women. However, although the team's enthusiasm and commitment were beyond doubt yet their impact was limited by their city based backgrounds.

### 3.2 *Promoting hygiene practices*

At the same time a different approach was adopted in the sanitation project in Rae-Bareilly, where it was necessary to not only ensure a cent percent coverage of households, but more importantly effect a change in attitudes, habits and practices related to sanitation and hygiene. The problems here were compounded by the apparent low priority of sanitary latrines in the low income level households. The project therefore, targeted the children as one of its primary agents of change. Small energetic groups were trained to perform simple, yet striking and forceful plays. Their involvement was not only a tremendous learning process but also led to a more spontaneous acceptance of their messages by the adults of the community.

### 3.3 *..... With the community*

The intensive nature of the programme in Rae-Bareilly and Varanasi also led to the establishment and development of identified members of the project areas as *Group Organisers*. The *Group Organisers*, mostly women, were the mobilisation force from within the community who were



*The traditional ... Lilli Ghori and Puppets*



trained in inter-personal and group communication. Soon, they discovered the potential of performing arts as a communication media and themselves doubled as a performing team. It was indeed a revolution for the previously shy ladies to not only emerge as responsible animators of a project but also to perform in front of the village community, including elders. Their task was not simple but it had a more lasting impact.

### **3.4 Expanding the base of community participation**

Similar experiments, on a modest scale, were slowly initiated in other districts (of SP VI) where site selection for handpump installation was the initial priority. With the completion of site selection activities, health education and mobilisation for upkeep and maintenance of handpump were stepped up. However, the increasing coverage of the project areas compounded by the limited manpower resources, (at that time a single Social Scientist was looking after approximately 250 villages on an average, spread across the length and breadth of the district), and the need for intensive interaction with other programmes/agencies for overall development of the IDC project villages, led to the formulation of an approach focusing on the expansion of the base of community participation (ECP). This entailed the involvement of both government grassroots functionaries and resource persons from the community for implementing the programme.

It was during the search for alternatives to spread the message of safe water, sanitation and the collective responsibility of a community that the Foundation's belief in the tremendous power of local folk based communication media was strengthened. With this the Foundation began to formulate its communication activities in a structured manner.

## **4 Approach and methodology**

The approach which has evolved can be summed up as ***“planned, participatory and situation specific”***, and the philosophy as ***“reaching out”***. The participatory communication activities of the Foundation facilitates the community to identify critical issues involved in the water and sanitation sector along with an understanding of the crucial tasks ahead. The message is placed before the rural community in a form and language which is familiar and interesting. In a situation-specific framework, the emphasis is on the identification and use of local art forms, performers, props and other paraphernalia and the purpose is the generation of participation.

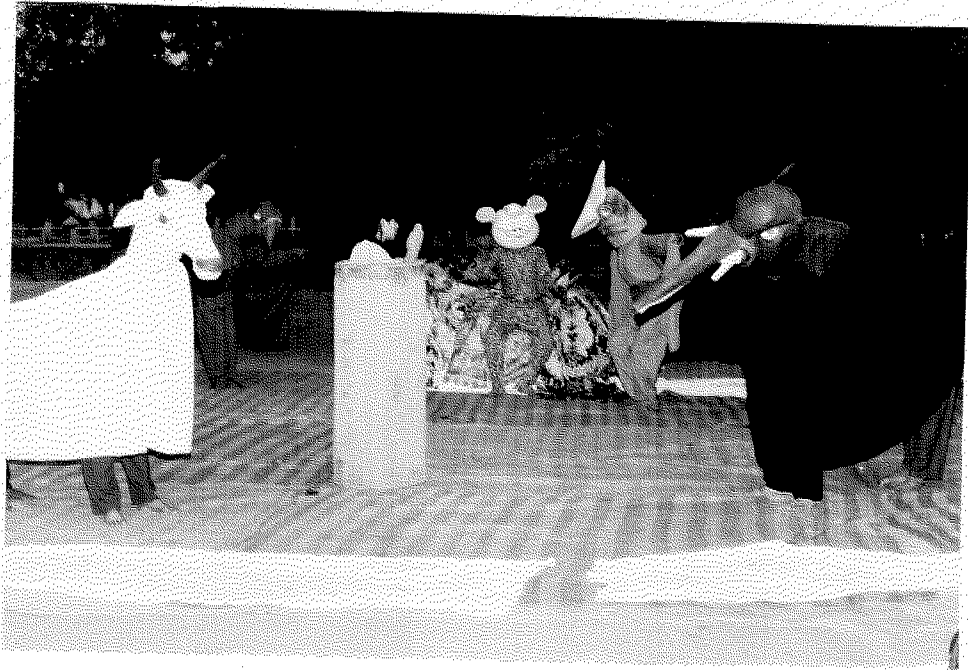
### **4.1 Planning the strategy...**

The planning process is purposeful and goal oriented. This is reflected in the strategy of selecting village based locally oriented media, tools and techniques, the continuous monitoring of the performance and its impact and the careful documentation of communication inputs and outputs for the purpose of reference and future use.

Communication activities, as a critical objective oriented tool, is integrated into the overall project strategy itself. Thus, the yearly plan of operations also reflect the communication interventions alongwith the expected outputs and the indicators for measuring them.

In fact, the process of baseline survey of a new project village provides the initial inputs for the communication strategy to be followed. It is at this time that the cultural repository of the area and the potential resource persons are first identified. Identification of local art forms so as to adapt the contents, format and style to the communication of the project messages is critical to the entire strategy. The communication professionals supported by the Social Scientist of the district, interact with the community, especially the women, in order to understand the prevalent art forms and generate a picture of the community's cultural perceptions, with the village elders often





*Delivering the message ... Lok Roop Natya*

helping in unearthing rare art forms of the region. In the process, potential local resource persons are also identified.

The data and information thus gathered are meticulously documented, analysed and the basic strategy formulated. Thereafter, it is a continuous process of refining the form and adapting the subject to meet the needs of specific situations.

#### **4.2 Ensuring participation...**

It is important to ensure compatibility and strike the right balance between the message, the medium and the local communities. The help, guidance and active participation of the local people thus become important. Their involvement often leads to the setting up of local communication teams.... a step towards participation.

##### ***Team building : a process analysis***

###### ***Identification...***

The team members are identified and selected from within the community on the basis of their interest, ability and potential. The range of talent varies from the gifted to the mere enthusiast! As sensitivity and understanding are the primary attributes required, amateur skills in performance is not a deterrent to selection. What they lack in terms of ability and skills is overcome in the course of imaginatively designed trainings.

###### ***Process of team cohesion ...***

Regular interactions help shed their initial inhibitions while instilling enough confidence to play an active role in the process. Interactions with others are encouraged, and a sense of mutual trust developed- till they emerge as cohesive, self-sustaining units ready to undertake communication activities.

The team is put through a pace of physical exercises and games which are not only geared towards ensuring strength and flexibility to their body, but also contribute towards the team building process. The objective is to develop a self-sustaining and cohesive team with a clear purpose and vision. Team building starts with ice breaking exercises developed to break inhibitions and encourage interaction between the team members. Trust and support to each other being the strength of an effective team, efforts are made in this direction and in the process a strong leadership is generated.

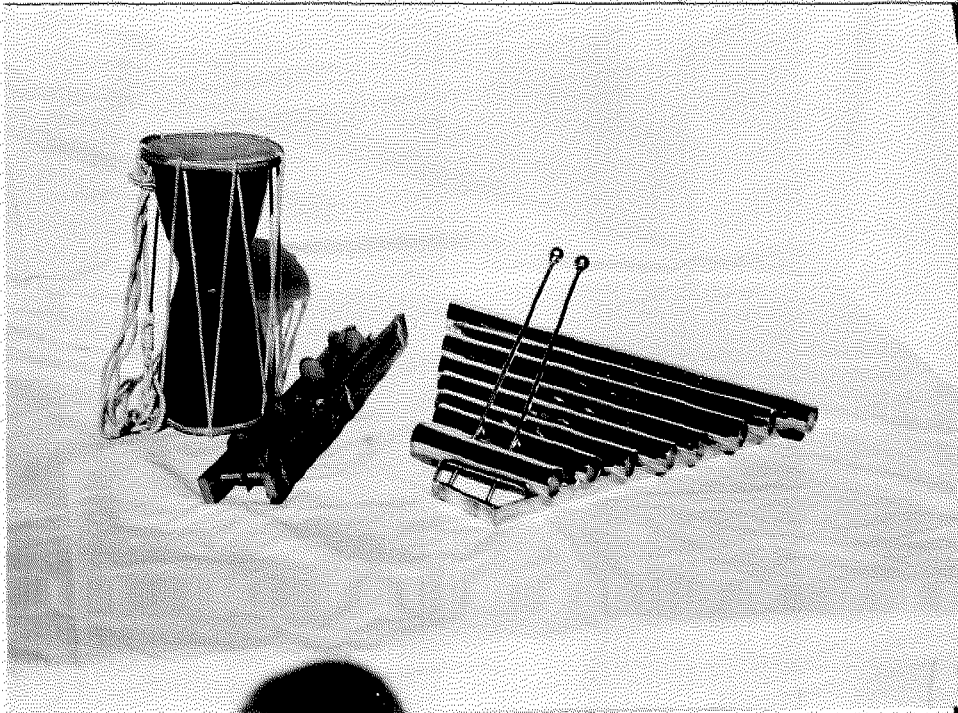
###### ***Delivering the message...***

The process, starting from a purposeful study of the cultural profile of the project area to the emergence of a well equipped and sensitive communication team, is one of skill development, awareness creation, confidence building and innovations. As the objective of the performance is not mere entertainment but message oriented communication it is of utmost importance that the members of the team understand the dynamics of development and are sensitive to the prevailing issues of their communities.

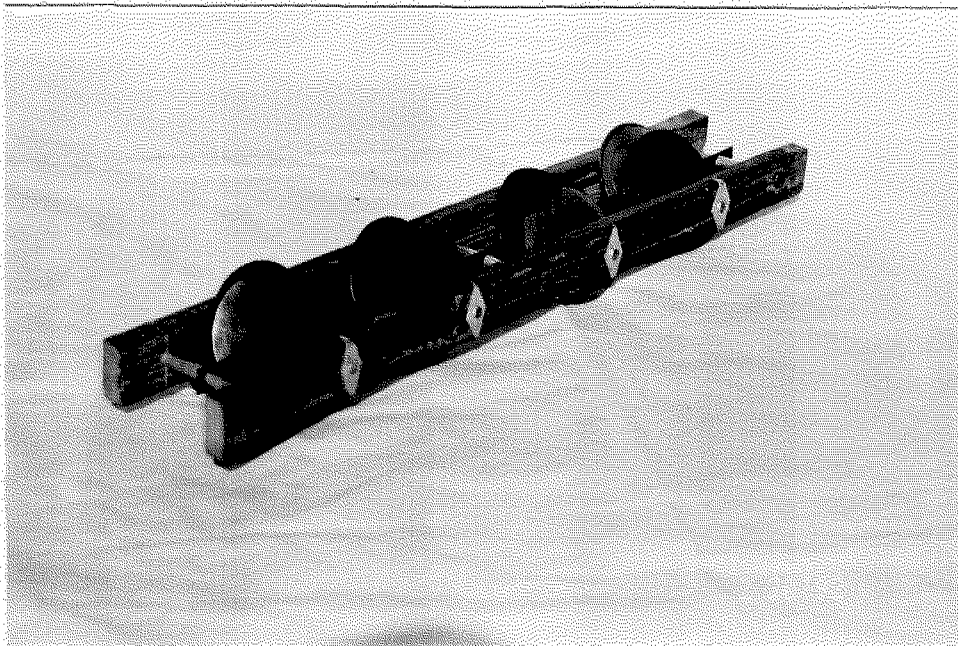
Training of the team starts with an exposure and understanding of the critical issues involved. The status and dynamics of their community defined, very often through a process of PRA, and the problems faced are analysed in the context of the water and sanitation sector. Thus wholly local based issues are identified for subsequent development of scripts.

###### ***Improving skills...***

Simultaneously the theatrical skills and repertoire of the team is enhanced covering a wide range of inputs including voice modulation, facial expressions, body movements, identification with the characters, etc. Training and skill development primarily focus on basic technical aspects of the



*Innovative accompaniments ...*



project, interpersonal communication, group dynamics and various performing skills.

The team is exposed to various forms of theatre through organised workshops conducted by professionals from different parts of the country. From time to time they are also provided the opportunity of witnessing theatrical performances of various groups in Lucknow.

#### ***Generating scripts...***

Development of scripts based on issues identified by the team is another important part of the training. The process is creative and participatory with the initiative for writing being taken by some of the members.

Script development begins with the identification of issues, the framing of the basic story line, the development of characters and finally the selection of the form of presentation. The entire process is participatory and the debate lively! The scripts themselves, interestingly, evolve around conceptual issues, programme objectives and activities, contemporary problems, and specific case or character based issues.

#### ***Innovating accompaniments...***

Innovative use of local material as props for cost effective performances, is another aspect of the training. Thus, costly musical instruments are replaced by sticks, stones, pebbles, plates utensils, etc. Instruments are also created for special effects. However, the dholak and harmonium, being extensively used in almost all the village, are few of the formal instruments used by the communication team. Besides, typically local instruments like the *Hurk*, *Nakkara*, *Chimta* and *Chamoli*, are imaginatively used.

#### ***Continuous development...***

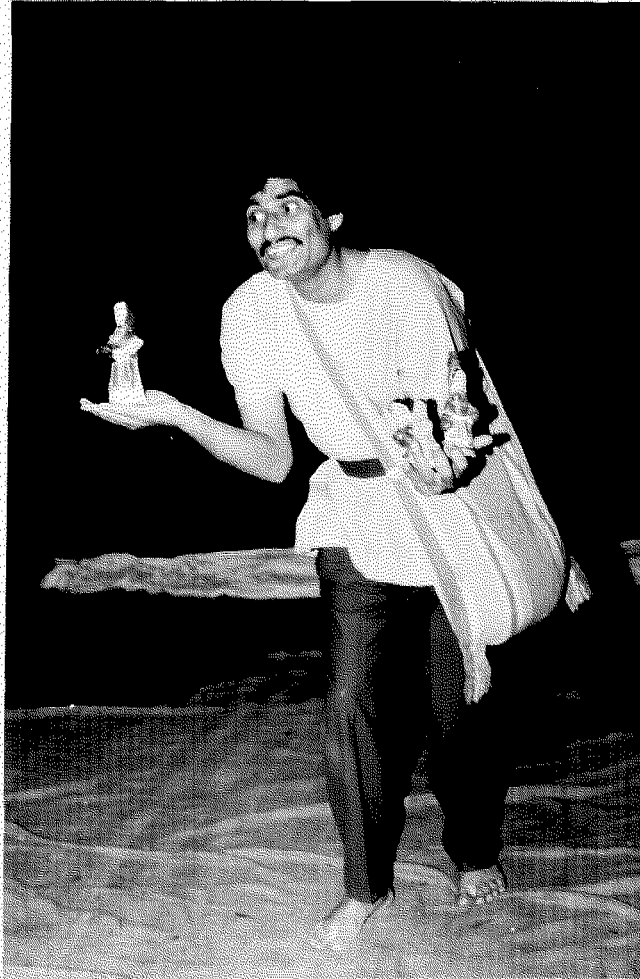
Finally, the process includes the evaluation and documentation of the activities. The teams themselves monitor and evaluate their activities and at the same time document the process. This provides substantial inputs for future strategy as well as improved performance. Self-review of each performance is encouraged, with the basic tools being open discussion and video review.

The key factors which have contributed to the effectiveness of the team are the strategy of developing a single core team which in turn supports the activities of several village based teams, the exposure to a variety of theatre and performing skills through organised workshops with professional from different parts of the country and the innovative and participatory process of production .

### **4.3 Responding to specific situations**

The performances are conceived and presented not as pure theatre but a form of creative intervention and communication reinforcing the implementation process. And therein lies the reason for its very situation specific approach which is reflected not only in the creation of local teams but also in its ready and spontaneous response to local issues and dynamics.

Thus local storylines, idioms and even characters form the core of the communication activities. The subject matters therefore range from the very direct project issues like safe water and sanitation, health and hygiene, institution building and community based maintenance, to such issues like literacy, the role of the *Panchayats*, specially the women etc., which although peripheral to the project objectives, are critical for its sustainability.



*"Dholki Chachi"*



## 5 Some emerging trends and features

Seven years back, when the PSU (Foundation ) began its activities in the development sector in the state of Uttar Pradesh participatory communication was not part of its planned agenda. Soon however, in response to the social, administrative and project dynamics it evolved into an effective tool with promising possibilities, resulting in its integration with the overall project strategy and operational plan. Over the years several performances on various issues and on various occasions have been held in the project districts. In the process certain sustainable features have emerged:

### 5.1 *Structured planning*

The recognition of the importance of participatory communication based on local culture and resources has led to a structured planning and implementation of the communication interventions.

### 5.2 *Local performing arts: a re-definition of purpose*

The largely folk base of the communication activities has interesting possibilities. First, local folk base ensures the availability of the contents, the mode as well as the audience all within the project villages. Secondly, it does not bewilder the audience by a total novelty of experience as the local performing art forms are familiar to the local communities. Finally it has the tremendous potential of not only reviving dying art forms, but also giving a new socially relevant dimension to a hitherto purely entertainment media. The fact that the communication techniques are developed *in situ* and are retained by the community has an impact which is sustainable.

### 5.3 *Creating a local resource base*

The abundance of latent talent is provided an opportunity to present its skills, resulting in the creation of a local cultural base with a new meaning. The involvement of the members of the local community, especially the younger members, has led to very positive fallouts. What is more, as this involvement is not limited to occasional performances, but is also extended to the analysis of the issues to be presented communication members gradually extend their support to the more critical and sustainable issues of the project. In the process, the development dynamics are better understood, confidence is generated and pressure groups formed to positively mobilise the entire community towards sustainable initiatives.

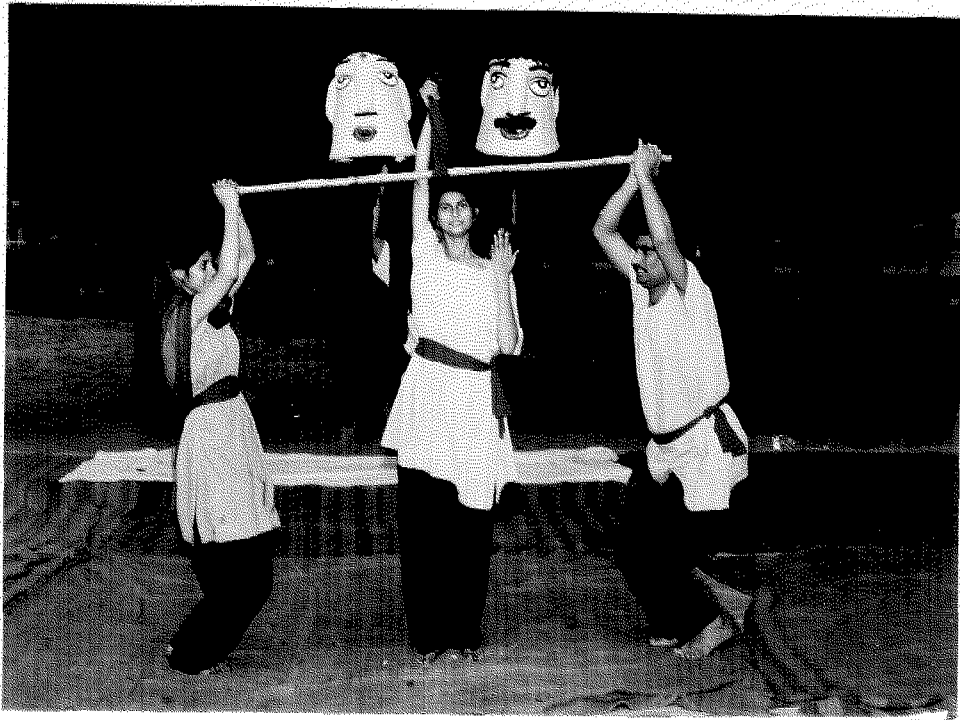
An interesting trend - and also a positive commentary on the effectiveness of the communication activities- has been its ability to create awareness to the extent that a number of persons who joined only as a member of the communication team are now actively involved in other project related activities. Thus, some of them also support the project as community-based block or village level volunteers.

### 5.4 *Local poets and local compositions*

The process of generating local talent has had rewarding fallouts with one of the most noteworthy being the active involvement of a number of gifted poets in the local tradition. Their compositions, reflecting the project concepts and philosophy, have now acquired a new meaning .

### 5.5 *Skill enhancement and training*

The communication team consists of voluntary members who have come together initially out of interest in the performing arts or the development of the village itself. Soon, however, the team has oriented to a single purpose i.e. sustained development, through community efforts. The



*Beyond water and sanitation ... gender and literacy*



contribution of the programme towards the creation and development of such a team is awareness generation and training, both in terms of project information and skill development, supported by constant encouragement.

#### **5.6 *Participatory research and documentation***

Prior to adapting any form of local folk art, the Foundation conducts a detailed inventory and analysis of the existing forms and resources. Naturally the community itself is the prime source of information. Their involvement has now stretched to the area of documentation. The major communication activities and training workshops are carefully reported and documentation undertaken by the communication teams themselves. The reports are very often supported by visuals - the creation of the team members. Each district communication team now takes pride in its creative abilities and the spirit of competition spurs them on. In the process of evolution of the communication process is being documented by the community itself.

#### **5.7 *Gender balance***

The programme consciously aims to facilitate a gender balance primarily by encouraging the involvement of women at every critical stage of the project. The communication activities also embody this commitment by addressing issues from the point of a gender perspective as well as encouraging women to be a part of the communication team.

#### **5.8 *Beyond water and sanitation***

The communication activities and the teams themselves have established their credibility and skills beyond doubt. Interestingly, they are now often called to support other development activities in the districts and are being recognised for their contributions. These recent developments have tremendous potential for participatory theatre in the field of social change.

#### **5.9 *Functional integration...***

The growing importance of communication, specially local participatory communication, was emphasised when the Foundation restructured its organisational frame work to include a team of communication associates. While at the initial stages the project depended on the inputs of part time consultants, subsequently the responsibilities for planning and implementation of the communication activities were entrusted to a team of communication professionals placed within the functional framework of the Foundation. The team now consists of theatrical and visual artists professionally trained and experienced in the field of development communication. The team members, although having specific job responsibilities, work together as an integrated whole.

### **6 *Summing up***

The approach of the Foundation's communication strategy has been one of interest and involvement on the part of the community. It has evolved as an answer to the challenges posed by the dynamics of a rural society - the dynamics of class and caste divisions, wide scale prevalence of illiteracy and lack of awareness and above all the overpowering burden of poverty.

The communication activities are only a tool in the entire scheme of the Indo-Dutch water and sanitation programme. However, with the approach being followed it has evolved to be an underlying philosophy and way of life!



