

# **TOWARDS PRODUCTIVE EDUCATION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In remoter rural areas like the one I've been in for 16 years: northern Shirpur, on the Satpuda foothills, Dhule District, Western Maharashtra, the dream of educating educationally alienated groups like tribal communities fascinates the administrator, NGO and political leadership no less, for 'need based' reasons. The administrator has to look after his track record of spreading public institutional presence. The NGO must gain credibility for funding. The politician needs votes from as many as tilt in his favour. The dream syllabus, ideal teaching method, the committed pedagogue, and hopefully the dream target community, are missing in fact but are greatly longed for. But the education we observe remains a colonial harness (a very robust one yet) that ensures conformity of a chosen few to the demands of competitive trade systems for survival. Those who can't conform must educate themselves and strive for a living. Poor communities who are the nation's and world's majority across caste, creed and culture still await educational systems that match and enhance their indigenous ways of imparting livelihood, skills and knowledge

Learning resources for rural communities is a vast field of research and experimentation not only because of the size of our rural populations but because of the great plurality of their culture and life-styles. Yet the masses generally tolerate our educational systems that eliminate a majority of them from livelihood occupations. We might posit one explanation for this phenomenon. In India nations within nations are seen at every turn of the road bound together by the instinct for survival. This instinct involves a sound perspective that if the other is hell there is only annihilation in store for us. While maintaining individuality each knows that space must be made for others even if it means some curtailment of one's own autonomy. Our peoples tolerate the standardized formal system since only this seems available to all and sundry. They cannot envisage any other supportable system unless it be their own home-made pedagogies for survival. They might see the educational system as a competition certificate for the job-market or employment in government, a means to class mobility. But as to enhancing their own capacities to produce a livelihood the educational system has not much to offer. This is especially seen in the apathy shown by poor agrarian and tribal communities to the educational processes.

Education is a fundamental right in India. Yet a great many children do not go to school and drop outs are substantial. Parents and children do not find what is taught in school relevant and useful in their lives. If children persist in school it is because they are just passed up until they can be promoted no more. Education does not attract learners because of its intrinsic worth but because of its function of certifying rare jobs. If education is to be meaningful then it has to be productive. That is, it must equip learners with the knowledge and skills for life support; it must improve the quality of life.

The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram has been grappling with this challenge for over 15 years. Working at a model of nonformal education in adivasi areas of Dhule district we have built up syllabus content, methodology, teaching aids, to directly address the needs of rural teachers and learners. The teaching-learning kits entitled Towards Productive Education are part of this ongoing effort. Towards Productive Education is a collaboration between Vishwa Mandal, tribal communities interacted with, groups with professional expertise ranging from agro-technology (AFARM and AFPRO) and community development (MPSM) to development communications (TRAMP). Financial support for the project has been provided by Intermon Oxfam. Towards Productive Education is a series of flip charts and resource books in Marathi on themes that are of immediate use and relevance to rural adivasi communities. The four interlinked themes are:-

- Our Natural Resources
- Our Rights
- Women take the Lead
- Technology for Advancement

Titles in the series are as follows:-

*Kit 1: Our Natural Resources (three flip charts)*

- Land
- Water
- Forests

*Kit 2: Our Rights*

- Understanding Our Rights
- The Right to Know; The Right to Vote
- Everyone Must Participate

*Kit 3: Women Take the Lead*

- The Need to Fight
- Together We Can Win

*Kit 4: Technology for Advancement*

(Three Flip Charts and Three Resource Books)

- Nurturing Nature (Agriculture)
- All Creatures Great and Small (Animal Husbandry)
- For Our Well Being (Health)

## **THE MATERIALS**

A total of 11 flip charts and 3 resource books make up the kits in the series. The flip charts and resource books have been designed for use by teachers in rural areas. The teacher can use them with young or more adult learners, in the classroom as well as in small informal learning groups, such as

women's groups and farmers. In remote rural settings where electricity and projection facilities are often unavailable, these flip charts and resource books are a valuable aid to the teacher in making the process of learning more enjoyable for all age groups.

Extensive use of colourful visuals and interesting narrative devices like stories and dialogue and real-life examples make up the flip chart's appeal and the process of learning truly interactive.

We briefly describe the contents of this educational tool recently developed for our rural and tribal learning centres (annually 25 in remoter villages/hamlets).

## **OUR NATURAL RESOURCES**

The series begins by providing an understanding of the resources necessary for survival. Our Natural Resources focuses on the three basic natural resources, namely, land, water and forests. The charts make the learner aware of the nature and present condition of these resources, and the need for urgent action at the local level to protect and conserve them.

## **OUR RIGHTS**

This leads naturally to the question of who has access to these resources and who regulates them – a question that is taken up in Our Rights. This kit provides information on the fundamental Constitutional rights, as well as on two rights that are crucial in making the government accountable to the people – the right to information and the right to vote. The structure and functions of local self government institutions at the village level are also taken up for discussion. The emphasis is on the need for people to take a more active role in making decisions that affect their own lives.

## **WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD**

If people are to have a greater say in decision making then everyone must have an equal opportunity to do so. Women Take the Lead focuses on one section of our society that has remained marginalized. The first flip chart explores the areas of everyday life where women are discriminated against and questions the attitudes that have led to this unjust treatment. The second chart uses case-studies to show how 'ordinary' women have empowered themselves to make a positive difference to their own lives and to the lives of their family and community.

## **TECHNOLOGY FOR ADVANCEMENT**

While the flip charts on the first three themes empower learners to be more aware of their resources and their rights, the fourth kit, Technology for Advancement, equips them with the knowledge of the techniques necessary to organise and use their resources to better advantage. Each of the three topics on this theme – Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Health – is explored through a flip chart and a resource book. The resource books contain technical and practical information on the topics chosen. The flip charts explain the holistic, eco-friendly approach that has guided the process of selecting the information provided.

## **THE STRATEGY AHEAD**

If we can have more such livelihood based teaching-learning contents and corresponding to such contents, rural-friendly teaching-learning materials, maybe education will become a more inclusive

enhancing process for our population rather than a means to eliminate masses of citizens from the fringe opportunities of development today.