

ILO NATIONAL SEMINAR FOR TRADE UNION  
LEADERS ON RURAL WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS  
IN INDIA.

VARANASI -20-24 November, 1978

.....

Address by Mr.K.Duraiappah,  
ILO Regional Adviser on Workers'  
Education at the Inaugural Session.

.....

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants and guests,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the first ILO National Seminar for Trade Unions in India on rural worker's organisation. This National Seminar is a fellow-up of a recommendation made by the ILO Asian Regional Seminar held in December, 1976 in New Delhi. Consequent on this recommendation, the I.L.O. organised a National Seminar for the Council members of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress in July, 1977 and it also organised this year a National Seminar for the Council Members of F.B.S.I (All Indonesian Federation of Labour). Both these national seminars enabled the policy makers of the Trade Union movements in these two countries to discuss the problems of the rural poor and decided the form of action that these two National Trade Unions should adopt in the promotion of rural workers' organisations and the type of assistance to rural workers. This National Seminar is, therefore, been organised with the objectives of providing an opportunity for Trade Union Leaders in India to examine some of the problems confronting rural workers in organising into a body and, how the organised sector (Urban Workers) could provide the type of assistance and services to the rural workers in organisation building.

contd....2

India is traditionally a land of rural setting; folk and murals depict the character and culture of its people. On the other hand, the various social systems which existed for generations particularly in the villages have a great bearing. There is a conflict of interest existing among the rural people and also economic and social disparities are widening. The present economic and social conditions have relatively changed the life style in the urban sector due to technological changes. In a way these technical innovations have also affected the life style of the rural people. Nevertheless we see absolute.

The Government of India has ratified ILO Convention No.141 concerning organisation of rural workers and their role in economic and social development. However, ratification of the Convention by the Government alone does not mean the rural workers can organise themselves as illiteracy prevails. The rural poor needs positive encouragement and National Policy should be to facilitate the establishment and growth on a voluntary basis, strong and independent organisation of rural workers.

It is also important that those who want to assist this process have a common understanding of what is meant by an "Organisation". A generally acceptable definition of a workers' organisation might be a continuing, voluntary and self-determining groups of workers, either on a local, natural or federated basis, independent of political or other influence or patronage, depending on resources it itself controls and having for its purpose the provision

of a service or services for its members- as determined by its members. However, the development of more and bigger independent organisation of rural workers will be no easy task-either for the rural workers themselves or for those who wish to assist. There will be resistance from vested interests sometimes ruthlessly. But experience has shown that difficulties and problems can be faced and can be overcome. Even in the very early days of industrial revolution, when workers organised themselves to defend their interest, they faced the barons' oppressions, but events have taken care for the good of the Society. The ratification of this convention by the Government of India should give the workers the confidence to join organisation of their own choosing without previous authorisation. Therefore, the greatest need in the rural areas is the development of organisation to cover the vast majority of rural workers as yet unorganised. The rural workers are economically very weak and they lack resources for organising themselves to defend their interest. It is now a matter which rests on the organised urban workers themselves to come forward to assist the rural workers, so that the rural workers could equally play an effective role in national development and thereby to improve their living standards.

Participation of rural workers in economic development has been stressed often but efforts for such participation and involvement had been negligible. Volumes of literature have been published stressing the importance of participation for development and yet the result is very much frustrating. What are the causes for this? My own view is the lack of

dedicated cadre of workers coming forward to help and enable the rural workers through voluntary efforts and creating confidence among the rural workers of the need for improvement through collective pressure and action. Any kind of paternalism from any source will not create the type of confidence among the rural poor. It is only through their own efforts and participation they could achieve their objectives.

It is gratifying to note that Government of India has launched a massive programme on adult education, which I, hope, will certainly create confidence so much needed. The trade unions must seize this opportunity of Government's programme in educating not only the illiterate urban workers but also those in the rural sector. The ILO workers education programme is increasingly being geared to provide technical and other assistance, guidance and information, training fellowship and grants, as well as teaching materials for rural workers organisation and for those organisations and agencies, who wish to work with rural workers to help them to develop and strengthen their own organisation.

I hope that this National Seminar of Trade Union leaders will consider of providing the type of assistance to rural workers in order to organise themselves and decide their own programmes and actions. When organising rural workers it is equally important to bear in mind that a situation unlike in the urban sector of the existence of multiplicity of unions should be avoided in the rural sector. If polarisation of such organisation continues, there will arise further conflicts among the rural workers and thus weaken their collective strength.

The ILO has in recent years been carrying out workers' education activities for the development of rural workers' organisations. These activities have been developed in response to requests from workers' organisations for workers' education help and expertise in this field and have largely taken the form of assistance to international trade union organisation and their rural affiliates in the organisation of courses, seminars and training programmes at international, regional or national levels for all categories of membership of rural workers' organisations.

We are pleased to note that seven major national trade union centres in India are participating in this national seminar and we hope their conclusions and recommendations will be of great interest to all those involved in national development programmes.

.....

ILO National Seminar for Trade Union Leaders on  
Rural Workers' Organisations in India, Varanasi  
20-24 November, 1978

Programme

Monday, 20 November 1978

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 09.00         | Registration   |
| 10.00         | Inaugural Session -<br>Address by - Mr. Bimal Ghosh<br>Director, ILO Office, New Delhi<br>Address by - Mr. K. Duraiappah<br>Regional Adviser, Workers' Education<br>Address by - Mr. V.S. Mathur<br>Regional Secretary, IIFTU/AFO<br>Inauguration by- Mr. B. Bhagwati<br>President |
| 11.30         | Coffee Break   |
| 14.30 - 15.30 | The needs, structure & functions of the<br>Organisations of Rural Workers- lecture<br>by Mr. V.S. Mathur   |
| 15.30 - 16.00 | Tea Break  |
| 16.00 - 17.00 | Discussion   |

Tuesday, 21 November 1978

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 09.00 - 10.30 | Organising of peasant organisations<br>(Problems & Prospects) by Mr. A.N. Seth.  |
| 10.30 - 11.00 | Coffee Break   |
| 11.30 - 12.30 | U.N. Agencies and organisation of rural<br>workers - by Mr. Mahmood Ali Khan, ILO<br>Regional Adviser on Rural Institutions. |
| 12.30 - 14.30 | Lunch Break  |
| 14.30 - 15.30 | Discussion on both the morning topics  |
| 15.30 - 16.00 | Tea Break  |
| 16.00 - 17.00 | Continuation of discussion   |

Wednesday, 22 November 1978

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 09.00 - 10.30 | Government's policies and assistance in the<br>development of rural workers' organisation<br>by Prof. Prag Mehta, Dean, National Labour -<br>Institute, New Delhi |
| 10.30 - 11.00 | Coffee Break  |
| 11.00 - 12.30 | Workers' Education and Financial Resources<br>for Rural Workers- Mr. K. Duraiappah,<br>ILO Regional Adviser, Workers' Education                                   |

: 2 :

12.30 - 14.30	Lunch Break
14.00 - 15.00	Discussion & Drafting of the Seminar Report

Thursday, 23 November 1978

08.00 Visit to Q&P Project, Ghazipur

17.00 Return from Ghazipur

Friday, 24 November 1978

09.00 Adoption of report

Afternoon Departure

Rajinikandan Sridharan  
 A B - b - Sat - du Jay Enclosure  
 Mrs Pathin - 18  
 Tel: 665415, 6676211

Final Report

ILO National Seminar for Trade Union Leaders  
in INDIA on Rural Workers' Organisation  
Varanasi 20-24 November, 1978

Conclusions and Recommendations:-

The I.L.O. organised a National Seminar on Rural Workers' Organisation in India at Varanasi from 20 to 24 November, 1978. 20 participants from seven major national trade union centres in India attended the Seminar, which was inaugurated by Mr. B. Bhagwati, President, Indian National Rural Labour Federation. The Seminar was also addressed by Messrs. Bimal Ghosh, ILO Director for India, Bhutan, Nepal & Sri Lanka, K. Duraiappah, Director of the Seminar, V.S. Mathur, Regional Secretary, ICFTU/ARO. The Seminar arrived at the following conclusions and recommendations:-

India has a population of more than 600 million; a large majority being in the rural sector. It is estimated that 294 million people are below the poverty line approximately 81 per cent of these poor live in the rural areas. The distressing feature of the rural scene is that both poverty, under employment and unemployment seems to be growing although India is the eight industrial nation in the World. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, 40 per cent of the rural population live below the poverty line in 1961 and 10 years later the percentage increased to 63. In Bihar it was found that the poor as percentage of the rural population increased from 41 in 1961-62 to 59 in 1970-71. The real wages for male agricultural workers in the country as a whole went down by 12 per cent between 1964-65 and 1974-75.

There were around 20 million marginal holdings of less than 1 hectare in India during 1961-62 and such holdings had increased by more than 50 per cent in 1970. In 1962, 24 per cent of land was controlled by 4 million families, whereas in 1971, they were farming as much as 31 per cent of such land. This highlights the urgency of land reforms, rural housing and other measures for more equitable distribution in the countryside. It is an essential condition for the economic and social transformation of the countryside on progressive lines, which, however cannot be achieved without an independent democratically functioning organisations of the rural poor. That alone can exert the necessary pressure for reform and ensure the effective implementation of land reforms.

and importance of proper formulation and effective implementation



While technology plays an important role in increasing agricultural productivity and bringing green revolution, the Seminar noted that the experience of green revolution has been far from satisfactory. It has accentuated disparities, often reduced opportunities of employment in the countryside and not always achieved the optimum possible productivity. The highest productivity per unit of land can be achieved only by intensive cultivation. For the purpose, it is essential to have small holdings well provided with the needed inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation facilities, credits etc. These are more generally taken advantage by the rural elites than the rural poor. This has led on the one hand to the increase of size of the elite holdings, irrespective of the legislative restrictions, and contributes to the prosperity of the rural rich. The participants emphasised that the phenomena of progressive farmers seems to be assiduously promoted and needs to be carefully watched as this will result in the diversion of scarce resources from the rural poor to the comparatively richer farmers. If the "Green Revolution" has to achieve its full potentiality of increased agricultural productivity and production, greater opportunities of employment have to be generated through intensive cultivation giving rise to more equitable distribution of income in the countryside. Technological progress should be promoted through organisations of the rural poor. Such organisations, therefore, have a crucial role to play, as pointed out in the Draft Sixth Five Year Plan, in ensuring implementation of all re-distributive laws such as ceiling and tenancy laws, identification and distribution of surplus land as well as for plugging the leakages in the delivery systems and effective administration of rural programmes. Rural Workers organisations also have an important role in developing ancillary services such as credit supply of inputs, marketing, employment generation, agro industries and rural craft. Further such organisations alone can provide reliable channels for two way communication between administration and the rural poor without which realistic planning and effective and satisfactory implementation of rural projects is well nigh impossible.

While the above broadly indicates the aims, purposes and functions of rural workers organisations, the way to achieve them should be through the pressure activities like that of trade unions and servicing activities like those of co-operatives. Progress in development is only possible through pressure and struggle. Rural workers organisation will be able to achieve its objectives and avoid the pitfalls of such institutions which, from all accounts, became the vantage operations of the elite.

It was agreed that the term "rural workers" should be adopted as defined in the ILO Convention 141 and Recommendations No.149- namely- any person engaged in agriculture, handicraft, or a related occupation in a rural area, whether as a wage earner or as a self-employed person such as a tenant, share cropper or small owner. The Seminar also agreed to include forestry workers, fishermen and workers in Tribal areas. The view was expressed in the Seminar that in the prevailing situation it was of paramount importance that all the rural poor, such as, small farmers, marginal farmers, share-croppers, landless labourers, artisans and servicing caste, should be effectively united in one organisation to be able to combat with and resist the power and pressure of vested interests. This will ensure both strength of numbers as well as financial viability and further reduce the possibility of the different groups, working at cross purposes and endangering each other's efforts for achieving the common broad objectives.

While there may be wide variations existing in both occupations and interests of the various categories of rural poor, such variations should not be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle in the way of building up strong and effective organisations. Experience has shown that the need for a mass organisation to ensure financial viability is greater than the difficulty that arises from embracing various categories within the same broad lower income group. In fact, experience has also indicated that once recognition of a common denominator, i. e. poverty and exploitation is established, the effective manner for dealing with the varied interests is to establish sections dealing with each; each section being part of the whole and contributing to the maintenance of the

organisation. Again, the need for such an approach is further emphasised by the fact that within the lower income group, and in spite of the variations, i. e. the tenant or share-cropper will, if the opportunity arises, become/a sharecropper. In fact, interchanges in these categories are not frequent. Thus, the above approach will provide for attention to specific categories as well as ensure overall involvement of different phases of membership in the activity of the united organisations encompassing the whole body of the rural poor.

There was, however, another view also expressed that since the interest of the landless labourers may conflict with those of their employers who can be even small and marginal farmers, share-croppers and tenants, it would be more logical and desirable to have separate organisations of the landless workers for the purpose of effective collective bargaining. Another view was that since those who would habitually employ labour for their operations and indulge in other forms of exploitation would be excluded in any case from the membership of the organisation as they would not be covered by the ILO definition of rural workers. It was, therefore, not necessary to have separate organisation of small and marginal farmers who hired help occasionally in times of busy seasons.

There was general consensus that the rural workers organisations should be multi-tiered and democratic functioning. Also the effective participation of the membership in the work of the organisation as well as their financial viability and administrative efficiency should be reconciled. Mutual assistance and effective servicing, which are essential functions of such organisations, may require operations on bigger scales to achieve both efficiency and economies of scale.

It was emphasised that the organisations should not remain aloof from the mainstream of the workers' movement. Indeed the movement of the rural poor and the movement of the Urban industrial workers must forge firm links and develop institutions both economic and social for mutual benefit.

L a wage earner, the wage earner may also if the opportunity arises become

contd....5

It will be futile to expect that such organisations of the rural poor would be able to develop **spontaneously** or the rural poor should be able to pull out from the prevailing economic and social morass. The stranglehold of the rural elite in the present socio-economic situation in the countryside would not easily promote rural poor to build up their own independent self-reliant organisations. Considerable help will be needed from outside to give them the necessary encouragement and protection to do so. The State will have to provide legislative protection to such organisations and guarantee congenial law and order situation for their operation, as provided for the operation of trade unions. A deliberate state policy must also help these organisations to develop their servicing activities. The resources both financial as well as technological must be put at the disposal of such organisations and state programmes and services should be organised and implemented in full consultation and co-operation with organisations of the rural poor and preferably also through them.

The Seminar was unanimous in expressing the view that the rural elite have often filed law cases in various courts to defeat the provisions of land-reform and minimum wage laws. A recommendation was made to establish appropriate machinery in the government which should be responsible to supervise and implement the provisions of relevant legislation in the rural areas. A point was made that landless workers should be registered locally and preference should be given to them for employment as against the non-locals. The seminar was informed that the government is actively considering the formulation of agricultural workers legislation. For this purpose, a committee has already been formed. The seminar recommended to expedite the formulation of such legislation and setting up of appropriate machinery for necessary enforcement of laws, research and action-programme.

The industrial trade union movement has also a special responsibility. Since most of the industrial workers have come from the rural areas and have firm links and roots there, they must do everything possible to help their kith and kin in the rural areas to build up their own organisations. Further, being comparatively more organised and conscious section of the community and

having experience in the technique of organisations, they must share it with their less fortunate brethren in the countryside. This initiative of the industrial trade unions is bound to have far-reaching effect on the relationship between them and rural organisations and both will benefit from such relationship. While the industrial unions will be able to broaden their base and strengthen their representative character and acquire more creditibility and authenticity as spokesmen of all the rural poor, the rural organisations will have friends and comrades in cities which are the seats of power and where most of the political decisions are made.

The Seminar discussed also the objectives of rural workers' education and financial resources. It felt that organisation and education are virtually inseparable; specially in the early stages of development of an organisation: organisations can not be effective without education and to educate is to further organize. The most important element of educational activity is the development of a two-way communication system with the rural workers and that their personality should be developed in order to assume organisational and community responsibilities. The participants also decided that <sup>per month</sup> a monthly subscription not less than 2% *adequate* of their wages should be collected in order to maintain viable organisation and to provide services for its members.

In conclusion, the seminar participants expressed their appreciation to the ILO for organising the national seminar. It provided an opportunity to the trade union leaders to acquire more knowledge through exchange of experiences in organising the rural workers. In this regard, reference was particularly made to Convention 141 and Recommendation 149 which were instrumental in creating awareness for the need of organising rural workers and their role in socio-economic development. Thereby the government of India was able to ratify the Convention 141.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments should reflect its conviction with regard to role and functions of rural workers organisation in its programmes and policies. It should among others:

1. give legislative protection to the formulation and function of such organisations by granting the usual immunity, protection as in the case of trade unions and co-operatives and to ensure effective implementation of the ILO Convention.
2. It should make available its resources and technological expertise to enable such organisations to develop effective servicing of their membership.
3. The government programmes and plans in the field of rural development should be formulated in close consultations with such organisations and implemented through them.
4. The educational and other welfare activities of the government should seek co-operation and support of such organisations. Hitherto expansion of formal and vocational education has bypassed the weaker sections. This can only be checked if rural organisations are effectively brought into the picture and involved in the implementation of such programmes.
5. Social security for the rural workers should be provided <sup>nonstop</sup> along with other social and welfare services- like drinking water, health care, etc.

### TRADE UNIONS

Trade Unions should establish a cell or a department at their Headquarters for the organisation of the rural workers and

- (1) collect and establish separate funds for the promotion of the organisations of rural poor
- (2) make available their expertise for development of the rural organisations
- (3) the industrial workers unions and the rural workers organisations should establish links between consumers and producers co-operative which will prove of mutual benefit to both and thereby the rural people through their producers co-operatives will be able to obtain proper price for their goods and commodities avoiding the intermediaries.
- (4) The industrial workers organisations should help in developing educational and training programme for the rural workers.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

ILO

1. The ILO should ensure that ILO Convention No.141 is effectively implemented and that the necessary legislation on the lines of the Convention is enacted.
2. The ILO should extend its workers education programme for rural workers' organisation and help in training, servicing and provision of equipments and literature. It is essential that the ILO should help promote training institutions for training organisers and other personnel for rural workers organisations. It should also provide fellowship and study grants for rural workers organization in leadership training.
3. The ILO should also help in development of economic and social projects for rural workers organisations and secure the necessary technical assistance for such workers.
4. The ILO should undertake studies of existing rural workers' organisation and their problems.

FAO

1. The FAO should impress on the governments the importance of the role of rural workers organisations for greater efficiency in agriculture and allivating poverty.
2. The FAO should give greater recognition and importance to rural workers organisations and associate them in its work by inviting them to its various conferences and meetings.
3. The FAO should provide fellowships and grants for rural workers organisations for study in agriculture, agro-industries and other services.

UNESCO

The UNESCO should develop special general education literacy programmes for rural people to be formulated and implemented in co-operation with the rural workers organisations.

contd...9

UNIDO

The UNIDO should help rural organisations to establish industrial projects in the countryside by giving financial and technical assistance for such projects and for their proper management and execution.

WHO/UNICEF

Both these agencies should assist the rural workers organisations in promoting basic health care and also to seek the co-operation of the rural workers organisation in implementing health programmes and child care.

—oo—

24th November, 1978