

The peasant is a tough customer. He's from Missouri; he has to be shown. He has the wise caution of a man who lives so close to the edge of starvation that he can't afford to take risks on a new seed or a new method of cultivation. He won't believe what is written in pamphlets or what an agricultural expert tells him. But it is a different thing if he sees with his own eyes on the field of a neighbour that a new seed or a new method of cultivation will produce bigger crops.

The Indian experts on the subject are the first to admit that not all community projects are successful and that no community project is successful in everything it has tried to do. There are good projects and weak projects. The good projects successfully resist the temptation to concentrate on quick results which make a good showing in statistical returns, to build community centres which aren't used and new pumps that aren't kept in working order. The good projects concentrate on three tedious, arduous tasks. The first is to persuade the villager to help himself; the second is to build up local leadership; the third is to persuade the villagers to cooperate under their own leaders to improve the amenities of the village -- the schools, the lanes, the sanitation. It is a programme of self-help, independent initiative, and mutual aid.

Everything depends on the people in charge of the project -- the director, his immediate assistants, and most important of all, the man at the bottom of the pyramid -- the man who is in charge of all the activities of the project in five or ten villages. This is the man who has been given the not very euphonious title, "all purpose village level worker". If India's programme for reforming its villages is to succeed, India must have tens of thousands of first class village level workers. They have to be recruited, trained and kept up to the mark.

This in itself is an immense task and it is only one of the many difficult tasks which India faces. India has to find and train efficient, keen and honest people for so many jobs. It needs skilled workmen and foremen and administrators for the new factories. Under a pitiless tropical sun and in a poor country it has to maintain high standards of competence and integrity.

The wonder is not that mistakes have been made but that so much has been accomplished against such odds.

As you go up and down India you can see the face of India changing.

I have myself seen how valleys have become lakes, how land that was brown has become green, how what was jungle has become a modern industrial town. I have seen in some community projects the beginnings of a revolution in village life and peasant agriculture. In these projects the peasants are beginning to adopt better methods of cultivation. They are beginning to use better seeds. They are beginning to use fertilizers. They are beginning to work together to build schools for their children and to make their villages healthier places to live in.

I am sure that other of the under-developed democratic countries, particularly those in South and South-East Asia, are beginning to show similar signs of progress and development. The common problems which the under-developed countries of South and South-East Asia are facing have brought them together as partners in the Colombo Plan. The success of the individual national development programmes, based on a spirit of international co-operation, may emerge as one of the finest achievements of our age.