Some Applications of FEST

FEST does not provide a blueprint to be directly replicated in all situations. Instead it suggests a range of understandings, values, and principles that must be respected in the design and implementation of programmes designed to bring about empowerment of the marginalised and wider transformation in society. What follows are outlines of two proven applications of the FEST approach: the Surkhet Project Awareness Raising Cycle (SPARC) and Sahakarmi Samaj's Community Governance Enhancement for Social Transformation (CGEST) Programme. Related approaches have been used by other organisations in other settings and it is hoped that those involved will provide details of the specific processes they use.

1. Outline of Surkhet Project's SPARC Process[1]

Stage One – Social Analysis and Listening Survey

The broad objectives of stage one are:

a) to establish trusting relationships with community members in the area (VDC).
b) to identify the most marginalised communities and groups in the area.
c) to identify the actual interests and concerns of these marginalised groups.

This stage is of about 6 months' duration. During that time, the field staff (a team of four `community educators' resident in each VDC) visit every household in the VDC to establish contact and explain the purposes of Surkhet Project. They record details of these visits, identifying any factors of disadvantage and critical issues affecting individual families. Having familiarised themselves in this way with the locality and its people, they perform a social analysis through which the most multiply disadvantaged (marginalised) communities or groups are identified. Further visits are then made to these marginalised communities/groups to strengthen the relationship with them. Their actual interests and concerns (known, in Freirean terms, as `generative themes') are identified using the `listening survey' technique. This is a kind of participant observation in which field staff note and record the issues that are most important to the villagers.

Stage Two – Group Formation and Problem Definition

The broad objectives of stage two are:

a) to establish community groups (or links with existing groups).
b) to develop the skills needed for effective group working.
c) to develop the capacity of group members to critically analyse problems and identify root
a) causes.
d) to identify root problems for group action.

This stage is of about 2-3 months' duration. Unless a group has already been formed, field staff first bring community members together into a group, giving special encouragement (and reassurance) to the most marginalised. During the early sessions, staff facilitators establish a `group contract' with the group which includes the basic guidelines for effective group interaction. Facilitators feed back their observations of group behaviour with reference to the contract. At each meeting (usually once a week) a different concern (generative theme) is addressed using a problem-posing tool known as a 'code'. A code may be a play, a mime, a role-play, a picture, a photo, a puppet show, a story, a song, a game, somebody's personal history, a field visit ...anything which brings the problem into sharp focus. The code does not provide any answers. In the course of group discussion, the facilitator steers the group through the 6 steps of problem analysis described by Freire:

1. Description of the code (What did you see...?, What happened then....?)
2. First analysis (Why do you think he behaved in that way.....?, Why does the girl in the picture look sad....?)

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[1] This account is taken from 'Surkhet Project Awareness Raising Cycle (SPARC) - A Description of Surkhet Project's Appropriate Education Programme' (UMNSP, 1991).

3. Real life (Does that ever happen here...?, Do you have any experience of this......?)
4. Related problems (What happened to his family...?, How does that affect the community...?)
5. Root causes (Yes,...but why?.... I see, but why?..... But why does that happen....?)
6. Action (What can we do about it...?, How could we change that....?)

In this way the group members are encouraged to think through the problem, identify its root causes (the 'root problems') and come up with their own answers. Some groups may be impatient to take action to address a certain root problem and in this case the facilitator may decide to proceed immediately on to stage three, the action stage (see below). Otherwise, towards the end of stage two, the group will have to consider all the root problems it has uncovered and decide which of these, (if any), it wants to address first. (At this point it may be that certain specific interest groups break away from the original groups. However, the facilitators will generally encourage groups to continue to work together to address common community concerns).

Stage Three – Action Planning and Implementation

The broad objectives of stage three are:

a) to determine a goal in relation to the group's root problem.
b) to identify strategies and resources to meet the goal.
c) to determine objectives to implement the chosen strategy.
d) to formulate an appropriate action plan.
e) to evaluate the outcome.
f) to define a new goal.

This stage is of variable duration, depending on the nature of the problem addressed. In the first instance, facilitators encourage groups to address a small-scale problem, using only locally available skills and resources. More ambitious projects may be initiated once the group is familiar and confident with the process, although the emphasis remains throughout on the creative utilisation of local skills and resources.

Firstly, the group decides on a goal for its action. If the problem addressed is very complex or abstract, facilitators help the group to conduct a `force-field analysis'; a tool used to identify manageable goals. Strategies are then identified by `brain storming' and group discussion. At this stage, it may be realised that the group lacks adequate information, skills or resources to meet its goal. In such a case, the root problem is redefined as a lack of information, skills or resources, and a new goal set to make good this lack. The facilitator may then help the group to enhance its knowledge through the use of appropriate participatory research methods. The project is also willing to help community members undertake necessary investigation by sponsoring consultation with resource persons, trainings and study tours.

The facilitator helps the group to determine objectives in relation to its chosen strategy. Because many group members are illiterate, pictures are generally used to represent the group's objectives. The facilitator helps the group to formulate an action plan, detailing who is responsible for individual tasks and when and where these should be carried out. Again, pictures or agreed symbols are used to represent the tasks on the group action plan.

One task that is always listed is that of monitoring the implementation of the plan, the responsibility for which is assigned by the group to certain of its members. The facilitator helps the group members to conduct an evaluation discussion, reflecting frankly on the outcome of their actions and drawing out the lessons to be learned from their experience. Depending on the outcome, group members may decide either to define a new goal in relation to the same (unresolved) problem or to tackle a completely different problem.

Stage Four – Organisational Development

The broad objectives of stage four are:

a) to develop leadership skills among group members.
b) to provide organisational development consultancy to emergent NGOs.

If a group that has successfully achieved two goals decides that it wishes to establish itself as an ongoing institution (a local NGO) it may participate in stage four of our programme. The project offers leadership training for group representatives in Birendranagar, developing such skills as facilitation, institutional development, planning, record-keeping and financial management.

The project also offers free organisational development consultancy to these groups, both in Birendranagar and, as necessary, in the field. (This consultancy is available to all stage four groups, even after the original field programme has ceased to operate in their VDC).

2. Outline of Sahakarmi Samaj's Community Governance Enhancement for Social Transformation Process[2]

Stage One – Social Analysis and Listening Survey

Identification of VDCs

This involves meetings with district authorities, government line agencies and NGOs to a) make a marginality ranking of VDCs, b) identify the reasons for the marginality of VDCs, c) identify other organisations working in the district, and d) introduce and publicise the programme. It also involves meetings with to the highest ranked VDCs to introduce the programme and secure official invitations.

Community Screening Process

This involves 2-3 meetings in different parts of each ward of the selected VDCs and the use of participatory exercises to identify the most marginalised communities and the reasons for their marginality.

Listening Survey

This involves making house-to-house visits in the most marginalised communities to win trust, to listen for 'generative themes', and to understand the factors contributing to marginalisation.

Social Analysis and Final Determination of Community Ranking

This involves reflection on, and analysis of, the situation of the respective communities and identification of the key issues affecting them. It also involves the selection of specific communities in which to work.

Preparation of Village Profile

This involves the documentation of what has been learned about the VDC through community screening, listening surveying and social analysis. The Village Profile serves as a baseline for future comparison and as an information resource for VDCs and other concerned parties.

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[2] NB - The version of CGEST presented here is a draft that needs to be reviewed and approved by Sahakarmi Samaj.

Stage Two – Group Formation

Community Meetings

This involves inviting people to participate in meetings and supporting/encouraging them to attend.

Participatory Analysis of Community Situation

This involves the use of tools from the PRA toolkit (social/resource mapping, community history, seasonal calendar, trend analysis).

Establishment of a Group Concept and Vision

This involves an introduction to group work [? torch and thread models – check details]. It also involves the presentation of a sample code. Finally, participants are invited to consider whether they want to continue to meet as a group.

Group contract

This involves reaching agreement on the key principles and practices that will guide participation in the group.

Stage Three - Problem Analysis, Action Planning and Evaluation

Code presentation
This involves the presentation of around 3 further codes and the facilitation of code analysis.

Action Planning

This involves the preparation of a plan with specific objectives, agreed timelines and clear allocation of responsibilities, as well as monitoring and evaluation criteria. Action planning may commence as soon as a group is ready, but facilitators help groups to begin with more manageable projects and to differentiate these from more long-term, strategic undertakings. Groups may tackle a number of issues and this element of Stage Three may last from 6 months to 1 year.

Implementation

This involves encouraging community group members as they work to implement their plans.

Evaluation

This involves supporting community groups to reflect on their experiences of action planning and project implementation and to identify relevant learning for the next round of activity.

Family Coaching

This involves reaching out to those that find it difficult to attend group meetings to encourage them and to support them in addressing specific issues in their families or households. They are helped to clarify and analyse these issues and to develop a plan in order to respond to them.

Stage Four - Organisational Strengthening

Consultation

This involves the provision of information regarding government and other services available to community groups.

Leadership Development Training

This involves the provision of a) Community Group Strengthening Training (CGST), b) Community Facilitation Training (CFT), and c) Community Organisation Strengthening Training (COST). CGST covers issues such as group work, participation, decision making, roles and responsibilities, and development theory. CFT covers facilitation skills, leadership and meeting management. COST covers network formation, resource acquisition and liaison with external agencies. COST supports the emergence of network organisations at a) VDC level, and b) regional (sub-district) level. Sahakarmi Samaj's Organisational Capacity Building and Training, Consultation and Research Sections provide support and specialist training in accordance with the specific needs of established network organisations.

Other Activities

Monitoring

This involves regular assessment of the capacity of community groups and network organisations through the use of participatory self-assessment tools ('spider diagrams'; 'group photos').

Exit Evaluation

This involves the assessment of community group capacity at the point of withdrawal by the community educators.

Training Workshops for Local Government

This involves the provision of workshops to raise awareness amongst local representatives and government officials regarding marginality, injustice, good governance and democratic accountability.

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