

20th Regional Workshop on Capacity Building of NFE Facilitators in Asia and the Pacific
Yangon, Myanmar, 3-12 December, 2002

TRAINING THE NFE FACILITATORS TO BE CHANGE AGENTS

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Non Formal Education (NFE) is not just about literacy and numeracy. The objective of any genuine NFE program is to bring about qualitative changes in the lives of the learners. This would involve changes in their Physical, Social and Cultural environment. Thus the NFE Facilitator, who must play the most crucial role in the process, must learn to be a change agent, one who can help to initiate meaningful changes in the life of the learners and the community in which they live. Any training program meant for the NFE facilitators should take care of this aspect.

In order to become a change agent, the NFE facilitator should know his learners, their family environment and the community in which they live very closely. She/he should also have the capability to understand and analyze their problems with them, clearly.

Knowing the Learner

In order to know the learners closely, the NFE facilitator should interact with them continuously and intensely. The following aspects of the learners life is of special importance:

- Learner's economic situation
- Work and working environment
- Educational background
- Health condition
- Skills that they possess
- Communication ability
- Leadership qualities
- Attitudes
- Special aptitudes
- Positive and negative experiences
- Limitations

Each learner will have several positive and negative aspects in her/his character. Each one of them must have gone through painful as well as joyful experiences. The NFE facilitator should try to patiently understand and analyze each one of these aspects so that he/she will be able to help the learner to move forward in life. This cannot be done in a day or two. The NFE facilitator should patiently talk, interact and observe his/her learner in different situations to acquire a clear understanding about the learner.

Facilitator can make use of different techniques to understand his/her learners. Some of the techniques are listed below:

- intensive interpersonal chats
- close observation of the learner in different situations
- observation of the learner behavior during group work/group discussions etc
- learner's self-description or narration

NFE facilitators may make use of one or more of these techniques. They can also make use of other methods not mentioned here. But the most important point is to document all the information that he/she gathers about each learner, systematically. It would be extremely useful if the NFE Facilitator can keep notebook with 3-5 pages set apart for each learner. This learner observation diary will be a very useful tool for measuring the progress that each learner is making in his life.

The NFE facilitator should try to prepare "baseline" information about each of his/her learner. Baseline information is information about the learner before the learning process starts. This should include details like the nature and quantity of income that the learner is able to generate, nature of the learner's communication and leadership capabilities, learner's general attitude towards life, his/her understanding about social/community problems, level of educational achievement etc. As a change agent the facilitator should know from where he/she is starting and what exactly are the changes that he would like to see happening in the learner. It would be interesting to prepare the baseline details in consultation with the learner herself/himself.

Such a baseline data would help to assess the progress that the learner is able to make at different stages of learning. This would also help the NFE facilitator to make appropriate changes in the teaching learning strategies that he/she is adopting.

Knowing the Family of the Learner

In order to understand the learner the facilitator should also know the family situation of the learner closely. Suppose a learner is burdened too much with family responsibilities, it will certainly have a negative impact on her learning process. A supportive family environment will certainly help the learner. Similarly the attitude of the family members towards her learning is also very important.

Facilitator should have knowledge about the following aspects of the learner's family life:

- economic condition of the family
- educational background
- overall health situation in the family
- socio-cultural aspects
- customs and social norms followed by family
- nature of relationships
- living conditions

There are many more aspects to family life. The more one is able to understand the better one can help the learner. But NFE facilitator must also be careful not to intrude into the private aspects of family life that the learner may not like to share. Some times the facilitator will have to wait patiently till the learners gain enough confidence in him /her to share details.

Several methods can be adopted to understand the family situation of the learners. Some of the methods are given below:

- Visit to the family
- Group Discussion with all family members
- Intensive chats with selected family members
- Informal discussions with the learner about his/her family

After gathering the details, the facilitator should analyse and put together in a systematic manner so that it becomes useful in understanding the learner and also in providing appropriate support in her learning.

If the facilitator can make a table showing the key aspects of the family life of each learner in such a fashion that it can be reviewed from time to time.

Knowing the Community

Each learner is the product of the community. The economic, social and cultural aspects of community life determine several aspects of the learner's life. Hence it is very important for the facilitator to have a clear understanding about different aspects of the community in which the NFE Center is functioning. In most of the cases the facilitator will also be a member of the same community and he/she will have some basic knowledge about the community. However it is important that the information is collected and analyzed systematically.

Some of the key information that are crucial to the effective implementation of the NFE are listed below:

- Economic Situation
- Educational situation
- Health situation and Sanitation
- Social structure
- Markets
- Crafts and Skills
- Gender Relations
- Agriculture, Animal Husbandry
- Cultural background and resources
- Infrastructure
- Industry, Skill, Crafts
- Government Institutions and Programs
- State of environment, water, sanitation
- On going development programs

- Main felt needs of the community
- Legal provisions and legal institutions
- Developmental agencies, plans
- Nature of caste, racial discriminations

These details can be collected using different methods. Methods like New Participatory Method, Participatory Rural Mapping, Participatory Resource Mapping etc are some useful methods. Apart from this the facilitator should also try to collect as much information as possible through different kinds of interactions with different sections of people living in the community.

The facilitator should not be satisfied with the data and information collected by him/her in the beginning of the program. The community is an ever-evolving entity. So effort should be made to constantly update ones own understanding about the community.

Details relating to the history and culture of the community will be found to be of great use in the NFE program. Some of the cultural “tools” or resources will become excellent educational/communication media. The NFE facilitator can intelligently and effectively use some of the cultural symbols or occasions (like festivals).

There may be some traditional institutions and systems that can be adapted for improving the effect of NFE and bringing about substantial positive changes. Positive examples from the history of the community, some times, will make the communication more effective.

A proper understanding about the traditional knowledge systems, socio-cultural practices, traditional market arrangements, local heroes and heroines etc will be of great use if used intelligently. This is not to say that every thing traditional must be used and accepted as it is. But in order to bring about positive changes in the lives of the learners and also in the life of the community, it is important to know about the existing culture, value systems and so on.

Various methods that can be employed in knowing more about the community are listed for reference.

- NP method
- Participatory Rural Appraisal
- Participatory Resource Mapping
- Interviews with different sections of population
- Socio-economic surveys
- Village History writing
- Collection of Secondary data
- Examination of old records
- Village visits
- Observation of important events
- Focussed group discussion with community members
- Visit to important village/community institutions an observation

There are many more methods that can be used. The NFE facilitator should make use of different techniques that he/she feels confident about.

However, the most important point is to systematically analyze and understand the crucial aspects of the particular community's life and then to apply it in the NFE situation.

Knowing Development and Institutions

In order to function as a change agent, the NFE Facilitator should have a good understanding about the development plans and practices that have affected the lives of his learners and their community. Some of the development plans may have several possibilities that can be made use of by the learners to improve their living standards while some others may have negative impact on their lives.

The NFE facilitator should be able to guide his learners through discussions and debates about these development processes so that they are able to judge what is good and what is not. The capability of the learners to understand and judge the merits and demerits of various development plans and programs so that they can meaningfully participate in them is key to meaningful participation and change.

It would be of great use if the facilitator can familiarize himself with the details of different programs that are being implemented in and around the community. He/she can then, persuade his learners to discuss about these plans from the perspective of their own living conditions. These discussions may lead to significant learning programs and action plans that can have long term implications to the lives of the learners.

Lot of details regarding various development plans should be available in government documents and announcements. The NFE facilitator can analyze them systematically. If necessary he/she should not hesitate to take the help of experts who are more knowledgeable.

Another important job that the NFE facilitator should do in order to play the role of a change agent is to gather as much information as possible about various institutions and organizations that are functioning in and around the local community. Depending up on the community and where it exists, the nature of organizations and institutions may also vary.

Generally there will be the following types of institutions in and around any community.

- Traditional institutions (places of worship, religious institutions etc.)
- Educational institutions
- Health related institutions
- Local self-government institutions
- Financial Institutions (Banks, traditional banking, co-operatives, Tax agencies))
- Markets
- Community organizations
- Police, legal institutions

- Cultural institutions (libraries, sports clubs etc.)

And so on. The NFE facilitator should not only know about these organizations but also try to develop organic linkages with each of these institutions.

Each of these organizations will have various kinds of impact and influence on the lives of the learners. Hence it is important for the learners to critically understand these institutions and organizations.

Most of these institutions and organizations will be able to provide very useful support to the NFE facilitator and also to the learners. It would be a good idea to put together the details of these institutions and organizations in the form of a poster or handbook for the ready reference of the learners. The facilitator can also arrange learner's visit to these institutions so that they will be able to interact directly with them.

Look for local Innovations and Good Practices

In every community, there will be individuals and groups who will be making interesting new innovations and generating new ideas. There will be innovative farmers who have tried out new methods and practices of agriculture, there may be artisans and craftsmen who are perusing new designs and practices. There can also be dreamers and idea generators among the community members. The NFE facilitator should have an 'eye' to identify such people and make use of their ideas and wisdom for the benefit of the learners and the community.

In short, the NFE facilitator should try to gather and analyze information about all the important agencies that influence and determine the nature and quality of the learner's personal as well as community life. This knowledge will help her/him to become not only an instructor or facilitator but also a 'Change Agent' who can help the learner and her community to think and act differently.

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1, December 2002