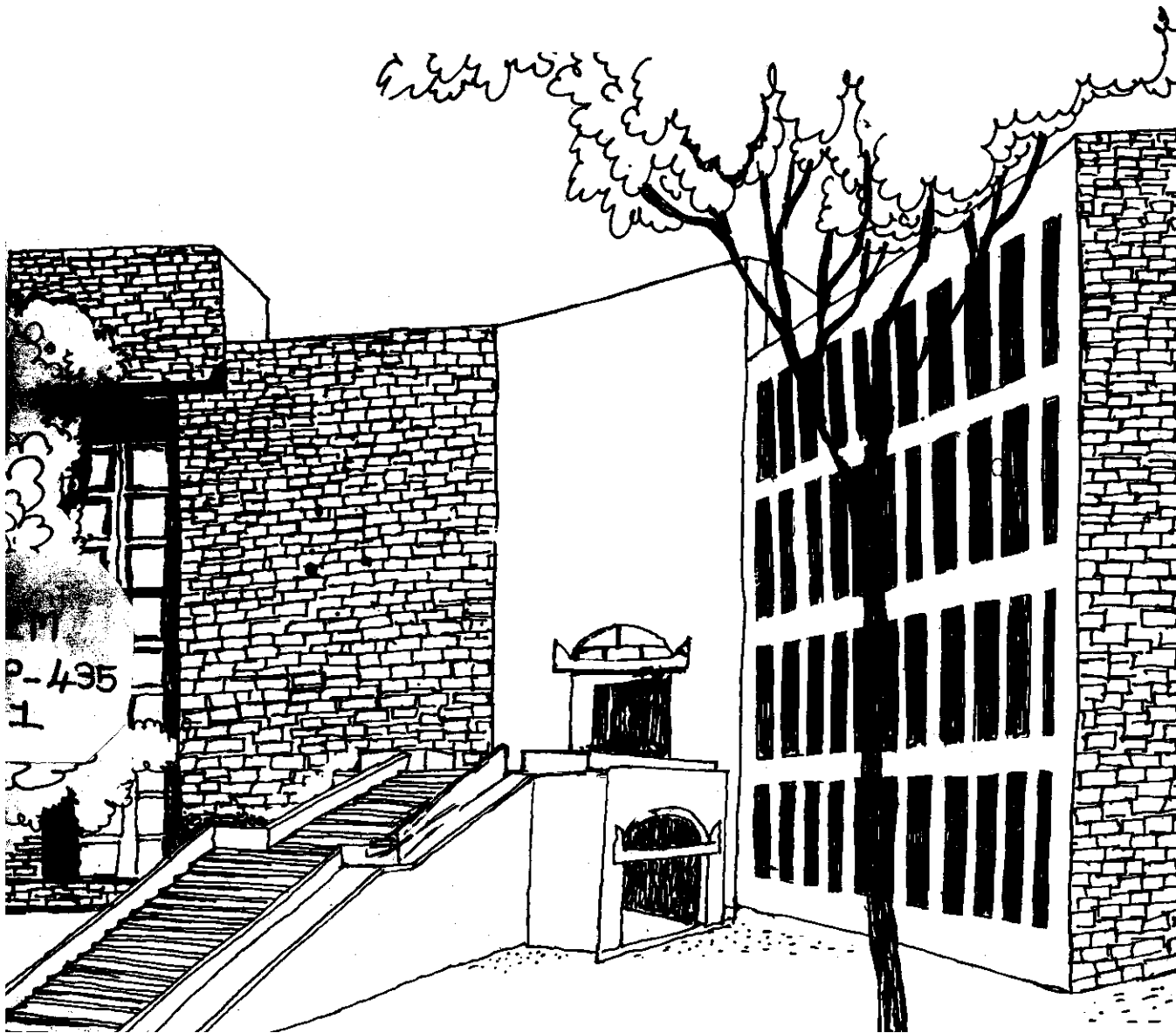# Working Paper

MANAGING GRASS ROOTS ORGANISATIONS:
A STUDY OF VOLUNTARY AGENCIES IN
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

By

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MANAGING GRASS ROOTS ORGANISATIONS :
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INTRODUCTION

Voluntary Agencies (VAs) have earned considerable recognition in the recent past. The Sixth Plan, 1980-85, notes that the "promotion of purely non-governmental organisations which could motivate and mobilise people to participate in developmental tasks" is very important (Planning Commission, 1980). VAs are considered a major institutional means of bringing about this participation. The Plan further looks forward to supplemental action by VAs in promoting activities for self-employment, women's development and in programmes for backward areas.

The VAs themselves have moved from an involvement in relief and welfare work in disaster programmes and in traditional sectors such as health and education to programmes and interventions in the economic and sometimes in the political spheres. These moves were far from smooth shifts in focus. A great deal of controversy has been raised regarding the relevance, role and need of the services of VAs in the context of the nation's social and economic development. The debate about the significance of programmes of reconstruction ("rachnatmak"), development ("vikas") and struggle ("sangarsh") continues to this day (Fernandes, 1980; Lokayan, 1981). In its wake, it has pointed to a range of potential roles and functions for the VAs.

The roles and functions of the VAs have been the subject of many discussions. Several articles have appeared in Voluntary Action, a journal of the Association of Voluntary Agencies in Rural Development (Gupta, 1967; Dasgupta, 1972; Shastri, 1972; Gonsalves, 1975; Shankar, 1981) and elsewhere (IIC, 1964; Kulkarni, 1969; Saint, 1974; Jain, 1978;

Sharma, 1979; Satyasundaram, 1980). By and large, the critical roles proposed by many are that of a:

(1) catalyst, mobilising people, particularly the poor towards developmental activities;

(2) model builder, experimenting and evolving alternatives to the mainstream approach and systems;

(3) representative, of people's aspirations and

(4) watchdog, ensuring the interests of weaker sections or worthwhile causes in society.

In addition, it is suggested that VAs can play a significant role in the development of backward areas (Bhasin, 1978; Natarajan, 1977; Solanki, 1981). Their work, not only in backward areas, but also with socially and economically backward people, may suggest alternative development strategies (Sethi, 1978). These perceptions give us an idea of the part that the VAs can play in the social and economic development of the country. In this paper, however, we propose to retain the focus at the micro level and hence to the VA as an organisation engaged in a specific sector or sphere of development, working in proximity to other private and public systems.

THE FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Over the years, interesting and innovative models have been demonstrated by VAs at the micro level. Just to cite a few examples: The Rural Health Project, Jamkhed; Seva Mandir, Udaipur; Kishore Bharati, Hoshangabad and The Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia have

pointed to the possiblities in health and education. The Self Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad, has earned recognition for its pioneering work with women labourers as also the Bhoomi Sena in Thane for its work with the tribals. The Chipko movement has demonstrated the effect of community mobilisation for an ecological cause in the Himalayan foothills. These experiences have led to considerable interest in the way these non-governmental agencies function so that their insight might help in better design and implementation of developmental programmes. At the same time, there has been a growing awareness of the limitations of the large public systems and their strategies and structures.

It was felt in this context that it would be useful to review some of the managerial choices and responses made by VAs engaged in development programmes. The study discussed in this paper is, therefore, a preliminary attempt to understand some of the critical or strategic choices made by voluntary agencies.

It is pointed out by critics that the micro projects of VAs thrive because of:

(1) The Halo : a Great Cause that binds its personnel together,

(2) The Hero : charismatic leadership and

(3) Funds : disproportionate input of resources due to easy access to donors.

These are not easily replicable elements and hence the VAs' innovations remain "backyard glories" with little hope of traversing the length and breadth of the country. It is not our attempt to support or negate

these views. We wish, however, to make two points in this context.
Firstly, notwithstanding the hero-and-halo image of the VAs, wherever
its programme demonstrates an innovative alternative, it may present
the possibility and constraints of an alternative mode of development.
For instance, the potentialities of the humble and the "lowly" (such
as village workers) and of a demystified technology are often brought
out in such efforts. (Sethi, 1978). Secondly, beyond the heroes and
halos, it does appear, in the models and experiences cited earlier,
that there are specific strategies one can learn from. The management
strategies often developed by intuitive grass roots efforts of some of
the VAs, with their feet firmly on the ground, might offer lessons on
what is desirable in development programmes. Interested others in
public and private agencies may glean from these efforts what is nece-
ssary and feasible for their setting. At the same time, observing the
VAs' responses could enhance our own understanding of the dilemmas they
face.

The response of organisations to demands from their environment
could result in critical choices of their goals and consequently in
services offered, population served, type of technology and organisa-
tional forms used. These choices involve decisions with regard to
(1) The overall purpose or goals of the agency, (2) The section of
the community that the VA is to work with, commonly called the benefi-
ciary or target group, (3) The nature of services to be initiated or
developed for and with the group(s), (4) The technology to be utilised
and (5) The VAs' organisational means.

Determining the strategic choices or the process of strategy formu-

lation, enables the organisation to relate itself to the environment. Every organisation must draw its boundaries in order to distinguish itself from its external environment (Thompson, 1967, p. 132). Analysing the latter and evolving appropriate strategies or ways of influencing and responding to it then become important functions of management (Roeber, 1973; Croon, 1974). Organisations may also make a number of operational responses in line with their critical or strategic thrusts. Setting up new systems and methods of work are examples. It is the specific strategic responses made by the VAs in terms of the aspects outlined above that are the concern of this paper.

THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY

Voluntary action can be observed in a wide variety of situations. At a local, neighbourhood level, the volunteers may offer services as individuals or groups in response to people's needs in an informal manner. At a larger regional or national level, a group of volunteers may band together around a cause such as protection of the environment or civil liberties. Traditionally, voluntary action has been associated with altruistic efforts of social help. There may be instances of benefits to the volunteers themselves in terms of prestige, power, status or the fulfilment of the need to serve others. Thus, psychological, not material gain may be the "profit" to the volunteer (Blau, 1962; Perrow, 1970a). The degree of altruism may have to be then qualified. However, action with the explicit primary motive of gaining personal material gain (like that of a shareholder) is not considered voluntary.

At some point of time, a need to organise independent individual or small group efforts into a coordinated whole may be felt. This need

may arise due to a desire for expansion, for larger impact, for better management or related reasons. A formal vehicle to offer a focus or forum for diverse and multiple voluntary initiatives may then be created. A voluntary agency is such a forum for pooling together a variety of individual efforts (Subramanian, 1981). As the agency grows, however, there may be individuals who work for it for a salary, with commitment not being an overriding concern. The label of "volunteers" may then be affixed only on the founder(s) and the "original" team of people. In practice, therefore, the degree of voluntariness may have to be discerned from an analysis of the functioning of the agency.

SELECTION OF VAs

There is a bewildering variety of VAs. They range from informal neighbourhood groups to large formal organisations, and from those that offer relief and welfare services to others that mobilise communities for social or political action. Given this variety, it is difficult to select some agencies for study on the basis of any criterion without facing a problem of an unmanageable sample size. Ensuring a representative sample would mean a staggering number of cases.

A second difficulty relates to the researcher's access to the VAs. It is not easy for an "outsider" researcher to gain access to agencies which are often manned by people clustered around certain values and causes, unless a degree of personal rapport is built up between the researcher and the leadership of the agency.

Given these difficulties, it was finally decided to purposively select three agencies, which may not "cover" all types of VAs, but

would (1) represent different sponsors and groups served, (2) willingly
discuss and ensure access to their experiences of management. Since
it was not the intention to undertake a comprehensive analysis of all
possible responses nor to attempt a conclusive investigation, it was
felt that variety in terms of sponsors, service or beneficiaries and
openness to a study were realistic working criteria of selection.

The three agencies selected have the features shown in Table 1.
A brief description of each of the agencies is presented in Appendix 1.

Table 1

Features of Voluntary Agencies Studied

Name & years of active presence (approximately)	Location	Sponsor	Service	Beneficiary
Comprehensive Rural Health Project (RHP) (10 years)	Rural Maharashtra	A protestant mission	Health; Animal Husbandry; Non-Formal Education	General Community in two talukas
Jeeva Sevalaya (JS) (10 years)	Rural Tamil Nadu	A congregation of catholic sisters	Project involving income generation	Poor Women of the outskirts of a town
Gram Seva Kendra (GSK) (30 years)	Rural Gujarat	A Taluka level Gandhian Institution	Formal and Non-formal Education; Consultancy for Cooperative Development	Children and the weaker sections in the taluka

The three agencies RHP, JS and GSK are located in backward areas
and are sponsored by three active participants in the social development

efforts of the country. As can be seen, their services vary and they work with different beneficiary groups. They have done pioneering work in their chosen area and services. Their performance has been creditable and like all development efforts, they have had their success and failures. It would certainly have been useful to include other kinds of VAs, such as those primarily involved in mobilising people for social or political purposes and those initiated without external intervenors. However, due to the constraints mentioned earlier and the nature of the study, one had to forego the richness of variety for the insights of a few. Accordingly, the ideas presented here may be seen in relation to the fact that the VAs studied were by and large involved in rendering social and economic services.

The researcher in the voluntary sphere of activity is also faced with an operational problem. Unlike the organised sector of industry and commerce, records and reports are not easily available in printed form, both due to a scarcity of manpower to maintain records and publish a number of reports and also a general inclination towards informal rather than formal systems of information.* Consequently, intensive interviewing and extensive file searching are required to locate and piece together basic data. Comparable data over time or over activities may be hard to come by. There are bound to be data gaps. Beyond these burdens to the researcher used to neatly ordered sets of facts and figures, the exercise of "data search" is a rewarding one. The available records and discussions will often present a vivid picture of the organisation, perhaps not quite prone to instant analysis, but rich in insight:

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* In a jocular vein, people in VAs talk about projects with excellent modern systems and neat reports but without committed workers or a receptive community.

DISCUSSION : SOME POINTERS FOR DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

The strategic responses of the VAs studied present some useful lessons for the management of development programmes. At the same time, they also offer a view of the contexts in which the VAs make such responses.

The strengths and constraints of VAs, in general, are already well known and need not be elaborated here. The commitment of personnel, their capacity for "frontier work", the problem of second line leadership and other features such as these have by now been recognised. The three VAs under review did exhibit these features. However, — as already mentioned in the case of micro projects in general — there appear to be useful lessons to be learnt from the kind of critical choices the VAs have made in relation to their goals, services, beneficiary groups, technology and organisation, given their strengths and constraints. The following is a discussion of such choices. .

The Overall Purpose or Goals

The overall purpose or goal sets the pace, as it were, for any organisation. This often means a choice of what role it will play in its sphere of work. In VAs, as in other organisations, the purpose or goal is not easy to identify, since it may not be very explicit and may have to be derived from action (Perrow, 1970b; McKee, 1974).

The primary goal seems to be derived from the interaction of the philosophy and interests of the sponsoring agency, the capabilities of the VA leadership and the needs of the people or area to be served.

Accordingly, RHP decided upon improved health status of a taluka at the beginning. JS wished to improve the economic standards of women in the neighbourhood village. GSK, as a result of its Gandhian origins, opted for a mix of social, economic and political goals by way of an improvement in educational and economic status, increase in agricultural production and a higher level of local participation in decision making. The sponsoring agency seems to have a key role in the choice of goals since GSK derived its wider set of goals from its sponsor, who in turn, would have been influenced by the philosophy and visions of Gandhian institutions. JS's new goal of enhancing women's status in society is also partly an offshoot of the sponsor's re-examination of its role in development.

The chosen goal acts as a spur to determining services and activities. The latter may be changed over time to produce the most effective combination, as discussed in the next section. Fig. 1 graphically presents the iterative process.
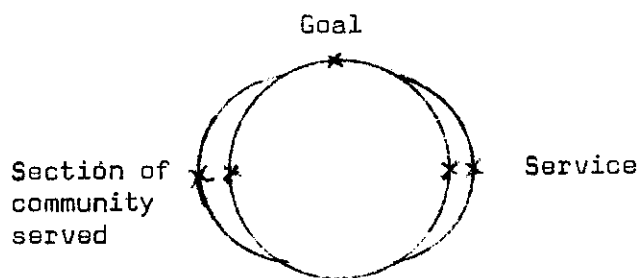
Goal

Section of community served

Service

Fig. 1

While the goal thus sets the pace, as it were, an interesting feature of the VAs seems to be the shift in the goal itself at stages in its history. After five years of work in health, RHP implicitly

took on the goal of initially understanding and later enhancing women's role and status in society. The experience with women village health workers had demonstrated the potential strengths and the enormous disadvantage of women in a backward economy. RHP felt moved to contribute to the solution of the problem; as a consequence, half the time of the sessions on health training with the health workers was spent on discussing family and village related problems of the women. Mahila mandals and literacy classes also followed. JS, after establishing the income generating capacity of the fibre craft work was seriously debating whether its goal of improving the economic status of the women it was associated with, was not "too narrow". There was a feeling that voluntary agencies such as JS should play a more dynamic role in development and assume a larger goal of social change. Thus, enhancing people's capabilities to deal with oppressive structures in society, was being spoken of as a goal to be pursued.

These shifts in the goal or purpose implies a "paradigm shift". It may also be seen as a process by which, in a development agency, an ultimate goal assumed at a point in time during a phase of the agency's evolution, becomes an intermediate goal at another point during another phase. Fig. 2 attempts to portray this shift along the dimensions of development which include a concrete and tangible improvement of living standards, equity in distribution of benifits of economic growth and an enhancement in power and capabilities of people in dealing with their environment.

Dimensions of Development

Goal
× Service

Bene-
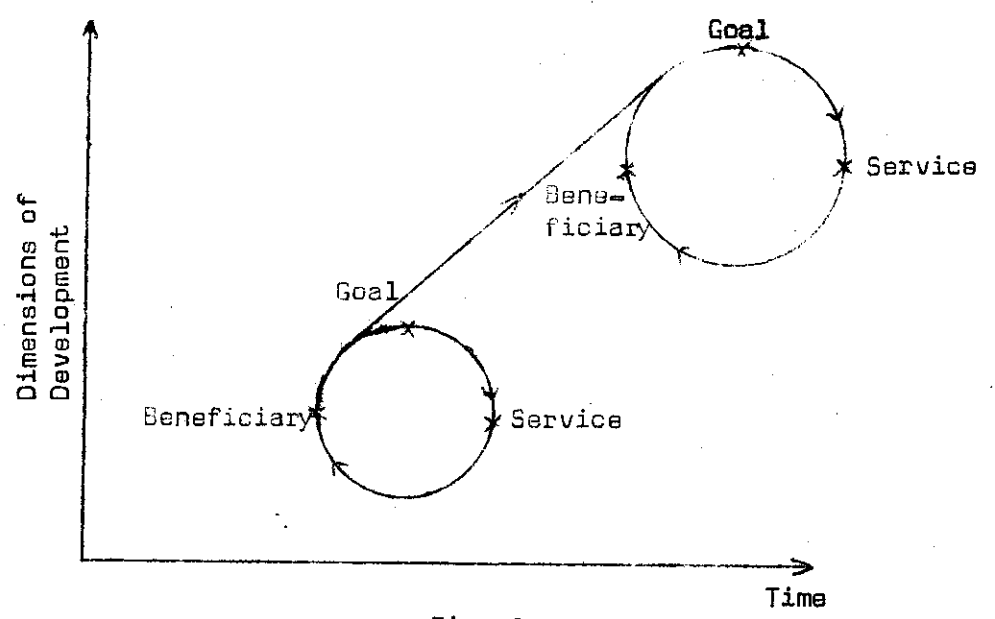ficiary

Goal

Beneficiary × Service

Time

Fig. 2

The dimensional shift offers options for actions in relation to the new goal. The VA, in response, may: (1) add a new goal to its present set (2) work with others who can contribute to the new goal (3) give up present goal and services in order to pursue the new one (4) continue with the old. While it is not possible to judge the relative effectiveness of each of the options, the VAs studied either added on to the present set of goals or looked to others for supplementing their own effort.

Consideration of the new goal may pose some challenges to the VAs. In the case of JS, for instance, groups within the sponsoring agency seemed to support all of the four options. This meant a great deal of joint study and reflection for JS's leadership and the various groups within the sponsoring agency. Managing the tension among the varying options as reflected by the groups may thus be an important goal-related function of the VA's leadership. While it may be too early to review the impact, RHP seems to have decided to continue with its health related

goal as the dominant focus and use its health work as a basis for triggering off other interventions. It may be interesting to understand, through such effort, how health can be a "lever" for creating alternatives in development (Banerjee, 1978) and how there may be limitations of being a "model" in the given social structure with the attendant constraints in adopting goals of social change (Qadeer, 1980).

Choice of Service and Community Groups

A philosophy of Gandhian or Christian ideals inspired each of the VAs and fuelled its teams for action. Derived from this philosophy was the cause of serving backward areas and the weaker sections of society. Christ's message that he who served the last man served Him and Gandhi's emphasis on daridranarayan enabled the agencies to generally opt for serving the weaker sections.

It is, however, apparent that a concrete analysis in the context of a particular area and community served by the agency is necessary if the philosophy and cause are to be anchored in the social reality. Such an analysis could delineate specific weaker sections in a given area. For instance, RHP's specification of the groups in the community enabled special attention to be given to activities involving women and children, the dryland farmers and buffalo owners. The GSK experience brings this out vividly. Although it was generally committed to serving the poor and the weaker sections, it found a specific analysis of various segments of the community in the given socio-economic situation revealing. In the 1950s, when one of the national objectives was to spur agricultural production, all sections of the farming community

needed help with agricultural inputs to improve output and productivity.
GSK responded with appropriate action by forming farmers' organisations.
In the late 1960s, when it found that the farmers once assisted were no
longer the "weaker sections", and were, in fact, busy organising a power-
ful political base for themselves, GSK wanted to shift its focus to
specific backward groups in the area - landless labour, marginal farmers
and other occupational groups. JS identified the women of a neighbour-
ing backward village as the group it wanted to work with. The lesson
seems to be;

(1)   Recognition of the heterogeneity of the community is useful. The
      term "community" is an abstraction and it is necessary to understand
      the groups and sections within a given community and their relation-
      ships.

(2)   A concrete analysis of groups within the community aids the objective
      of working with and benefitting intended groups rather than other
      sections.

(3)   This analysis needs to be done periodically since structural shifts
      may render the once weak as the present well-off.

      A major response made by all the three agencies is the <u>provision</u>
<u>of new services</u>. The RHP ensured the provision of water and feeding
services to the Jamkhed community at the time of drought although it
did not intend to do so in the beginning. Later, animal husbandry and
nonformal education were significant new services. JS introduced
literacy classes for the women workers and undertook training programmes
GSK became involved in income generation services for neglected occupa-
tional groups.

Clarity regarding the population to be served seems to aid in determining the provision of any new service. RHP responded to a shift in the ecology of the area of its operation. It had decided to serve the taluka of Jamkhed and had hence made moves in line with the changes in the taluka's ecology. Thus, when water and food famine struck the area, RHP responded appropriately, demonstrating its empathy for the suffering of the people of the taluka. Similarly, when the dialogue between the village health worker and the village women was bearing fruit and a rapport was established, RHP decided to participate in the National Adult Education Programme based on its relations with the women. So also did it initiate animal husbandry services, mostly of an educational and linkage providing nature, in order to respond to the needs of buffalo owners. JS realised that the women it was working with were school drop-outs. There were many needs in the course of their work and daily life for reading and writing. Literacy classes were, therefore, introduced in the daily schedule of the women at the JS centre, where they assembled for fibrecraft training and production. GSK found that the two groups - riverbed vegetable growers (vaghris) and sheep breeders (rabari-bharwars) - were faced with the problem of an unstable economy of production of vegetables and wool and hence needed to strengthen their occupational base and stabilise it. The GSK's active involvement in the economic activity and formation of cooperatives with regard to these groups followed. There is thus a process by which the development agency may:

(1) delineate the beneficiary group to be served

(2) analyse specific needs and attributes of the beneficiary group and

(3) respond with appropriate services.

The VAs studied demonstrate that a set of integrated inputs may be necessary for a particular service, given the beneficiary group's needs and attributes. JS worked hard for the provision of marketing linkages, without which the fibrecraft activity could not have been sustained. RHP offered education, information and facilities for health care (simple drugs in the village through the village health workers' kits and curative facilities at the base hospital). Similarly, it provided a forum for the education, training and inputs for animal and farm care. Within a year of its new activity, GSK faced the challenge of attending to all the necessary linkages for the cooperatives it had helped to organise.

The experience of the VAs also suggests that it might be necessary to go in for a diversity of sub-services within the same service (or a diversity of services) so that sometimes a "demand deficient" but desir- able sub-service (or service) may be coupled with a "demand surplus" one. Thus, RHP displayed its competence in curative care and provided facilities for it, while using this entry into the community to carry out preventive efforts such as health education. Demand for the latter sub-service, viz. preventive care, within the overall health care service, would be rather limited considering the community's low prio- rity for services the benefits of which were not of immediate, short term reckoning. In a similar fashion, organising khadi and cooperative activities in the villages enabled GSK to gain entry in order to mobilise demand for its educational service, in particular, from the women.

There appear to be some critical problems in the provision of services or sub-services. The first relates to the specification of needs of the intended beneficiary groups. The danger here is that the perception may be based on the agency's assumptions and anxieties rather than on the groups' own articulated desires. Literacy, in many instances of nonformal education, has been an agency objective rather than the peoples'. In the case of JS, the literacy service did not meet with success for quite some time. So JS may, after all, have started with its own assumptions about the women's needs **for literacy or about the teaching methodology to be used.** Similarly, despite its credibility, RHP's efforts at sanitation also did not succeed perhaps due to the greater anxiety of the agency rather than that of the people to adopt good public sanitation measures.

It might, however, be argued that (1) all needs are not necessarily articulated by the people and hence have to be "sensed"; the talk of "felt needs" may be, therefore, considered too textbookish and romantic and (2) certain practices, such as the care of children, are desirable and essential for the well being of the family and hence it may be felt that the community must be helped to "feel" the need. Even if one accepted this argument and the VAs take on additional services, there can can arise the second problem of managing new services along with the old. There seems to be a distinct possibility that the dominant service of the agency overwhelms the other services. That is, given the managerial resources of a voluntary agency, it may be difficult to diversify into other services and sustain them over a period of time. In the case of JS, this appears to be the major reason for the literacy

service as it was designed not "taking off" despite two attempts. The organiser of JS was preoccupied with the income generating economic service. This involved skill training, organisation of production and a great deal of efforts in marketing. Human resources to carry out these activities were considerably limited and were inadequate even for the economic enterprise. Thus alternative strategies to dovetail literacy and numeracy education into the economic activity itself could not be considered carefully. Responses, by way of differing organisational forms, may partially remedy the situation and will be examined in the subsequent sections.

Choice of Technology

Technology presents a varying picture among the VAs. RHP, in its health work, by and large, used the allopathic system of medicine perhaps due to the training of the doctors. Significantly in its communication and educational efforts, RHP relied largely on nonformal methods and processes in keeping with the rural milieu it was dealing with. GSK adopted a combination of formal, class room, academic sessions, and nonformal, skill based, "action" components in the school. With regard to its economic projects, in particular the cooperatives, it was yet to consider the question of a new or appropriate technology. JS, too, resorted to available techniques of carding and weaving in its fibre work. The primary objectives of the VAs studied seem to have offered considerable opportunity for innovations in the software or work technology of extension of their service into the community. The absence of major breakthroughs in hardware such as equipment, machinery and related techniques is a reflection of the absence of a contextual need

for such innovations and of the agency's focus. However, it may be speculated that where economic activities are involved, as in the case of JS and GSK, the growth in size and volume of activity will demand attention to productivity and hence also to technology.

Individual VAs, with their limited resources, may find it difficult to develop new "hardware technologies" on their own and perhaps external agencies may assist with problem-oriented research and development. The VAs can, however, provide good testing grounds, with their grassroots involvement and special skills in communication.

The unique software expertise may be particularly helpful for programme managers of public systems. Over the years, the limitations of the administrative structure of the development bureaucracy, in terms of the organising and communicating tasks related to the communities they work with and programme beneficiaries are becoming apparent. It may then be useful to pursue collaborative arrangements with VAs, so that a mutuality in developing and utilising a set of appropriate technologies may be created.

Organising for Services

Although there could be several useful aspects to this factor, in this section, we wish to highlight one, which is the formation and forging of linkages with the beneficiaries, local communities and other development agencies. This emerges as the single, most significant feature in the VAs observed. The actions of the VAs suggest some lessons in choosing appropriate means of structuring tasks.

Sharing of services and functions

As mentioned earlier, voluntary agencies may be faced with limited resources of trained manpower. In which case, undertaking a diversity of services and even functions, however, needed or desirable they are, may place considerable demands on the agencies. And yet, if the services and functions are inevitable and imperative, how are they to be organised?

A significant lesson from the cases appears to be that due caution is necessary before adding a new service or function to the existing set of services and functions in the agency. The caution is intended to prevent organisational overload. RHP realised that water and food were scarce in the drought hit taluka. Accordingly, it ensured that services to meet these needs were offered to the villages. The service were, however, provided by other voluntary agencies, with RHP participating actively and contributing its manpower. This participation helped RHP develop sound relations with the villagers. This was a good basis for its long term health work after the relief operations. Similarly, when undertaking animal health care work, RHP decided to act as a catalyst and provided a forum for the people, concerned Government agencies and leading dairy cooperative experts to come together. The point is that there was formal organisational differentiation with regard to the new service, and yet, at the same time, there was a concerted effort at integration of the new service with the long term programme of the agency. The careful avoidance of overload is also evident in the case of GSK. In assisting the vegetable growers and sheep breeders, GSK facilitated the formation of the groups' own

cooperatives - organisations formally distinct from GSK and yet depen-
dent on it for regular counsel.[1] The informal relations provided an
opportunity for the students and teachers of GSK's school to maintain
links with the community around.. There is, in this too, the illustration
of the principle of differentiating at the level of the formal organi-
sation and informally integrating at the level of goals of the main
agency.

The experiences also show that there are other ways of reducing
overload. Some functions of the voluntary agency may well be shared
by beneficiary or community organisations. The Young Farmers' Club in
Jamkhed carried out the task of assisting the village health workers in
mobilising the children for the nutrition programme. In the absence of
design specialists, the women beneficiaries of JS contributed actively
to the designing of fibre products.

In some cases, the sharing of functions was desirable not only
from the view point of the VAs' difficulties in (1) handling an array
of functions and services and (2) gaining access to specialists, but
also from that of programme effectiveness. That is, the function may
be performed better by a community agent rather than the agency perso-
nnel. In the RHP example, the village health worker turned out to be
a far more effective communicator with and influencer of the villagers
than the city trained nurses. Such a confluence of trained manpower
and local-people-with-potential not only reduces organisational over-
load of functions but also enhances the effectiveness of the performance

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1 The sanchalaka of GSK likens himself to a "marriage arranger" whose
  only purpose is to bring the concerned parties together.

of certain functions. Action along these lines seems to require a critical analysis of services and functions and the decision as to the agency best suited for carrying them out. The critical question, of course, being: Need we do this?

The formation of lateral linkages with grass roots organisations appears to be a necessary and useful feature of structuring the tasks of the VA as it grows in size, territorial spread or assumes new services and functions. Such formation seems to be aided by a meaningful reciprocal relationship between the two organisations. A two-way flow of benefits may be involved. The Young Farmers' Club in Jamkhed served as a forum for RHP to propagate better farming practices and provide support for the village health workers. Reciprocally, the YFC could make decisions related to food-for-work projects and acquisition of new equipment or agricultural knowledge. In Khadasali, GSK's school obtained access to the poorer sections as part of its community education for students and teachers. In turn, the various groups of the poor obtained a forum and a channel of organising themselves and dealing with external institutions. JS's activity of fibrecraft production and marketing on a viable commercial scale was still in its early years and like RHP and GSK, JS too would probably resort to similar linkages at a later stage.

The GSK experience points to the significance of inter-organisational linkages among like-minded VAs. The association of GSK with its sponsoring agency, Kundla Gram Seva Mandal, and of its members with several similar organisations of Gandhian persuasion strengthened its own identity and base. Functionally, there was considerable direct support

among these organisations. GSK's school derived the benefit of commi-
tted teachers from a like minded Gandhian teacher training organisation
in Saurashtra. This saved GSK the awesome burden of retraining and
reorientation of teachers trained elsewhere. GSK, in turn, was assist-
ing others in strengthening their khadi programmes. Institutionally,
the network ensured a degree of security and identity for the various
organisations involved and created a sense of self reliance. There was
thus a partner rather than a recipient image of self vis-a-vis the
government, although funds were taken for specific purposes such as the
teachers' salaries in the GSK school.

Relations with a powerful proximate system

There is the question as to how a powerful proximate system, such
as the Government, would continue to view an equally powerful, self
reliant partner, with strong inter-organisational linkages. Elsewhere,
the apprehension that such a network may grow in political strength
has been viewed with alarm and unfavourable action on the part of the
dominant system. Thus, close collaboration for mutual support on the
part of a group of VAs may be progressively perceived as more than a
rational move for inter-organisational, task related support. Political
motives are likely to be imputed. Appropriate reading of the environment
for an adequate collective response is, therefore, very important for
the VA as the network's links grow wider and stronger.

In two of the three agencies studied, establishing a strong identity
for themselves precedes their efforts at association and forging of close
ties with their proximate system of government or public bodies. It was

only in the 1980s that the RHP entered into a major collaborative venture with the state government to train the district level personnel at Ahmednagar, where Jamkhed was located. This was nearly ten years after the RHP started its work and gained considerable national and international recognition. Similarly, JS established its name firmly in the field of fibrecrafts and only then undertook a collaborative project with the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. In both the cases, there were some activities which brought the VA in contact with the external public agencies. However, the VAs made moves for significant collaborative ventures only after gaining in expertise and strengths in their chosen sector of operation so that it would be easier for them to function as partners rather than as "beneficiaries" with powerful agencies such as the Government. Fear of loss of identity and of cooptation, a distaste for bureaucracy and the availability of alternative sources of funding were the main reasons for the "wait and act" strategy. It must be noted that there is room for apprehensions on the part of the VAs if one considers the experience of RHP with the National Adult Education Programme. In March 1981, despite the reputation and strengths, RHP was still owed Rs. 25,000/- while there was a great deal of uncertainty about the continuation of the programme. In this light, the government's moves for collaboration with VAs must consider the potential barriers between the two. Such collaboration cannot be "summoned" by the bureaucracy. Nor does desiring it likely to produce results. A process of understanding of one another's strengths and weaknesses may have to be initially set in motion.

The Sharing of Innovation

It appears that plans must be made for extending any innovation pioneered by the VA, or for which it becomes known. The innovation may be in terms of a concept, strategy or method and the first few years of a VA's activities are likely to generate considerable experience to demonstrate the practicability or otherwise of a new intervention through the agency's successes and failures. The VA's desires to avoid publicity might preclude the possibility of a large scale exposure. However, word-of-mouth dissemination seems to attract interested practitioners, resear-chers and later, policy makers, to the VA. Again, given the usually slender organisational and managerial resources of the VA, it seems necessary to evolve a means of handling this "sharing" effort, especially if this is not to disturb the ongoing activities of its own programme. Organisationally this could mean the emergence of new functions of train-ing, research and sometimes consulting.

A mix of strategic responses seems possible in the light of the cases analysed:

(1) The VA may organise an educational programme in collaboration with an agency specialising in the concerned sector or in education. The VA may not wish to take upon itself the training and an organi-zed research function and may invite others with more time or expertise to do so. Given the overwhelming demands of development programmes, VAs are likely to be preoccupied with managing the programme. Relevant action research necessary for better manage-ment of the programme is likely to be carried out informally and

as part of the regular work. Consequently, there is likely to be neither time nor an orientation to research of a long -term nature or studies that have, as their objective, the training of other external programme personnel. RHP, realising the demands of education and research in the mid 1970s, tried to find a full time analyst for studies. · Later, it entered into an arrangement with the Voluntary Health Association of India, a national federation of voluntary health agencies, and with other community development educators, whereby the latter would provide supportive training and research inputs. JS, too, collaborated with the Khadi and Village Industries Commission for national training programmes in fibrecraft.

(2) The VA's own staff act as organisers/trainers elsewhere. The VA may lend or send its own managers, supervisors or experienced workers to other agencies in order to impart a skill or a method. RHP, JS and GSK have often shared their senior personnel for this purpose. An obstacle to lending the services of the key programme managers is that a second line leadership may not be in place. RHP had tried very hard to get competent doctors to assist the co-directors, Dr. and Mrs. Arole. In JS, the organiser, Sister Lilly's absence would be difficult to cope with. The sanchalaka's presence in GSK ensured sustained action with regard to the cooperatives and his long term absence could affect the programme, although to a rela- tively smaller extent due to the team of teachers in the school.

What is important is that it is necessary to explicitly recognise
and sharing
that expectations for training/would arise at a particular phase of the VA's growth. Consequently, an educational service or function will

become necessary. The VA's response then will have to consider;

(i)   the management of its ongoing programme

(ii)   its strengths as related to training, research and consulting and

(iii)   the availability of a supportive external specialist agency.

Structure and Process

It has been mentioned that the formation of linkages appears to be
oft
the most significant aspect of the organising process in the VAs. A
word about the organisational structure is in order. Given their size
and scale of operation, the formal structure of the VAs' organisation
does not seem to be of general strategic importance. The personnel play
multiple roles and functions, creating a climate for a "matrix" type of
organisation. However, both in the case of GSK and RHP, it is the
organisational processes of joint planning, monitoring and team function-
ing and the facilitation of such processes that is noteworthy. Formula-
ting specific projects with objectives, regular and periodic meetings
to discuss problems and to review programme performance, appropriate
training and follow up with on-site assistance for the agency personnel -
these seem to be critical processes in planning and implementation.
While these are often generated by the leadership of the VAs, other
agencies especially the public agencies, will have to probably look for
means of formally structuring these processes if they are not to rely
on personalised leadership styles. An analysis of the variety of these
organisational processes would be a useful future research effort.

A necessary caution seems to be that formal structure or form may
not generate the kinds of processes or functions that it is supposed to.

This, of course, is well established in organisation theory (form follows function, not the other way around); but this seems to be a principle difficult to observe. GSK, for instance, felt that it could have waited for some time before the formal registration of the vegetable growers', sheep breeders' and landless labourers' organisations as cooperatives. Cooperation as a process for commercial production and marketing is often not a starting point in organisation building but has to evolve over time. Moreover, formal registration as a cooperative meant that many alternative channels of finance and other assistance were excluded. In other words, the formal form chosen imposed constraints at a time when options were necessary. Similarly, the desire for community participation at the policy level propelled JS to form a separate registered society and include citizens from the nearby town on its board. However, it was not clear whether this token formal presence actually generated the desired participation. On the other hand, RHP's restructuring was in line with its own needs emerging from its operations. It reconstituted its governing body to include key resource people during its second phase and restructured its Registered Society to incorporate larger objectives of extension of the Jamkhed experience seven years after inception when new services and functions had emerged. It appears that an analysis of emergent functions, existing strengths, linkages required and appropriateness of the time or period when the change is sought, is necessary before structures are fashioned; if these structures are to play a necessary supportive role in the VAs' programmes.

CONCLUSION

Voluntary agencies have played many roles in the developmental sectors of the country. These roles have ranged from that of a provider of relief during crises to that of a social activist and supporter of long term developmental programmes. Over the years these agencies have demonstrated that they have much to teach by way of critical choices to be made in development programmes. Such choices may relate to agency goals, services to be offered to the community, the sections of the community to be served and the technology and organisation involved. This paper makes a preliminary attempt to understand some of the significant responses of VAs, related to these strategic choices.

Three voluntary agencies located in rural areas were purposively selected for case studies. Their dominant services were health, education and income generation respectively. With regard to goals, the sources of influence are cited. Change of goals and its implications are discussed. In relation to the choice of service and the section of the community served, the agencies' experience suggests that specificity of the beneficiary group enables the creation of appropriate services. Analysis of the agencies' concrete socio-economic setting is useful for such specificity. While new services seem necessary and are offered, careful planning of diversification appears to be essential. As regards technology, the agencies' demonstrate their capabilities in the software aspects of communication and educational processes, but may require assistance with the hardware when the situation demands it. In organising for service, the agencies studied present evidence of avoiding

organisational overload through linkages with public and private agencies, and with beneficiary and other grass-roots organisations. Some indications of the need to plan for the sharing of innovations, of the apprehensions of the voluntary agencies vis-a-vis the larger proximate systems and of the significance of organisational processes are also discussed.

The experiences may offer some pointers for other development agencies, for voluntary agencies themselves and researchers so that deeper reflection and more relevant action may ensure.

THE THREE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

(Summary description of VAs selected for the study)

1. The Rural Health Project

RHP started its activities in a drought hit part of Maharashtra in 1970. Sponsored by a christian protestant mission, its hope was to serve the rural area with a comprehensive, as against only curative health service. Its programme included simple primary care at the village level, care of pregnant mothers and pre-school children, family planning, control of chronic illnesses such as TB and Leprosy, emergency-cum-follow up care and care of the eyes. Aroles, the doctor couple leading the project team initially involved themselves and the RHP in health, water and food relief service during a famine and dry farming assistance. Later, RHP attempted animal care services and participated in the National Adult Education Programme. An outstanding feature of its work was the reliance on simple, village women who were trained by RHP in basic health care. They were available in the village and formed the foundation of the RHP's health and development efforts. Through them, women's groups were organised. Similarly, the young farmers' clubs provided a forum for activities related to the land and a means of support for other village work.

After five years of service in Jamkhed Taluka, RHP replicated its efforts in a neighbouring taluka. Meanwhile, the village health workers had earned national and international recognition, since this seemed to be an antidote to the ills of the generally bureau-

cratic health service systems, alineated from the communities they served.

Starting with a group of 20 personnel in 1970, RHP's staff strength grew to 40 in 1980 including 6 doctors, 3 nurses and 4 social workers. There were also the 62 village health workers. Within five years, RHP brought down the infant mortality rate in its area of operations from 97 per 1000 live births to 39. The birth rate was reduced from 40 to 23 per 1000. It was able to give immunisation coverage to 84% of required cases in 1976 as against less than 1% in 1971. The Young Farmers' Clubs, spurred on by RHP, had constructed 100 check dams, levelled and cultivated 2000 acres of land, constructed and maintained 104 tube wells and sunk 80 community wells for irrigation. In 1976, 10000 trees were planted and watered throughout the summer. Standing out in the list of achievements was, of course, the development of the women health workers, who seemed to reveal unexpected depths of their potentialities.

In 1980, 60% of RHP's budget of over Rs. 13 lakhs was met by its own revenues from patient fees. A large portion of the remaining 40% was from donor agencies in India and abroad.

2. Jeeva Sevalaya

JS's activities started in an orphanage located in a very backward, chronically drought affected part of Tamil Nadu in the 1960s. Sponsored by a Catholic congregation of sisters, the organiser, Sister Lilly, who took over the Centre in the 1970s, wished to build up a self-sustaining income generating service for the poorest women

of the villages around. Her focus was on harijan school dropouts.
Accordingly, JS gradually expanded its work beyond the orphanage to
needy women and by 1980, 100 such women were participants in JS's
fibrecraft training centre. Training, production and marketing were
the comprehensive set of functions carried out by JS as a part of
its economic service. The utility and fancy fibre products made
were marketed through established channels in the cities. The women
earned a steady Rs. 3 to 4 per day.

Some of the more experienced women from JS were sent to other
places in the state to help with similar local efforts. Later, a
national village industries' agency and JS initiated collorative
moves for national training programmes in village industry.

From time to time, JS attempted to incorporate aspects of adult
education, other than functional skill, such as literacy education
and developing social awareness. The sponsoring agency of the
sisters had meanwhile adopted a philosophy that stressed development
and social awareness and not only short term relief in all of their
work.

JS is staffed by its organiser, a supervisor and a couple of
office staff.

3. Gram Seva Kendra

One might say that the GSK was as old as independence.
Initiated by an associate of Mohandas Gandhi in a remote part of
Saurashtra in Gujarat, GSK is now a part of a taluka level rural
rural development agency. In response to Gandhi's call, GSK in its
formative years worked for schools, cooperatives and panchayats in

the villages. Over the years, with experience in education, it developed and handed over the primary school in Khadasali to the Government. In standards VII to XII of its secondary school, GSK educates 275 rural students each year. This includes 25 girls.

While the residential school is the centre of its educational activities, GSK's range of community service reaches beyond the confines of the school to the villages around. The teachers and the senior students participate actively in the socio-economic development of the area and hence also in the development of cooperatives. All the students and teachers are involved in the care of the school campus, goshala, 20 acre farm attached to the campus and in spinning yarn for their clothes, as a part of the Gandhian Nayi Taleem curriculum. A reflection of GSK's achievements is the 60% literacy rate in 1971 among women in the village where it was located, a four fold increase since 1961. The dropout rate in the school was only 3%.

Towards mid - 1970s, GSK decided to focus on specific economically deprived occupational groups in the neighbourhood of the school in its outreach programmes. Thus, it has become involved in the role of a catalyst and consultant to some of the poorest in the area - vegetable growers, itinerant sheep breeders and landless agricultural labourers.

The centre's school has nineteen teachers on its rolls. Half of its Rs. 2 lakhs per annum budget is financed by the Government. Students generally pay 80% of their cost of stay and learning and the farm makes up the deficit. Other activities are taken up as separate, special projects and funding assistance is sought from external donor agencies like Oxfam.

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