

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By
Jimmy C. Dabhi

[i am grateful to the people of Khambhat, Dhandhuka and Danta Talukas of Gujarat and the ISABIANS especially those who are in the field of social transformation to inspire me to write this article. i would like to acknowledge the help rendered by Persis Ginwalla in editing this article.]

Human Resource Development (HRD) profession is emerging as a new field along with multiplication of organisations and experts. The national agenda for Human Resource Development (HRD) is vital for nation building. Human Resource Development is either understood as an approach, a perspective or a programme (planned and systematic way of developing human resources) with definite expected outcome. T. V. Rao (1990:8) defines HRD as “a continuous process to ensure the development of employee competencies, dynamism, motivation and effectiveness in a systematic and planned way”. I would like to apply this definition to a broader perspective of an organisation called ‘the nation’ and an employee as ‘a citizen’ who is an employee and the employer at the same time in terms of a nation. With base of this perspective we may say that to enhance people’s capabilities and capacities is part of HRD. The process of HRD is comparatively easy among those who ‘have’ (at least the basic) – health, wealth and shelter, than those who ‘have-not’.

The challenge for HRD in the 21st Century is to develop the human resources at the grassroots level consisting of the unorganised landless farm labourers, the daily wage earners in the slums and rural areas, industrial labourers, the marginalised, the oppresses and women across these groups/communities. “HRD in organisational setting is a phenomenon of the last one or two decades” (Rao 1990:4) especially in Public and Private Sectors. One tends to think of HRD only in terms of HRD Department, HRD manager, HRD Programmes, HRD Organisations and that too in the profit-making sector. I would like to draw the attention of the reader to not-for-profit sector (Voluntary Organisations & NGOs) which is involved in ‘HRD’ in their work of development of the marginalised and the oppressed communities. Number of these organisations are involved in liberty, equality and fraternity which Dr. Ambedkar believed are “essential for full blossom of the personality of every person – socially, intellectually and politically – to integrate the people in united Bharat” (Ramaswamy 1998:45). The word HRD may be unknown to a good number of NGOs and Voluntary Organisations (VOs) however my experience with these organisations shows that the nature of most of their work is either human resource development or related to it.

Human resource development seen in a wider perspective and in the context of the nature of work the NGOs and VOs do with various communities may be broadly defined as empowerment. Being from the NGO sector i would like to reflect on this concept and its application – at the grassroots, where millions of Indians live an inhuman life. In the voluntary and NGO circles the word ‘empowerment of people’ is constantly used. Empowerment of people is now understood as a new approach to development, different from the charity/welfare and community development approaches. To some extent it has become a cliché - to attract funds and/or justify NGO existence. The usage of the term ‘empowerment’ as a mere jargon dilutes the meaning of the term and discredits those Voluntary Organisations/NGOs who are

1

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

genuinely committed to empowerment of the powerless, the marginalised, the tribals, dalits and women. The paper explores various meanings of the word and root of the concept and provides an understanding of the term. The paper examines the concept of power and its sources to throw light on the concept of empowerment and its indicators. The implicitly invites the students of applied behavioural sciences to take up the challenge and make this 'enlarged HRD processes' available to the disadvantaged groups and communities wherever they are and wherever they can reach. The paper also highlights a few behavioural and attitudinal patterns in an individual and community as indicators of people's empowerment.

Before defining empowerment let us understand the term 'power'. Power is a slippery concept, difficult to define and pin down (Fincham & Rhodes 1992). Despite this difficulty power has been a major concern of social theorists and organisational students. Power can be understood in physical terms as mere strength or force but that does not help us. We are looking at power in terms of development of people, people becoming resourceful. The dictionary defines power as ability to do or act, also as faculty of the body or mind (Hornby et al 1963). I would like to consider power as an ability to achieve desired goals. For example Farida wants to learn driving, the ability she has to achieve this goal can be called power.

Power can also be referred to as the capacity to influence people (Buchanan & Huczynski 1985), bring about change in them. "Power is about the creative action of people and the possibilities for organisational change" (Fincham & Rhodes 1992, p.424). For Weber power represented the potential to act in certain ways (Max Weber, 1970). Power therefore may have multiple shades of meaning but we can safely define it as capacity to act/to influence and achieve desired goal.

The concept 'Empowerment' is closely associated with power. Drawing from our understanding of power we may define empowerment as a process of assisting oneself or other/s, in which one invests in self and in other/s (intellectual, emotive and behavioural self), whereby people feel capacitated to realise their goals. Carkhuff (1989) defines empowerment as an act of investing or authorising, whereby people and organisations are enabled to achieve their goals. Seth Kreisberg (Meintjes 1997) defines it thus, "Empowerment is a process through which people and/or communities increase their control or mastery of their own lives and the decisions that affect their lives". As I understand it, empowerment is an act, a process and I would like to suggest that this process has three dimensions affecting one another simultaneously - it is a process which goes on within the individual, it happens between two or more individuals i.e. interpersonal (group), and organisational/communitarian in which the individual/s live and function.

Thus an empowered person, group or community is one which experiences power to realise her/its goals, control and mastery over their own lives. It is helpful therefore for our consideration to briefly look at the sources of power. The main sources of power can be classified as external and internal. Let us examine the external sources. Knowledge may be considered as one of the external sources of power, (Buchanan & Huczynski, 1985). This knowledge could be conceptual or practical (ability to use a

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

computer, ride a tractor or make an indigenous drum). Formal and informal education thus may help acquire power of information, knowledge and wisdom.

Another source of power may be the Position a person holds in a group or an organisation. Each position in the group has a value attached to it (Buchanan & Huczynski 1985) and this becomes a source of power through which a person can influence others. A minister of the government, a teacher, a priestess may be thought of as having power over people because of the position s/he occupies and the legitimacy that people give to that position. Political power can be thought as placing oneself or a group in an advantageous position in the political arena.

Wealth is yet another source of power. Wealth comprises assets, income or control over the means of production which equip people with the capacity to purchase the desired goods and achieve the desired goals. It is also referred to as economic power (Herdero 1983).

Interior self can be thought of as yet another source of power which may be called as power from within or interior power. Some may like to call it spiritual power or charisma of a person. The roots of this power are in one's self. Person's quality and depth of self-awareness, authenticity, congruency of self become sources of power through which influence is exerted on others or a situation. Herdero defines it as personal power, "the ability to be fully oneself" (1983, p.20) which echoes the 'self actualisation' in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The understanding of people being empowered suggests that the power we have just looked at, in some form or the other, is manifested in the lives of these people. Empowerment thus indicates that the community has either acquired power or has reinforced power that was already there.

In the context of 'empowering' it may not be helpful to think as an individual/group empowering the other individual or group. It would then sound more like what Paulo Freire termed 'banking' education, where imparting knowledge is an act of charity to those who are considered ignorant – where an "i know everything, you know nothing" attitude is exhibited. Ignorance is considered absolute and therefore the existence of the agent (teacher) is justified. As against this empowerment is a process in which an agent accompanies an individual or a group in procuring access to sources of power and thereby facilitating the process and therefore not as a giver but sojourner, recognising a need of interdependency rather than fostering dependency. Seth Kreisberg in his definition suggests that empowerment is a process through which people and/or communities increase and exercise control or mastery over their own lives and decisions that affect their lives. Examining the above it seems to me that realisation of power is a process which begins within the individual and thereafter in a group or in a community which is a group of individuals. If we agree that empowerment is a process then we must accept that a process cannot be static; it has to be dynamic. This consideration may have a significant impact on the empowerment pedagogy. The static understanding of empowerment has the danger of overlooking the significance of historical changes in the factors that determine social, political and economic power; it sees empowerment as a one-time event. It is therefore more

3

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

accurate to consider this a dynamic process - "in relative terms as a variable position upon a continuumneously empowered and disempowered in relation to various other groups or individuals" (Meintjes 1997).

It is important to note that mere access to sources of power does not necessarily empower a person or a group in the real sense of the word. Some of the Dalit communities in Khambhat, Borsad, Kapadvanj and Dhandhuka Talukas of Gujarat have adequate land to cultivate and live a decent life but they, as a community, are not empowered yet. Likewise, often the city bred intellectuals or professionals may have knowledge or business people and industrialist may have plenty of money but as human beings they may be far from empowered. They may be in need of humanisation to be empowered. Empowerment is closely associated with humanisation, values and attitudes which enhance human life within and around. Therefore it seems to me that empowerment must be understood as a process of facilitating or accompanying others and not as an act of supplying power.

What then are the indicators to gauge whether empowerment has taken place? How are we to say that an individual or a group is empowered? One of the manifestations of empowerment is the behaviour of the individual/group and possible insight into her/his attitude to self, others and situation one is faced with. The ability, courage and ease to be 'oneself' in an adverse situation is one of the criteria to gauge the intensity of empowerment that has taken place. My experience and observation in Khambhat, Dhandhuka and Danta Talukas where some of the dalit, tribal and OBC communities have exhibited courage and ability to take a stand against some of the oppressive communities, their manipulation and violence and stand united is a sign of empowerment. The Dalits of Golana, a small village in Khambhat Taluka, (where Behavioural Science Centre of Ahmedabad works) and surrounding villages raised their heads against the exploitation (caste, class and sexual) by the dominant community of Rajputs landlords in the area and paid the price of losing four of their men (four Dalits were killed by Rajputs of Golana on 25th January 1986 in broad daylight). The Dalits resisted the 'buying up' tactics of such dominant groups and fought the legal battle in the Supreme Court and got the culprits behind bars.

A person who exhibits greater self-awareness of thoughts, feelings and behaviour may be said to be empowered. For example an individual becomes aware of feelings of anger and the thought pattern within her which goes along with that feeling. Sometimes the feelings and behaviour do not match, like, one sounds angry but there is a smile on the face. An empowered person would become aware of such contradictions between feeling and behaviour and make an effort to be more congruent. The Dalit women and men who come to the Centre (BSC) for training keep on blushing or smiling when they are narrating the suffering they have to go through in the village. You scratch the smile a little and you realise the humiliation, insult, pain underneath that smile. This suffering, in normal circumstances, would result in anger at the people who inflict humiliation, insult and pain but in the case of powerlessness and low self-image the victims laugh at their ownelves for what they have to go through. The process of empowerment would lead to a change in behaviour and inner disposition of a person. Some of these people now when abused by the

4

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

officials, village bullies and 'Bapus' (the 'high caste' Dons) do not 'give that helpless smile' but confront the inhuman behaviour in others, inviting the oppressors to be human.

A person or group may be said to be empowered when she/it exhibits confidence in taking up a task, handling different situations, facing people and voicing her opinion firmly and sensitively. Often a marginalised woman/man experiences fear when it comes to visiting a government official, police station and represent their grievances to people concerned. Empowerment would imply that these situations are handled without undue shyness, anxiety, fear. The women of Bhal Bara Dalit Mahila Saving and Credit Co-operative (area level Co-operative involving 43 villages in Khambhat Taluka) took up the cause of one of their women members allegedly killed by her in-laws in village Pandad, of Khambhat Taluka in 1992. They went to the Dy.S.P. at Anand in a protest against the police's soft handling of the case. The body of the deceased was exhumed. The legal battle was lost in the court due to unwillingness of the witnesses to stand up in the court of law. But the whole process of women mobilising themselves was a clear sign of empowerment of women.

Poverty, social discrimination (caste, gender) breeds insecurity, distorts self-image of a person and often results in strong jealousy (this does not mean those who are not poor or socially discriminated do not suffer from poor self-image or jealousy but the reasons may be different). Empowered persons have a realistic and healthy self knowledge, self image and identity. Such empowered individuals, through interpersonal relationships and encounters, facilitate group empowerment leading to organisational and community empowerment. Such an empowered person/group/community does not unduly suffer complexes, guilt, hostility, bitterness, resentment and jealousy. The process of empowerment would mean that a person begins to see the cause-effect of personal and social insecurity, search, analyse the cause and put the blame where it belongs and not just blame herself as others would like her to do. For example a tribal or a scheduled caste woman often is blamed, held responsible by others for sexual harassment inflicted on her and eventually she blames herself. An empowered individual/community will place the blame where it belongs, that is on the person or group who has inflicted pain/injustice/oppression, not only that but will resist such aggression. By not displacing the blame one learns to safeguard one's self respect and thus enhance the process of empowerment.

A person/group which is empowered exhibits motivation to learn, ability to gather information, analyse it and then use it effectively. A powerless woman/man/community tends to receive information submissively, without critique and feels handicapped to use it when and where necessary. Empowered individuals/communities actively seeks information in matters of concern, filters it through critical reasoning and converts it into a body of knowledge for further use. Carkhuff (1989 p.13) while talking of empowerment says, "The empowering of creative personnel is calculated to maximise the individual processing of information". Thus empowerment may be seen as a process of increase in bodies of knowledge and linkages between different types of knowledge acquired. This pool of

5

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

knowledge can either be conceptual, competencies/skills based or experience based. For example, Laljibhai Maheraman of Rohini village who is a non-matriculate and belongs to the Dalit group, over the years has learned to lead the Federation of Co-operatives in Khambhat Taluka with a turnover of about Rs.20,000,00.00 and occasionally takes a seminar with the postgraduate students of Fellowship Programme in Social Management at BSC, Ahmedabad. Jadiben, a Dalit woman from Varasada, (Khambhat Taluka), Puriben from Ratanpur (Dhandhuka Taluka) not only use their acquired knowledge and skills at the service of their own community but for the other marginalised women's groups in Gujarat through training, seminars, formal and informal meetings.

A person learns to participate in decision making by contributing her knowledge, information, and insights, then decides and acts on it. For example in Bhal Bara Dalit Mahila Saving and Credit Co-operative of Khambhat and Bhal Mahila Credit Co-operative of Dhandhuka, the Managing Committee of women are able to decide about whom to employ as a clerk, action to be taken with regard to defaulters, how much and whom to give loans, where and how to invest their money and which social causes to support through their co-operative. The loan recovery rate of these Co-operatives is above 95% with 15% interest.

An empowered woman learns to critically analyse the situation she is in and data she has about people and events, conceptualises and develops new theories. This means that the empowered woman has mastered the tool of analysis and conceptualising based on past experience and data she receives. She not only knows through practice what it means to be a leader in a village but can conceptualise what it means to be a leader. The unifying role tribal women have played in the recent trouble in Zankhvav (South Gujarat) instigated by communal forces (said to be 'Sangh Parivar') shows that these women were able to detect the strategy of the anti-social communal forces of dividing the Tribals on religious grounds for their own political gain.

Empowering means that a woman or a community learns to effectively deal with other women, men and groups in and outside the community. For example Shantaben (who was known as a shy woman, now is the elected vice-president of Antyodaya Vikas Shikshan Centre, a local organisation at Daheda) and many other Dalit women like her effectively conduct meetings of women and men, elicit responses from them and confront them when necessary. Likewise the Tribal community of Zankhvav (Bharuch Taluka) can resist and fight back the communal instigation of fundamentalist groups operating in Gujarat and also confront the Government officials and high ranking bureaucrats for allegedly refusing to act against such forces.

People/groups and teams in an organisational context become open to give and receive feedback, look at it and act on the feedback received. For example Anna is able to assert herself, apologise when she realises her mistake or confront others when she perceives contradiction or manipulation. A team, in the face of criticism, does not become defensive but explores the possibility of using the criticism constructively and as an occasion for introspection and change.

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

Another indication of empowerment of people is creation of socially and economically viable local organisations that are owned and managed by people themselves. This means that the local groups do not remain dependent on outside agencies and agents of change but organise themselves and take the responsibility of meeting the needs of their community in their own hands. With the invasion of market economy and global culture many communities and groups are rendered economically and politically powerless (Sen, 1997). Vested interests, power sharks operate, maintain and perpetuate their hold over the powerless through means like market economy without a human face and global culture without respect for minor cultures. This process of domination and exploitation is made possible through financial, political, bureaucratic and sometimes even judicial organisations, structures and processes. In the face of such a reality empowerment can be measured in terms of organisational power of people i.e. organisations of people where ownership is with those who are marginalised, deprived, rendered powerless and where these people are in position to decide, provide direction and implement. BSC's mission and effort to create, strengthen and support people's organisations has to be viewed from this perspective. Parmar and Franco (1996) site adequate examples of such organisations. I would like to mention a word of caution here. People's organisations and specially the leaders within such organisations, if not sensitive to people's felt long term needs, can stagnate the process of empowerment. These organisations can become self-centred (may just fulfil organisational goals and lose sight of the larger social goals for which the organisation was created) and may lose touch with people and their aspirations. People's organisations are true to their objective when they foster peoples' movements – Chalval - as it is called in Gujarati. These organisations may even be results of such movements (Narmada Bachao Andolan). What is important to note is that peoples' organisations keep the movement alive, whether that movement is micro or macro, whether it is on health issue or minimum wage issue. These organisations and the movements must give people a power to change government policies if they are anti-poor. We are talking of political power, power of governing the life of ones own community and participating in the governance and implementation of ones geo-political unit. It may be a village, a Taluka, a District, State or the nation. Political power has to do with active and just participation in decision-making structures and processes at all levels of the State.

Increased interdependency opposed to dependency and in contrast to rebellion may be considered a sign of empowerment of the group, organisation and community. Carkhuff (1989) talking of a creative leader equates interdependency with empowerment. He goes on to say that creative leader empowers people by enabling them to learn, perform, produce and relate both within and without units of production as well as between the producer and consumer. In the context of community empowerment it would mean that interdependency within and between communities would increase and would be mutually beneficial. In our Indian context as long as caste and gender ideology are operative and adhered to empowerment will remain a distant dream.

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

Yet another sign of empowerment is increased ability of people in resisting, changing factors within a community, tradition, culture which are oppressive and unjust. My experience in Khambhat Taluka of Gujarat shows that women not only question what is oppressive in a culture, for example covering their faces, rightful place in the Caste Council, but also covertly and openly resist and challenge such customs/traditions. This means that ability and power to influence a positive change in others is a sign of empowerment. Empowered members in a team/organisation/community influence change in other members. Jadiben Vankar (a dalit woman) from a village called Varsada (Khambhat Taluka) challenged the Gram Panchayat (Village Council) men (most of them caste men) on issue of a woman and that too a dalit woman sitting on a chair in the Panchayat office and brought about a change in behaviour and attitude. The men had to accept a new code of conduct that a woman will sit on the chair in front of so called 'gamna agevano' (village leaders) and will not cover her face as expected by traditional male dominated society.

The above indicators are not an exhaustive list; neither are they fully realised once and for all. They are part of a process which at times faces regression. Therefore empowerment has to be seen as an ongoing human process, a continuum within an individual and a group or community in a given society and mixture of cultures. Development agents, whether individuals or organisations, do not empower but support, facilitate the process of empowerment. They are in a way instruments in creating an environment, a climate so that empowerment can take place. One of the crucial indicators of empowerment is that an individual or a group that is going through the process of empowerment progressively becomes interdependent in relation to others rather than dependent. For example the 'Varna' (discrimination based on caste) ideology and practice of untouchability is present in almost all the villages of Gujarat without exaggeration even today because the dalit communities are dependent on the caste groups for labour, political favours and other needs. When these relationships of over dependence turn into interdependence whereby communities mutually depend on one another to fulfil many of their social, economic, political and religious needs, one can be sure that empowerment has taken place.

A word caution for those involved in the process of empowerment is not out of place here. Effective realisation of empowerment in a group/community may appear threatening to dominant/elite groups/community. The catalysts of transformation must foresee this and be prepared to counteract the consequences. The agents of change are likely to experience frustration in their efforts at empowerment due to "people's non-participation". They must take the past experience of these people with ill-concieved or pseudo-empowerment efforts of the governing elite. The people are justified in viewing these programmes with suspicion. The realistic approach therefore is to ensure that programmes and projects aimed at empowerment of people enjoy widespread legitimacy without, at the same time, unduly exposing those who are beginning to assert their rights to any unnecessary risk of repression or regression.

Thus empowerment in practice is human resource development, where the human beings as individuals and groups become resourceful to make their lives more human,

8

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By
Jimmy C. Dabhi

their relationships and interactions within and other groups and communities equal and just. It is realisation of power within an individual/s, group, organisations/communities, in a concrete reality of life (psycho-social, economic, religious, cultural, political etc.) which makes the subject and her/his environment more humane and just. The challenge for HRD practitioners and scholars is to influence the Government policies which affect the millions of poor of our country so that they are empowered, made resourceful. The challenge is to make HRD processes, HRD facilitators, resource persons and technology available to these marginalised and oppressed citizens 'employees' of our country in nation building. The challenge for all of us who are committed to HRD and nation building is to generously give our time, resources and join hands with the poor in the process of empowerment, theirs and our as well.

References:

- 1) Buchanan, D. A., & Hucznski, A. A., (1985), *Organisation Behaviour: An Introductory Text*, Prentice/Hall International Ltd., UK.
- 2) Carkhuff, R., (1989), *Empowering - The Creative Leader in the Age of the New Capitalism*, HRD Press, USA.
- 3) Fincham, R. & Rhodes, P., (1992), *The Individual, Work and Organisation*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.
- 4) Heredero, J.M., (1984), 'Caste and Christianity', Navajuni, Newman Hall, Ahmedabad.
- 5) Hornby, A. S., et al, (1963), Oxford University Press, London.
- 6) Weber, Max, (1970), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- 7) Parmar, V. S. & Franco, F., (1996), 'Dalit Organisations: Reconstituting Reality' in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Reassertion of the Subalterns*, ed. Fernandes, W., Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.
- 8) Ramswamy K., 1998, Ambedkar: 'A True Democrate and Nationalist', in Lal S., Saxena K. S. (Eds.), *Ambedkar and Nation-Building* Rawat Publications, New Delhi.
- 9) Rao, T. V., 1990, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- 10) Sen, Gita, (1997), *Globalisation in the 21st Century*, The UvA Development Lecture delivered at the University of Amsterdam.
- 11) Meintjes, G., (1997), 'Human Rights Education as Empowerment: Reflection on Pedagogy', in *Blueprint for Social Justice*, Volume LI, No.3, Loyola University, New Orleans.

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By
Jimmy C. Dabhi

[i am grateful to the people of Khambhat, Dhandhuka and Danta Talukas of Gujarat and the ISABIANS especially those who are in the field of social transformation to inspire me to write this article. i would like to acknowledge the help rendered by Persis Ginwalla in editing this article.]

Human Resource Development (HRD) profession is emerging as a new field along with multiplication of organisations and experts. The national agenda for Human Resource Development (HRD) is vital for nation building. Human Resource Development is either understood as an approach, a perspective or a programme (planned and systematic way of developing human resources) with definite expected outcome. T. V. Rao (1990:8) defines HRD as “a continuous process to ensure the development of employee competencies, dynamism, motivation and effectiveness in a systematic and planned way”. I would like to apply this definition to a broader perspective of an organisation called ‘the nation’ and an employee as ‘a citizen’ who is an employee and the employer at the same time in terms of a nation. With base of this perspective we may say that to enhance people’s capabilities and capacities is part of HRD. The process of HRD is comparatively easy among those who ‘have’ (at least the basic) – health, wealth and shelter, than those who ‘have-not’.

The challenge for HRD in the 21st Century is to develop the human resources at the grassroots level consisting of the unorganised landless farm labourers, the daily wage earners in the slums and rural areas, industrial labourers, the marginalised, the oppresses and women across these groups/communities. “HRD in organisational setting is a phenomenon of the last one or two decades” (Rao 1990:4) especially in Public and Private Sectors. One tends to think of HRD only in terms of HRD Department, HRD manager, HRD Programmes, HRD Organisations and that too in the profit-making sector. I would like to draw the attention of the reader to not-for-profit sector (Voluntary Organisations & NGOs) which is involved in ‘HRD’ in their work of development of the marginalised and the oppressed communities. Number of these organisations are involved in liberty, equality and fraternity which Dr. Ambedkar believed are “essential for full blossom of the personality of every person – socially, intellectually and politically – to integrate the people in united Bharat” (Ramaswamy 1998:45). The word HRD may be unknown to a good number of NGOs and Voluntary Organisations (VOs) however my experience with these organisations shows that the nature of most of their work is either human resource development or related to it.

Human resource development seen in a wider perspective and in the context of the nature of work the NGOs and VOs do with various communities may be broadly defined as empowerment. Being from the NGO sector i would like to reflect on this concept and its application – at the grassroots, where millions of Indians live an inhuman life. In the voluntary and NGO circles the word ‘empowerment of people’ is constantly used. Empowerment of people is now understood as a new approach to development, different from the charity/welfare and community development approaches. To some extent it has become a cliché - to attract funds and/or justify NGO existence. The usage of the term ‘empowerment’ as a mere jargon dilutes the meaning of the term and discredits those Voluntary Organisations/NGOs who are

1

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

genuinely committed to empowerment of the powerless, the marginalised, the tribals, dalits and women. The paper explores various meanings of the word and root of the concept and provides an understanding of the term. The paper examines the concept of power and its sources to throw light on the concept of empowerment and its indicators. The implicitly invites the students of applied behavioural sciences to take up the challenge and make this 'enlarged HRD processes' available to the disadvantaged groups and communities wherever they are and wherever they can reach. The paper also highlights a few behavioural and attitudinal patterns in an individual and community as indicators of people's empowerment.

Before defining empowerment let us understand the term 'power'. Power is a slippery concept, difficult to define and pin down (Fincham & Rhodes 1992). Despite this difficulty power has been a major concern of social theorists and organisational students. Power can be understood in physical terms as mere strength or force but that does not help us. We are looking at power in terms of development of people, people becoming resourceful. The dictionary defines power as ability to do or act, also as faculty of the body or mind (Hornby et al 1963). I would like to consider power as an ability to achieve desired goals. For example Farida wants to learn driving, the ability she has to achieve this goal can be called power.

Power can also be referred to as the capacity to influence people (Buchanan & Huczynski 1985), bring about change in them. "Power is about the creative action of people and the possibilities for organisational change" (Fincham & Rhodes 1992, p.424). For Weber power represented the potential to act in certain ways (Max Weber, 1970). Power therefore may have multiple shades of meaning but we can safely define it as capacity to act/to influence and achieve desired goal.

The concept 'Empowerment' is closely associated with power. Drawing from our understanding of power we may define empowerment as a process of assisting oneself or other/s, in which one invests in self and in other/s (intellectual, emotive and behavioural self), whereby people feel capacitated to realise their goals. Carkhuff (1989) defines empowerment as an act of investing or authorising, whereby people and organisations are enabled to achieve their goals. Seth Kreisberg (Meintjes 1997) defines it thus, "Empowerment is a process through which people and/or communities increase their control or mastery of their own lives and the decisions that affect their lives". As I understand it, empowerment is an act, a process and I would like to suggest that this process has three dimensions affecting one another simultaneously - it is a process which goes on within the individual, it happens between two or more individuals i.e. interpersonal (group), and organisational/communitarian in which the individual/s live and function.

Thus an empowered person, group or community is one which experiences power to realise her/its goals, control and mastery over their own lives. It is helpful therefore for our consideration to briefly look at the sources of power. The main sources of power can be classified as external and internal. Let us examine the external sources. Knowledge may be considered as one of the external sources of power, (Buchanan & Huczynski, 1985). This knowledge could be conceptual or practical (ability to use a

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

computer, ride a tractor or make an indigenous drum). Formal and informal education thus may help acquire power of information, knowledge and wisdom.

Another source of power may be the Position a person holds in a group or an organisation. Each position in the group has a value attached to it (Buchanan & Huczynski 1985) and this becomes a source of power through which a person can influence others. A minister of the government, a teacher, a priestess may be thought of as having power over people because of the position s/he occupies and the legitimacy that people give to that position. Political power can be thought as placing oneself or a group in an advantageous position in the political arena.

Wealth is yet another source of power. Wealth comprises assets, income or control over the means of production which equip people with the capacity to purchase the desired goods and achieve the desired goals. It is also referred to as economic power (Herdero 1983).

Interior self can be thought of as yet another source of power which may be called as power from within or interior power. Some may like to call it spiritual power or charisma of a person. The roots of this power are in one's self. Person's quality and depth of self-awareness, authenticity, congruency of self become sources of power through which influence is exerted on others or a situation. Herdero defines it as personal power, "the ability to be fully oneself" (1983, p.20) which echoes the 'self actualisation' in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The understanding of people being empowered suggests that the power we have just looked at, in some form or the other, is manifested in the lives of these people. Empowerment thus indicates that the community has either acquired power or has reinforced power that was already there.

In the context of 'empowering' it may not be helpful to think as an individual/group empowering the other individual or group. It would then sound more like what Paulo Freire termed 'banking' education, where imparting knowledge is an act of charity to those who are considered ignorant – where an "i know everything, you know nothing" attitude is exhibited. Ignorance is considered absolute and therefore the existence of the agent (teacher) is justified. As against this empowerment is a process in which an agent accompanies an individual or a group in procuring access to sources of power and thereby facilitating the process and therefore not as a giver but sojourner, recognising a need of interdependency rather than fostering dependency. Seth Kreisberg in his definition suggests that empowerment is a process through which people and/or communities increase and exercise control or mastery over their own lives and decisions that affect their lives. Examining the above it seems to me that realisation of power is a process which begins within the individual and thereafter in a group or in a community which is a group of individuals. If we agree that empowerment is a process then we must accept that a process cannot be static; it has to be dynamic. This consideration may have a significant impact on the empowerment pedagogy. The static understanding of empowerment has the danger of overlooking the significance of historical changes in the factors that determine social, political and economic power; it sees empowerment as a one-time event. It is therefore more

3

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

accurate to consider this a dynamic process - "in relative terms as a variable position upon a continuumneously empowered and disempowered in relation to various other groups or individuals" (Meintjes 1997).

It is important to note that mere access to sources of power does not necessarily empower a person or a group in the real sense of the word. Some of the Dalit communities in Khambhat, Borsad, Kapadvanj and Dhandhuka Talukas of Gujarat have adequate land to cultivate and live a decent life but they, as a community, are not empowered yet. Likewise, often the city bred intellectuals or professionals may have knowledge or business people and industrialist may have plenty of money but as human beings they may be far from empowered. They may be in need of humanisation to be empowered. Empowerment is closely associated with humanisation, values and attitudes which enhance human life within and around. Therefore it seems to me that empowerment must be understood as a process of facilitating or accompanying others and not as an act of supplying power.

What then are the indicators to gauge whether empowerment has taken place? How are we to say that an individual or a group is empowered? One of the manifestations of empowerment is the behaviour of the individual/group and possible insight into her/his attitude to self, others and situation one is faced with. The ability, courage and ease to be 'oneself' in an adverse situation is one of the criteria to gauge the intensity of empowerment that has taken place. My experience and observation in Khambhat, Dhandhuka and Danta Talukas where some of the dalit, tribal and OBC communities have exhibited courage and ability to take a stand against some of the oppressive communities, their manipulation and violence and stand united is a sign of empowerment. The Dalits of Golana, a small village in Khambhat Taluka, (where Behavioural Science Centre of Ahmedabad works) and surrounding villages raised their heads against the exploitation (caste, class and sexual) by the dominant community of Rajputs landlords in the area and paid the price of losing four of their men (four Dalits were killed by Rajputs of Golana on 25th January 1986 in broad daylight). The Dalits resisted the 'buying up' tactics of such dominant groups and fought the legal battle in the Supreme Court and got the culprits behind bars.

A person who exhibits greater self-awareness of thoughts, feelings and behaviour may be said to be empowered. For example an individual becomes aware of feelings of anger and the thought pattern within her which goes along with that feeling. Sometimes the feelings and behaviour do not match, like, one sounds angry but there is a smile on the face. An empowered person would become aware of such contradictions between feeling and behaviour and make an effort to be more congruent. The Dalit women and men who come to the Centre (BSC) for training keep on blushing or smiling when they are narrating the suffering they have to go through in the village. You scratch the smile a little and you realise the humiliation, insult, pain underneath that smile. This suffering, in normal circumstances, would result in anger at the people who inflict humiliation, insult and pain but in the case of powerlessness and low self-image the victims laugh at their ownelves for what they have to go through. The process of empowerment would lead to a change in behaviour and inner disposition of a person. Some of these people now when abused by the

4

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

officials, village bullies and 'Bapus' (the 'high caste' Dons) do not 'give that helpless smile' but confront the inhuman behaviour in others, inviting the oppressors to be human.

A person or group may be said to be empowered when she/it exhibits confidence in taking up a task, handling different situations, facing people and voicing her opinion firmly and sensitively. Often a marginalised woman/man experiences fear when it comes to visiting a government official, police station and represent their grievances to people concerned. Empowerment would imply that these situations are handled without undue shyness, anxiety, fear. The women of Bhal Bara Dalit Mahila Saving and Credit Co-operative (area level Co-operative involving 43 villages in Khambhat Taluka) took up the cause of one of their women members allegedly killed by her in-laws in village Pandad, of Khambhat Taluka in 1992. They went to the Dy.S.P. at Anand in a protest against the police's soft handling of the case. The body of the deceased was exhumed. The legal battle was lost in the court due to unwillingness of the witnesses to stand up in the court of law. But the whole process of women mobilising themselves was a clear sign of empowerment of women.

Poverty, social discrimination (caste, gender) breeds insecurity, distorts self-image of a person and often results in strong jealousy (this does not mean those who are not poor or socially discriminated do not suffer from poor self-image or jealousy but the reasons may be different). Empowered persons have a realistic and healthy self knowledge, self image and identity. Such empowered individuals, through interpersonal relationships and encounters, facilitate group empowerment leading to organisational and community empowerment. Such an empowered person/group/community does not unduly suffer complexes, guilt, hostility, bitterness, resentment and jealousy. The process of empowerment would mean that a person begins to see the cause-effect of personal and social insecurity, search, analyse the cause and put the blame where it belongs and not just blame herself as others would like her to do. For example a tribal or a scheduled caste woman often is blamed, held responsible by others for sexual harassment inflicted on her and eventually she blames herself. An empowered individual/community will place the blame where it belongs, that is on the person or group who has inflicted pain/injustice/oppression, not only that but will resist such aggression. By not displacing the blame one learns to safeguard one's self respect and thus enhance the process of empowerment.

A person/group which is empowered exhibits motivation to learn, ability to gather information, analyse it and then use it effectively. A powerless woman/man/community tends to receive information submissively, without critique and feels handicapped to use it when and where necessary. Empowered individuals/communities actively seeks information in matters of concern, filters it through critical reasoning and converts it into a body of knowledge for further use. Carkhuff (1989 p.13) while talking of empowerment says, "The empowering of creative personnel is calculated to maximise the individual processing of information". Thus empowerment may be seen as a process of increase in bodies of knowledge and linkages between different types of knowledge acquired. This pool of

5

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

knowledge can either be conceptual, competencies/skills based or experience based. For example, Laljibhai Maheraman of Rohini village who is a non-matriculate and belongs to the Dalit group, over the years has learned to lead the Federation of Co-operatives in Khambhat Taluka with a turnover of about Rs.20,000,00.00 and occasionally takes a seminar with the postgraduate students of Fellowship Programme in Social Management at BSC, Ahmedabad. Jadiben, a Dalit woman from Varasada, (Khambhat Taluka), Puriben from Ratanpur (Dhandhuka Taluka) not only use their acquired knowledge and skills at the service of their own community but for the other marginalised women's groups in Gujarat through training, seminars, formal and informal meetings.

A person learns to participate in decision making by contributing her knowledge, information, and insights, then decides and acts on it. For example in Bhal Bara Dalit Mahila Saving and Credit Co-operative of Khambhat and Bhal Mahila Credit Co-operative of Dhandhuka, the Managing Committee of women are able to decide about whom to employ as a clerk, action to be taken with regard to defaulters, how much and whom to give loans, where and how to invest their money and which social causes to support through their co-operative. The loan recovery rate of these Co-operatives is above 95% with 15% interest.

An empowered woman learns to critically analyse the situation she is in and data she has about people and events, conceptualises and develops new theories. This means that the empowered woman has mastered the tool of analysis and conceptualising based on past experience and data she receives. She not only knows through practice what it means to be a leader in a village but can conceptualise what it means to be a leader. The unifying role tribal women have played in the recent trouble in Zankhvav (South Gujarat) instigated by communal forces (said to be 'Sangh Parivar') shows that these women were able to detect the strategy of the anti-social communal forces of dividing the Tribals on religious grounds for their own political gain.

Empowering means that a woman or a community learns to effectively deal with other women, men and groups in and outside the community. For example Shantaben (who was known as a shy woman, now is the elected vice-president of Antyodaya Vikas Shikshan Centre, a local organisation at Daheda) and many other Dalit women like her effectively conduct meetings of women and men, elicit responses from them and confront them when necessary. Likewise the Tribal community of Zankhvav (Bharuch Taluka) can resist and fight back the communal instigation of fundamentalist groups operating in Gujarat and also confront the Government officials and high ranking bureaucrats for allegedly refusing to act against such forces.

People/groups and teams in an organisational context become open to give and receive feedback, look at it and act on the feedback received. For example Anna is able to assert herself, apologise when she realises her mistake or confront others when she perceives contradiction or manipulation. A team, in the face of criticism, does not become defensive but explores the possibility of using the criticism constructively and as an occasion for introspection and change.

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

Another indication of empowerment of people is creation of socially and economically viable local organisations that are owned and managed by people themselves. This means that the local groups do not remain dependent on outside agencies and agents of change but organise themselves and take the responsibility of meeting the needs of their community in their own hands. With the invasion of market economy and global culture many communities and groups are rendered economically and politically powerless (Sen, 1997). Vested interests, power sharks operate, maintain and perpetuate their hold over the powerless through means like market economy without a human face and global culture without respect for minor cultures. This process of domination and exploitation is made possible through financial, political, bureaucratic and sometimes even judicial organisations, structures and processes. In the face of such a reality empowerment can be measured in terms of organisational power of people i.e. organisations of people where ownership is with those who are marginalised, deprived, rendered powerless and where these people are in position to decide, provide direction and implement. BSC's mission and effort to create, strengthen and support people's organisations has to be viewed from this perspective. Parmar and Franco (1996) site adequate examples of such organisations. I would like to mention a word of caution here. People's organisations and specially the leaders within such organisations, if not sensitive to people's felt long term needs, can stagnate the process of empowerment. These organisations can become self-centred (may just fulfil organisational goals and lose sight of the larger social goals for which the organisation was created) and may lose touch with people and their aspirations. People's organisations are true to their objective when they foster peoples' movements – Chalval - as it is called in Gujarati. These organisations may even be results of such movements (Narmada Bachao Andolan). What is important to note is that peoples' organisations keep the movement alive, whether that movement is micro or macro, whether it is on health issue or minimum wage issue. These organisations and the movements must give people a power to change government policies if they are anti-poor. We are talking of political power, power of governing the life of ones own community and participating in the governance and implementation of ones geo-political unit. It may be a village, a Taluka, a District, State or the nation. Political power has to do with active and just participation in decision-making structures and processes at all levels of the State.

Increased interdependency opposed to dependency and in contrast to rebellion may be considered a sign of empowerment of the group, organisation and community. Carkhuff (1989) talking of a creative leader equates interdependency with empowerment. He goes on to say that creative leader empowers people by enabling them to learn, perform, produce and relate both within and without units of production as well as between the producer and consumer. In the context of community empowerment it would mean that interdependency within and between communities would increase and would be mutually beneficial. In our Indian context as long as caste and gender ideology are operative and adhered to empowerment will remain a distant dream.

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

Yet another sign of empowerment is increased ability of people in resisting, changing factors within a community, tradition, culture which are oppressive and unjust. My experience in Khambhat Taluka of Gujarat shows that women not only question what is oppressive in a culture, for example covering their faces, rightful place in the Caste Council, but also covertly and openly resist and challenge such customs/traditions. This means that ability and power to influence a positive change in others is a sign of empowerment. Empowered members in a team/organisation/community influence change in other members. Jadiben Vankar (a dalit woman) from a village called Varsada (Khambhat Taluka) challenged the Gram Panchayat (Village Council) men (most of them caste men) on issue of a woman and that too a dalit woman sitting on a chair in the Panchayat office and brought about a change in behaviour and attitude. The men had to accept a new code of conduct that a woman will sit on the chair in front of so called 'gamna agevano' (village leaders) and will not cover her face as expected by traditional male dominated society.

The above indicators are not an exhaustive list; neither are they fully realised once and for all. They are part of a process which at times faces regression. Therefore empowerment has to be seen as an ongoing human process, a continuum within an individual and a group or community in a given society and mixture of cultures. Development agents, whether individuals or organisations, do not empower but support, facilitate the process of empowerment. They are in a way instruments in creating an environment, a climate so that empowerment can take place. One of the crucial indicators of empowerment is that an individual or a group that is going through the process of empowerment progressively becomes interdependent in relation to others rather than dependent. For example the 'Varna' (discrimination based on caste) ideology and practice of untouchability is present in almost all the villages of Gujarat without exaggeration even today because the dalit communities are dependent on the caste groups for labour, political favours and other needs. When these relationships of over dependence turn into interdependence whereby communities mutually depend on one another to fulfil many of their social, economic, political and religious needs, one can be sure that empowerment has taken place.

A word caution for those involved in the process of empowerment is not out of place here. Effective realisation of empowerment in a group/community may appear threatening to dominant/elite groups/community. The catalysts of transformation must foresee this and be prepared to counteract the consequences. The agents of change are likely to experience frustration in their efforts at empowerment due to "people's non-participation". They must take the past experience of these people with ill-concieved or pseudo-empowerment efforts of the governing elite. The people are justified in viewing these programmes with suspicion. The realistic approach therefore is to ensure that programmes and projects aimed at empowerment of people enjoy widespread legitimacy without, at the same time, unduly exposing those who are beginning to assert their rights to any unnecessary risk of repression or regression.

Thus empowerment in practice is human resource development, where the human beings as individuals and groups become resourceful to make their lives more human,

EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE - A PROCESS

HRD CHALLENGE IN 21ST CENTURY

By

Jimmy C. Dabhi

their relationships and interactions within and other groups and communities equal and just. It is realisation of power within an individual/s, group, organisations/communities, in a concrete reality of life (psycho-social, economic, religious, cultural, political etc.) which makes the subject and her/his environment more humane and just. The challenge for HRD practitioners and scholars is to influence the Government policies which affect the millions of poor of our country so that they are empowered, made resourceful. The challenge is to make HRD processes, HRD facilitators, resource persons and technology available to these marginalised and oppressed citizens 'employees' of our country in nation building. The challenge for all of us who are committed to HRD and nation building is to generously give our time, resources and join hands with the poor in the process of empowerment, theirs and our as well.

References:

- 1) Buchanan, D. A., & Hucznski, A. A., (1985), *Organisation Behaviour: An Introductory Text*, Prentice/Hall International Ltd., UK.
- 2) Carkhuff, R., (1989), *Empowering - The Creative Leader in the Age of the New Capitalism*, HRD Press, USA.
- 3) Fincham, R. & Rhodes, P., (1992), *The Individual, Work and Organisation*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.
- 4) Heredero, J.M., (1984), 'Caste and Christianity', Navajuni, Newman Hall, Ahmedabad.
- 5) Hornby, A. S., et al, (1963), Oxford University Press, London.
- 6) Weber, Max, (1970), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- 7) Parmar, V. S. & Franco, F., (1996), 'Dalit Organisations: Reconstituting Reality' in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Reassertion of the Subalterns*, ed. Fernandes, W., Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.
- 8) Ramswamy K., 1998, Ambedkar: 'A True Democrate and Nationalist', in Lal S., Saxena K. S. (Eds.), *Ambedkar and Nation-Building* Rawat Publications, New Delhi.
- 9) Rao, T. V., 1990, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- 10) Sen, Gita, (1997), *Globalisation in the 21st Century*, The UvA Development Lecture delivered at the University of Amsterdam.
- 11) Meintjes, G., (1997), 'Human Rights Education as Empowerment: Reflection on Pedagogy', in *Blueprint for Social Justice*, Volume LI, No.3, Loyola University, New Orleans.