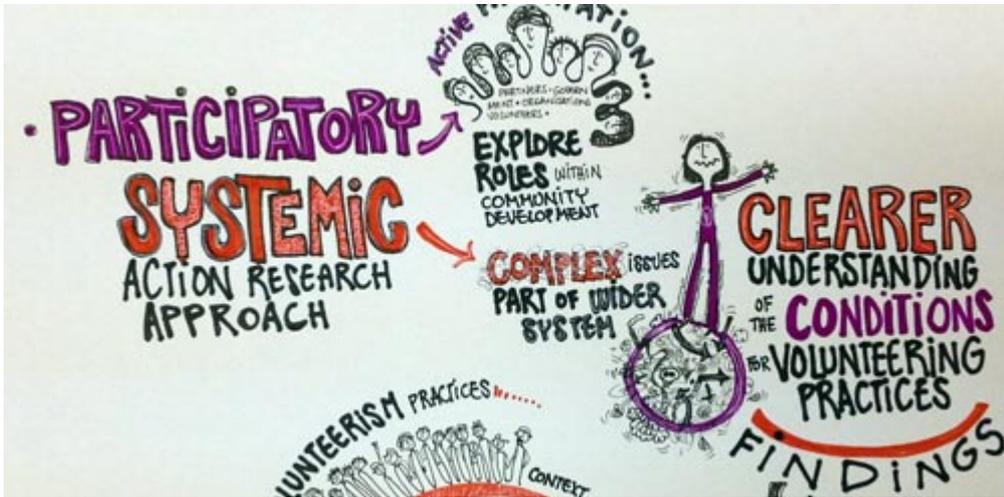


Social Issues and Grass Root Approach



By Acarya Vimalashananda Avadhuta

Samánam ejati iti samájah.

“Society is the collective movement of a group of individuals who have made a unanimous decision to move together towards a common goal.”

When the members of a society come to a unanimous decision, “We’ll move together, we’ll live together in good times or bad,” then their collective movement is known as Samaj or society. Some may have moved far ahead; some may have lagged behind. Some may be unable to walk due to pain in their legs. Some may have fallen on their faces. Those who do not even care to look after their companions trailing behind them are not worthy to be called members of society. **The proper thing is for all members of the society to move in unison; and while moving together, each member should feel a responsibility for every other member of society.** Those who are unable to move must be carried so that the rhythm of the collective movement remains unbroken. At present, we will have to look at everything in this world from the perspective of our solar system, even if we do not yet look at things from a cosmological perspective. We must move ahead, looking upon this solar system as one integral entity. But in the future, human beings from other planets and satellites will join our movement; we will have to build our society together with all. We will have to look upon this whole world as an integral entity. (Extracted from the Works of Shrii Prabhat

When we observe society of today it is obvious to observe several issues or crises taking place in the entire world. In order to confront them and come to reasonable solutions several approaches have been mastered. In this paper we wish to analyze a bottom-up approach which starts at the grass root level by bringing to light those issues or crises which are critically against the collective movement of the society.

For example: social inequality is a form of social injustice with brings suffering to parts of the society while benefitting a small portion of it. It is also called Exploitation. In the grass root approach people in the society protest against injustice and don't wait for solutions from the top to happen. They take active participation in the social dynamics and force the public attention to witness and eventually change the factor which determines such crisis.

Those who are aware of injustice are called to be part of the solution by leading the discussions and pointing in the right direction. Suppose for example that in a certain location there is a great number of people homeless. In the grass root approach those desperate voices are brought under the spotlight and those faces and names become the actor of change for bringing participatory progressive solutions.

The effort to empower change from the bottom is a key of success for the participatory approach and leads eventually to social projects which are bound to succeed in practical sphere.

Considering the steps of a grass root approach process we can consider:

1. First level - Issues or crisis
2. Second level - Panel discussion with competent actors sitting on the panel
3. Third level - Consolidation of the discussion among the leaders of the panels
4. Fourth level - Formulation of conclusions or resolutions addressing each issue
5. Fifth level - Formation of committees able to carry on the resolutions in form of social service projects

For example in Guatemala it is considered as a major crisis of endemic nature Children Malnutrition. Government has tried to set food programs receiving food and economic support from outside Guatemala. Local grass root agencies have achieved better result by involving the local population in producing nutritious crops like Moringa and Chipilin educating at the same time the people to incorporate those naturally protein rich foods in their traditional mais and beans diet. Overall the grass root approach seems to bring better and more economic result compared to other approaches.

While social issues looks to be better taken towards solution through a bottom up approach the general dissemination of ideas seems to benefit more from a top down hierarchical approach. It means that ideas of morality and spirituality which at the base of the solidarity of human society trickle down easily when the top leadership is spiritually oriented. Society seems to benefit most when both those two approaches are taken into account and coordinated. It means that spiritual people have to reach to the roots and assimilate firsthand the issues in order to catalyze solutions in the form of social projects and humanitarian endeavors.

In the Seminars and Retreats of Ananda Marga ideally both approaches are taken place and are integrated. The whole organization of Ananda Marga looks as if has been designed as a social service machine able to produce a maximum number of projects giving short term and long term solution to all problems. For example in the seminar system of Ananda Marga both spiritual and social topics are selected and propagated top down till the most remote corners of the world. As the ideas reach the grass roots issues are identified and the bottom up process starts according the the steps already delineated. Production of commodities for example is not profit oriented but carefully planned from the bottom and integrated as the plans are being consolidated and rationalized into carefully designed master plans.

Those master plans which are reflecting the needs of society from the roots can be implemented and coordinated in projects denominated Master Units. When a retreat or a Seminar of Ananda Marga takes place in a Master Unit location it becomes a perfect integrated modality of growth for the entire society.

In Ananda Marga the dynamics that regulates those two approaches , bottom - up and top - down vary according to time place and person. It means that we will never find a uniformity of implementation in one Master Unit as well as in any

social project of Ananda Marga. Such is the beauty of Ananda Marga as an ideal society based on spirituality and embedded in the inherent diversity of nature.

Suppose we consider another prominent issue in today society: immigration and displacement of population. Such humanitarian crisis cannot be left alone in the hands of political leaders which are not connected with the reality and the hearts and suffering of the people. Humanity is an integral entity made of a huge sentimental capital built upon the ages. Hopes and despairs of those people are the check and balances of society. Humanitarian efforts should be geared towards the increase of hope and the decrease of despair. In practical terms walls and discriminations at any level do not heal any wound. The compassionate effort to extend human help is what should be protected and safeguard. Such efforts know no borders and are the responsibility of all and not only of the international or national humanitarian agencies. Once again the grass root approach brings better solutions than imposed sanctions decided on the basis of geo-political considerations.

In conclusion society has a bright future when a proper understanding of its vital dynamics and relative approaches for its best expressions are considered fully. On the path of spirituality the love for each and every human being cannot be dissociated from the love for its Creator. It is the responsibility of every human being to take care and extend a helping hand to those who suffer without any discrimination. This is the scope, the breath and the beauty of human life.