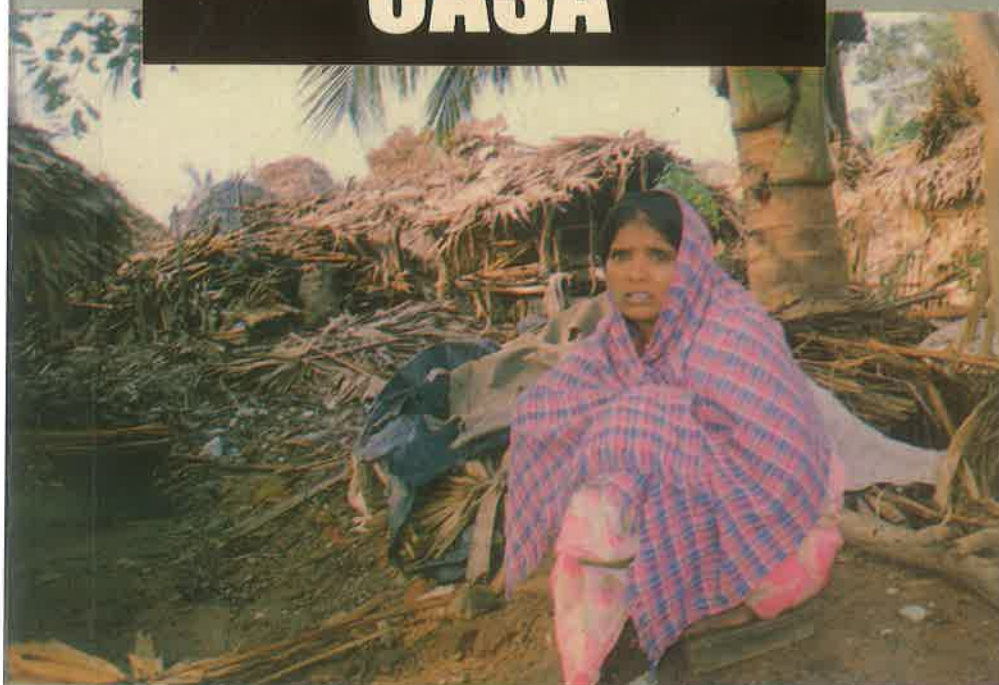


FROM
DESPAIR
TO
HOPE

**50 YEARS OF
CASA**



church's auxiliary for social action

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Typeset by Computer Prints, Delhi and printed
at Rashtra Rachna Offset Printing Press, Delhi

Acknowledgement

THIS book comes to you as a result of a series of interactions over a period of time. These exchanges had been at various levels, ranging from the grassroots to the leaderships not only within the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) but also within the churches concerned. As such, it contains experiences, reflections, observations and feedbacks which I could gather in the course of gathering material for this book. It is quite natural that I am indebted to a host of people and my acknowledgement will never be complete.

First of all, I gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the Director of CASA, Major J K Michael, and his staff, who were ever willing to answer all my queries, some of which might have been quite

irritating. Not only that, they gave me access to a lot of archival material and exposed me to some of their referral communities. It speaks volumes for the interest shown in the project that I could freely interact with the Director and the staff in spite of their time constraints. The senior staff like Mr Nirmal Singh, Administrative Officer, Mr R.R.P. Singh, Chief Projects Officer, Mr Jayant Kumar, Monitoring Officer, Mr Santosh Clare, Officer on Special Duty, and Ms Mridula Lawrence, Documentation Officer, had been particularly helpful in going through the manuscript and giving me their valuable suggestions.

My visit to the CASA projects in the South helped me immensely in the writing of this book. The visit would not have been a success without the co-operation of Mr Joseph P. John, Mr Jebasingh Simon, Mr Babu Thomas, Mr M. Martin Taylor, Ms Sheila Jones, Mr Sushant Aggarwal, Mr S.R.S. Selvin, Mr Prabhat Failbose and Rev. Robinson Levi.

Next, I am grateful to those people in the remote parts of India, especially the women who received me and were willing to talk to me about their experiences, about their communities and their dreams without any let or hindrance.

Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Darlena David, who supported me throughout my work. She had encouraged me to persevere, especially when the progress on the book seemed to have been stalled.

TITUS GEORGE

Foreword

FIFTY years is a long period in the life of an individual but a short one in the case of an organisation. It is shorter for a nation and almost inconsequential for a civilisation as old as India's. But that has not diminished the sense of joy Indians feel over the Golden Jubilee of India's Independence. For the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), it is a proud moment as the nation's Golden Jubilee synchronises with its own Golden Jubilee. The celebrations, therefore, acquire a deeper meaning for all those associated with it.

CASA owes its genesis to the Partition when the national borders saw a large movement of people from Pakistan to India and vice versa. Those who had been rendered refugees in their own country by a quirk of fate had virtually nothing to fall back upon. The number of the people, who had to be provided food, shelter and other bare necessities of life, was such that even the Government found itself unequal to the task. It was then that the

then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, appealed to the Christian community to take up the challenge of bringing succour to the displaced persons. The community took it up as a challenge. That sowed the seeds of a movement that has, over the years, grown into one of the largest non-governmental organisations in the country serving the poor and the dispossessed.

CASA no longer conforms to the stereotype image of a relief organisation that rushes to the scenes of calamity, distributes relief materials for a few days, whetting the appetite of the beneficiaries, returns to its headquarters and waits till disaster strikes at another place. For CASA, supply of relief material is just the beginning of an enduring relationship with the people concerned. From relief to development — that sums up 50 years of CASA when it interacted with millions of people throughout the length and breadth of the country. The hundreds of houses that CASA has built to provide a permanent alternative accommodation for those who had been rendered homeless in Maharashtra's earthquake-hit areas are a monument to CASA's metamorphosis. The permanent cyclone shelters that it has built all along the Andhra coast are yet another symbol of this transformation.

There is no doubt that the experience of the last 50 years will stand CASA in good stead as it enters a new phase in its growth, when it will have to tackle bigger challenges with greater finesse. The confidence that CASA has been able to instil in all those who have associated with it

during the last 50 years speaks volumes for its success in this regard. Needless to say, its constant endeavour has been to uphold Christian values in a totally secular mission. The ideal in its functioning as the church's auxiliary is to translate the church's commitment to social justice into a quantifiable reality. For those of us in CASA it is a matter of great satisfaction that it has succeeded to a large extent in living up to the ideals set by its founding fathers.

The intention here is not to claim that CASA has been free of blemishes. There have been occasions when we felt we could have done much better. Rather than lament over missed opportunities, we have tried to imbibe the right lessons from them and reorient ourselves. Of course, such a strategy has paid rich dividends. Small wonder that one thing that has been constant about CASA has been change.

It was rightfully felt that the Golden Jubilee was an ideal occasion to look back at the last 50 years and make an assessment of CASA's work. It was with this end in view that it was decided to commission this volume, not so much to gloat over the achievements as to put issues that concern the organisation in their proper perspective. I am sure the readers will find this book useful in making an assessment of CASA during the last 50 years.

J.K. MICHAEL

Director

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action

Introduction

THE Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) is celebrating its Golden Jubilee. Fifty years ago, during the Partition, CASA came into being as a spontaneous response to human suffering. When it was born, CASA turned out to be a channel for a lot of Christian youth to express their sense of commitment to the nation. That spontaneous beginning and the commitment of the youth took deep roots during the five decades and today, CASA has its reach throughout the length and breadth of the country. The five decades marked a quantum jump from an unknown entity serving the needs of the victims of Partition, to one of the largest relief and development agencies that brings succour to people in distress in any part of the country. It is a saga of

selfless service to society.

This book, first of all, is the history of CASA during the last 50 years. It has been a gradual growth from intervening in the crisis during the Partition to organising communities on social issues and facilitating their transformation. It was a growth from relief intervention to integrated development.

In this book I have tried to trace the growth of CASA in the context of two major factors. Since CASA has woven itself into the very fabric of society, I have looked at its growth in the wider context of socio-political developments in India. I have also tried to relate CASA's growth to the prevalent understanding of the Indian churches about the commitment they have to the society at large.

The first two chapters deal with the birth and growth of CASA during the last 50 years. Here, I have tried to dwell upon some of the significant events which influenced CASA's growth during its formative period. In the following chapters I have made an attempt to examine in detail these events.

Kokrajhar and Bogaigaon districts of western Assam constitute one of the least developed regions of the State, predominantly inhabited by the Bodos and the Santhals. The Santhals had started settling down in this region since 1850 to work in tea plantations and even now their main source of survival is these tea estates.

During 1996, there had been distrust among these communities and this turned out to be a major ethnic conflict. The government rehabili-

tated the Santhals in about 57 odd relief camps. However, the condition in these camps was quite disturbing. According to a few independent reports, in August 1996 there were about 24,000 children below the age of six in these camps. Half of them were under-nourished. Epidemics were frequently claiming the lives of people. Around a thousand people died in these relief camps by August that year.

The crisis in the rehabilitation camps was one of the emergency situations to which CASA responded in recent times. CASA's immediate response was to take care of the malnourished children in the relief camps. Simultaneously, it took up the responsibility of providing food, medicine and drinking water. By then the monsoon arrived in many parts of Assam and there was an acute need for sheltering these displaced people. CASA sensed the crisis and provided sheltering materials.

At times CASA considers disaster intervention as a stepping stone to a more lasting relationship with the affected people. CASA has a unique style, strategy and concept for its disaster interventions. The style, strategy and concepts are decided taking into account the dispossession of the disaster-struck communities and the availability of resources. In the third chapter I have looked at disaster intervention and relief involvement of CASA as its high watermark.

Poverty prevails in a society where there is unequal distribution of power and resources. A majority of the people is invariably dependent on

a powerful few for its sheer survival. The unjust distribution of resources would benefit those who control the social system. Ultimately, the majority of the population becomes incapable of controlling their own lives and destinies. The link between the economic and social forces is quite powerful when it comes to maintaining the unjust social structure. This link enables a few to own and dominate the sources of income. Thus those who have no access to income are often dehumanised and marginalised.

In the fourth chapter I have attempted an appraisal of CASA's strategy for creating self-reliance in the context of the social forces and power concentration which create an unjust social order.

The fight against dehumanisation through economic self-reliance is only a part of the solution. A radical change in the unjust social structure is necessary to transform society into a value-based entity. At the bottom of the unjust system lie the false values which create and maintain the structure. These false values need to be abolished before a community could transform the exploitative structures. To transform the social structure, the communities should be motivated to take control of the life and destiny of the people. This involves the participation of the marginalised and the dehumanised with a view to taking eventual control of the economic and social structures.

The fifth chapter talks about CASA's intervention in the social structure in order to facilitate an all-round transformation.

Finally, in the sixth and subsequent chapters I did an attempt to look at the implications of autonomy on the leadership of CASA.

This book is essentially a story of the people — their lives and experiences. Throughout, my constant endeavour has been to unearth the experiences of the common people in the remote villages who courageously stood for their own dignity and rights. These people knew their vulnerability and deliberately devised ways to withstand pressures of all kinds. They were the catalysts of social change who developed a critical understanding of their own situation. This book is about those people who were courageous enough to confront the social structure.

As is only to be expected, I have focused on the people's struggle for transformation and empowerment. Struggle and empowerment have by now become clichés. But what do these terms mean to women from the lower strata of society? I have spoken to women who could not ride a bicycle or thatch their houses because of harassment from the high caste men. What meaning do these women derive from terms like struggle and empowerment? In this book I have tried to look at these terms through the eyes of these women, not those of a city-bred theologian or sociologist that I may be. For them what is important is survival. And they struggle to survive with dignity.

This book is also about social change. The driving force behind social change is people's own judgement, initiative and creativity. Social change is a movement to build up a new value system

that answers the greatest and most urgent problems of society. Needless to say, the value system should not only reign in personal lives and relationships, but it should also be embedded in structures, systems and institutions.

There had been notable changes in CASA's philosophy of development; from being a relief agency to an organisation having a positive and sustainable approach towards community development. These changes created a sense of self-reliance and confidence in CASA's ability to intervene in emergencies and the freedom to engage in activities which call for its long-term presence.

What should concern us in the 50th year of CASA is how it can advantageously influence contemporary social issues and help in the restructuring of the Indian society. And what will be the nature of CASA's future commitment to reduce human suffering, abolish disparity, ignorance and injustice and build a new social structure? While these questions remain, I present this book as a tribute to CASA's 50 years of service to the marginalised in India.

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Chapter 1

Birth of CASA

THE Partition of India was the greatest crisis in Indian history. In spite of the jubilation over the birth of two independent countries — India and Pakistan — there were massive exchanges of displaced people from one country to the other. The exchange of these displaced persons between India and Pakistan had been traumatic and fearsome. Incidents of riots, arson and bloodshed seemed to spring up from everywhere. Fear and helplessness were writ large on every human face. Communal frenzy was running high among the people on the move and a rumour could like a wild fire, catch momentum at any time and wipe out human lives. The people who had been rendered refugees in their own country had to adapt themselves to the new situ-

ation. They had little to hold on.

The prime concern of those on the move was to save one's own life. The chaos and turmoil were so high that no one had the time even to rescue helpless children, trapped under those thousands of feet on the move. Calcutta and Bihar bore the brunt of the creation of East Pakistan. The communal killings in East Pakistan were swiftly retaliated in Calcutta and Bihar. In Delhi the rehabilitation camps would often witness sudden violent outburst of the displaced persons who went through the ordeal of brutal transition. Finally the Army had to be called in to take control.

Partition was the last thing Mahatma Gandhi would accept. He wanted India to remain one with its diversity. All these years different communities lived together in India. But when India was on the verge of being free from imperial domination, there came up serious differences among the communities. It was a setback to the freedom struggle. Gandhi found it painful to realise that the result of his struggle through the years had suddenly turned out to be a reason to divide communities. He could not accept that his struggle would culminate in riots and divisions.

For the Mahatma, the riots were only the manifestation of an inherent sin. When he took to fasting immediately before the Partition, he wanted to convey that it was sin to divide India. He was also concerned about the victims of the division. For Gandhi, Partition was a sin against the countless men and women who had been uprooted and

disillusioned. He was pained to see the hostility which the Partition created among the brothers who had until then lived as members of a large extended family. He keenly wanted to see them together. But he also knew that his dream was never to be fulfilled. The enmity had grown so deep.

The responsibility of the Indian Government during the Partition was enormous. It had to look after the safety of the people on the move and rehabilitate them. This meant, looking after them, feeding them, sheltering them and protecting them. Epidemics like cholera could break out any time and ravage through the rehabilitation camps. The government had the constraints of not only resources but also organisational capacity. The demand on it was so much that it opted to distribute its responsibility among different organisations. The churches in India came forward to share the responsibility with the government.

When the Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, invited the Christian community to share the responsibility of caring for the displaced persons, it did not come as a surprise. Although the churches understood its primary responsibility as spreading the Good News, it always responded to the needs of the society to which it belonged. The churches had committed themselves to challenging ignorance and disease and had been contributing to the increase of literacy, education and improvement of health. Besides, the churches

also launched welfare-oriented activities impelled in large measure by Christian compassion and obedience. The churches could mobilise resources from abroad for their welfare programmes through foreigners working with them. The government recognised the pioneering efforts of the churches and acknowledged it as the Christian concern for the upliftment of the poor people.

Independence was a time of transition for the churches in India. They were debating over their own future and their future mission. The Christian community thought that mission meant dealing with living situations. Hence, there was an awareness among the churches that Christian mission involved a commitment to the society. Each Christian had to be a socially responsive person. It called for social sensitivity which cannot be achieved in isolation. The churches also realised that fellowship among themselves was vital to sustain their responsibility towards the society. They wanted to enter into fellowship and unity with one another. Many church denominations came together to support their commitment to the society, realising that they have a common witness. With Independence the Indian churches also realised that they had to be self-dependent.

For many of the churches a tryst with the national Independence was an attempt to express their commitment to nation-building. They wanted to be a part of the patriotic movement which was sweeping through independent India. The movement had a greater influence on the Chris-

tian youth. They wanted to express their Christian commitment by being able to contribute to the welfare of the nation. Participation in the Independence movement and nation-building was seen as expressions of Christian faith.

Immediately after the Partition, the Christian youth community was eager to respond to the situation created by the painful vivisection of the country. This ideology attracted a large number of Christian youth to respond when CASA called for volunteers for relief work during the days preceding and following the Partition.

Relief was the need of the hour. For the churches in India, the Prime Minister's invitation was a breakthrough. The National Christian Council of India, a body representing the non-Catholic churches, came forward and formed a committee called the National Christian Council Relief Committee in September 1947. Immediately after its formation, the Committee started mobilising resources and volunteers. The response to the Committee's call for volunteers was overwhelming. People, especially medical professionals, left their regular job and joined the relief work. By the end of 1947, the NCC Relief Committee was in a position to mobilise assistance from other organisations like the Christian Medical Association of India, the Mennonite Central Committee and the Church World Service to take care of the refugees, many of them hospitalised and to rehabilitate them. The Committee started collecting relief materials and supplied them to the dis-

placed persons. The Indian Government recognised the National Christian Council Relief Committee to receive donations and relief supplies, both from home and abroad. This constituted a watershed in the history of CASA.

Towards the end of the Forties, the Indian society was going through rapid changes trying to settle down with the new environment created by the Partition. The churches were trying to respond to the rapid social challenges in India in order to clarify their responsibility towards political, economic and social changes. It was an attempt to look into the socio-cultural and political aspect of social development.

Although the impact of the Partition continued to haunt the government even at the end of the Forties, it had to shift its priorities and plan for the future of India. One of the significant developments on the planning front was the five year plan. Through the five year plans the government set its priorities and implemented them to make India a self-reliant nation.

In 1951 when the Indian Government initiated the First Five Year Plan, food production got the highest priority. The country was heavily dependent on foodgrains imported from abroad. Moreover, the Partition of India had created an economic crisis which the government sought to resolve through improvements in the methods of agriculture. As far as the government was concerned, an improved output in agriculture could ensure a balanced development. In the following

Five Year plans, the government planned to shift its priorities from agriculture to industry. Development programmes were oriented towards self-employment schemes and rural development through agriculture and agro-based industries. Hence, improvements in agriculture, especially food production, were expected not only to meet the immediate crisis but also to function as the foundation for all subsequent developments.

This was the time when the United States had a boom in foodgrains production and the foodgrain price in the world market was sliding down. The immediate reaction of the US Government was to buy the surplus foodgrains and dump them in the sea, while a lot of people in the newly independent nations were dying of starvation. However, in 1951 the United States changed its policy and decided to ship the surplus food to the needy countries. An agreement was signed between the Indian Government and the US Government in that year and foodgrains started reaching Indian ports.

This programme, called Public Law 480 Title I (PL 480 - I), was initially a government-to-government arrangement where no third party was involved. The Indian Government was directly importing food material from the United States. The payment had to be made in Indian currency. The advantage of paying in Indian Rupees was that the amount could be spent in India itself. During the second phase of the PL 480 programme, the US Government involved organisations like Ameri-

can Churches and Lutheran World Relief in the transaction. Recognised relief organisations like the National Christian Council Relief Committee took up distribution of the foodgrains in India. The Relief Committee built up a network of contact persons all over the country and these contact persons were responsible for the local distribution. Transportation of these materials in India was at the expense of the Indian Government. The Relief Committee had made the best use of the flow of food materials into India under PL 480. In 1951, when India was struggling to recover from the crisis of the Partition, the food materials from the United States were a great relief for those millions of people who were reeling under the impact of displacement and disaster.

There was another committee of the National Council of Churches, the Central Economic Life Committee, active at that time with the objective to "strengthen the social and economic welfare of churches". When the churches affiliated to the National Council of Churches started identifying their mission with the wider society, they realised that the Christian mission should not be limited to the welfare of the churches alone. At the same time, there was a rethinking among these churches on the relevance of having a mission exclusively in terms of welfare-oriented activities. Hence, the Central Economic Life Committee assumed an inclusive nature and merged with the National Council of Churches Relief Committee in 1955. The newly formed body was called the Committee

on Relief and Gifts Supplies (CORAGS).

The Sixties was called the first development decade, a decade which started with an overwhelming optimism and hope in the development of the Third World nations. It was generally felt that the transfer of capital and technical know-how, which had revived Europe until the Second World War, could now be extended to the Third World. This transfer of technological know-how would bring a similar economic growth to the developing countries. This development stressed on industrialisation and technological expertise. The introduction of sophisticated technology was expected to result in economic growth and greater employment opportunities. In short, the industrial revolution was expected to result in a social change.

While the Indian Government was all set to carry on with this wave of optimism, there was another massive exodus of displaced people from East Pakistan to Eastern and north-eastern India in early 1964. In many parts of West Bengal like Calcutta their arrival triggered fresh communal violence. In the north-east, the Garo Hills in Assam was one of the main regions where the refugees were concentrated. The Government of India rehabilitated them in 13 temporary camps.

This was the time when CORAGS was seriously considering ways and means to mobilise participation of the churches at the local level. The main thrust was to encourage the churches to assume a 'supervisory-cum-participatory' role at the local

level, in spite of their denominational affiliations. This meant that the local churches take up greater responsibility not only to share their resources but also to plan and implement CORAGS programmes.

Once again, CORAGS went into action when there was an influx of displaced persons from East Pakistan. It formed a committee in Assam with representation from the local church denominations. Forming the committee was an attempt to involve the local churches in relief work in their own region. The committee set up interim camps to provide food and medical assistance to those refugees en route to rehabilitation centres. The major task in these interim camps was to prevent the outbreak of epidemics.

By then CORAGS realised that providing relief is only an immediate response to the crisis. There should be something more in terms of rehabilitation and local participation. In March 1964 the field representatives of CORAGS met in Hyderabad and reviewed their performance, especially in the context of the recent crisis in Eastern and North-Eastern India. The main concern of this meeting was to consider the mission of the churches in serving the needs of the people irrespective of man-made barriers like religion, caste and politics. The service to human need should be the churches' expression of Christian love. Considering this nature of the Christian mission, the meeting went on to explore the organisational pattern of CORAGS in order to develop its future pro-

grammes. Co-operation with local churches was further emphasised both for 'participation on advisory level' and to share their resources. The idea of self-help came to the forefront at this stage. Self-help in its basic form was an attempt to help the beneficiaries to stand on their own legs. In other words, they were to be provided with implements and skills necessary to pursue a vocation of their own.

During the Sixties, relief and development work of the churches in India had undergone a significant change. This change could be attributed not only to the changing socio-economic situation in India but also to the church's understanding of its mission perspective in the prevailing context. There was a rapid change in the society because of the growing trends of industrialisation. The Third Five Year Plan had emphasised industrialisation and 'Machine-building capacity' as a means to reduce the disparity in wealth and income.

The main question that confronted the churches during this rapid industrialisation and urbanisation was, what was human dignity and Christian service in relation to the contemporary social reality? There was an attempt within the churches to define Christian mission in relation to the new phenomenon of industrialisation. Service was understood as actions directed against social "disease and injustice" as well as attempts to eradicate the cause of the social disease and injustice. It was directed towards the immediate

needs of the people. It also meant taking part in the formation of a social structure to restore human dignity. For the churches in India the era of 'assimilation' and 'apologetics' were long gone. There were attempts to articulate the church's response to that 'moment of history'.

In 1966, famine broke out in Bihar and lasted for about an year. Initially, the monsoon seemed to be evading the State. The last rain in Gaya district was in August 1966 and it played hide and seek until October next year. Whatever little moisture was left in the soil evaporated in the scorching heat of the sun. With all kinds of vegetation started drying up, survival became the main concern of the people. The landless among them could easily migrate to the nearest industrial areas or towns in search of job. The land-owning community was not ready for the move since it meant parting with their possessions. Initially, they tried to survive selling off their livestock and household items. But soon, they had either to sell or had to mortgage their land. In October that year, Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan initiated a voluntary movement to help the famine victims. He set up the Bihar Relief Committee. The Lok Nayak was also instrumental in assigning regional blocks to different voluntary agencies for relief activities.

By March 1966 itself, the National Council of Churches realised the imminence of a famine and invited Roman Catholic agencies and OXFAM for a consultation in Delhi. The consultation was

mainly to draw up a list of priorities that should guide relief assistance. The meeting formed a 'joint service agency' called Action for Food Production (AFPRO). This service agency was to promote food production and irrigation projects of church-related voluntary agencies. Being a department of the National Council of Churches in India, CORAGS was a member of AFPRO.

In the context of Bihar famine, there were attempts among the voluntary agencies and the government to mutually supplement their development and relief programmes. Over the first two decades of Independence, the Indian Government had been implementing programmes aimed at economic development. Although the significance of agriculture in food production was not undermined, development planning was oriented towards industrialisation. The government was keen to promote an economy centred around mechanisation in order to modernise India. 'Science and technology' came to the forefront as a means to support development and modernisation. The attempts to modernise India through industrialisation was the key to economic and political independence of India. Industrialisation was expected to be a 'campaign' against backwardness and an effort to strengthen Indian unity. The government felt that voluntary organisations had a vital role in this campaign against backwardness. While the government relied on technology to modernise India, it appealed to the voluntary organisations to motivate farmers to

make use of the 'fruits of technology'.

This appeal came to the open when in December 1966, AFPRO and CORAGS held a conference in Delhi, involving representatives from the government and other voluntary agencies. The government participants counted upon the voluntary agencies to equip the farmers with skills and to help them "take full advantage of science and technology". In short, they wanted help from the voluntary sector to transfer technology from "the lab to the land". The role of voluntary agencies for creating an environment of socio-economic development was once again reaffirmed. CORAGS and other participants from different AFPRO constituencies realised that voluntary agencies in India could no longer work in isolation but through mutual co-operation. There should be liaison between the 'project holders', the government, and the donor agencies. This liaison was expected to avoid duplication of projects and exchange of ideas and skills.

While the churches in India were reassessing the Christian responsibility in the contemporary society, CORAGS was trying to define the nature of its relationship with the churches. CORAGS' main concern was to understand the nature of the church's participation in the 'social responsibility' of CORAGS. Although the relief and development programmes of CORAGS were channelled through the local churches, there had been voices asking for a greater participation of the churches. CORAGS felt that money and material received

from abroad weakened to some extent the church's responsible participation.

This was evident when the Triennial Assembly of the National Council of Churches in India met in Shillong in October 1967. This meeting marked a milestone in the history of CORAGS. The participants assessed the past performance and the profile of CORAGS, especially in the light of the experience during the famine relief work in Bihar. They felt that community development is equally important to relief and it was time that CORAGS got a new outlook insofar as community development was concerned. The Assembly also realised that there was a greater need to interact with Indian churches and tap their resources and potentials, however limited they may be. This could be done through sensitising the churches on their responsibilities of supporting CORAGS. It was the interaction with the churches which made CORAGS different from other voluntary organisations. However, the nature of interaction between the churches and CORAGS required clarity and redefinition. This was a call to emphasise CORAGS as the 'church's expression' of social concern. The Assembly concluded with recommendations to change the Committee on Gift and Relief Supplies (CORAGS) into the Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action.

By 1970, the partners of the Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action became aware that there should be decentralisation and power distribution within the structure. They wanted the

Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action to reorganise itself and explore the possibilities for a wider networking in order to mobilise voluntary involvement from the churches and other church-related organisations. When the Executive Committee of the National Council of Churches in India met in Nagpur in 1970, the members were of the opinion that the Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action should consider the social situation in India and orient itself to "planned approaches on resource developments". The participants felt that the donor agencies were interested in specific projects. They were not bothered by the administrative costs. Since there had been no sustained effort to achieve self-reliance on the part of the Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action, they suggested a time-bound plan to achieve self-reliance.

As a result, the Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action went through a shift from 'relief to greater emphasis on rehabilitation and development'. For the first time, 'social change' figured in its development agenda. The Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action was expected to overcome barriers in development and initiate changes in its strategy for social change. The Agency realised that it was essential to address the society at its structural level. A sustained effort towards the formation of a society based on justice, peace and dignity of human kind was badly needed. This shift in emphasis, a shift from relief to development, was very much in the background when

the Christian Agency for Relief and Social Action was re-christened the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) in 1970.

In the following years there emerged a rethinking whether to continue CASA with its present structure. With the shift in strategy and objective, a movement towards autonomy was building up within the structure of CASA. This movement for autonomy called for a greater sense of accountability within CASA and an increase in its efficiency. The autonomy movement was aimed at providing clarity on CASA's role and helping it plan its long-term objectives.

In September 1973, the representatives of CASA and different church leaders met in Delhi to express their mutual expectations. If CASA was to be the auxiliary of the churches in India then the basic aim of CASA should be to help the churches become a 'caring community'. CASA's 'philosophy of operation' should be to 'rouse' the Indian churches to a deeper understanding of the need of caring for the whole community. The emphasis on 'care for the whole community' was significant while the churches at times expected CASA to aid only Christian communities.

The Delhi consultation wanted to 'help' CASA determine the nature of the churches' participation in the structure and programmes of CASA. It was proposed that all the committees of CASA should include representatives appointed by the member churches of the National Council of Churches in India. Further, regional church bod-

ies were to be established which would function as local units of CASA. They were to provide leadership and direction for the local-level functioning of CASA. CASA's field representatives were to work in consultation with these regional and local Christians councils. Wherever possible the Christian councils were to be allowed to draw up priorities for local relief and development. The regional Christian councils were urged to organise projects on behalf of CASA and budgets were allocated. The churches were asked to set up a portion of their budget for CASA's programmes and mobilise resources not only from Christians but also from the community as a whole.

Nineteen Seventy Four was the year when the movement for autonomy for CASA took a decisive turn. There were recommendations for constitutional changes to make CASA autonomous. One of the major areas of concern was defining the nature of relationship between the church and CASA. There were suggestions that before CASA became an autonomous body, the churches in India should be given a chance to define their role within CASA. The churches were called upon to 'own CASA'. At the third Annual General Body meeting of the Christian Service Agency in Madras in April 1974, Rev. Rolston insisted that the churches in India should 'adopt' CASA and call it 'their own auxiliary'.

Subsequent to this call to adopt CASA, various studies were made and discussions initiated at various levels. Church denominations were asked

to draft proposals for a viable constitution for CASA. By May 1974, it was clear that the churches in India were serious about 'adopting' CASA. In August 1974, the Executive Committee of the NCCI and the church representatives met in Madras. The participants were convinced that the churches in India will have a greater involvement within the structure of CASA. The Executive Committee decided to draw up a constitutional framework and a tentative structure for the new CASA. It sought comments from the churches on the nature of the development programmes, constitution, and involvement of the churches within the CASA structure.

Recommendations were made to register CASA as an autonomous body serving as an auxiliary of the churches. In March 1976, CASA became autonomous and was registered as a society with representatives from the member churches of the National Christian Council of Churches of India. The churches finally adopted CASA as "their own auxiliary for social action".

Chapter 2

Autonomy and After

AFTER CASA became autonomous, its first task had been to define its future orientation. Defining its future orientation involved, first of all, defining the nature of its relationship with the churches and, secondly, defining its future development thrust and strategies. Until the Seventies, the trend had been that "CASA kept giving because people were asking". With autonomy, CASA realised that there is more to social response than just giving. The society had the power to transform itself. The response of CASA could be in terms of enabling the people to realise their power and potential in their fullness. On the other hand, the role of the church in this participatory response was to enable the people

to realise their potential.

CASA had been directly interacting with various social situations. Hence, functioning as the auxiliary of the churches meant knowing the church's perception of the social situation and what response the church expected from CASA. On its part, CASA was concerned about how best it could assist the churches in a 'programme of action'. This concern was an attempt to link the mission understanding of the churches with the concept of development.

Until the early Seventies the churches' direct interaction with CASA had mainly been through participation in the relief programmes of CASA. CASA mobilised volunteers from the churches and Christian institutions for its relief activities and in some areas involved the churches as the local contact centres for organising relief activities. In the administration of CASA, the churches had an indirect involvement through the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). But with autonomy, CASA wanted the churches to play a greater role mainly because CASA's mandate was to function as the auxiliary of the churches in India. The churches wanted CASA to function as their instrument for realising social justice and development.

The Seventies was also the time when the churches in India were becoming increasingly concerned about the plight of the marginalised. The churches had been exploring ways and means to relate themselves to the struggling communi-

ties. The churches understood their mission in terms of struggles for 'economic justice and political freedom'. Hence, the church was keen to intervene and thereby become a tool for social justice.

The church in India understood its mission as an expression of its 'total being'. For the church, mission occurred in the context of a community. New communities needed to be created to respond to the structures of society. Christian mission was thereafter best accomplished within communities indigenous to the social situation. The churches were convinced that their mission was not limited to the Christians alone but it extended to the whole humanity. The churches could no longer be passive spectators of the pain, suffering and helplessness of the people. They must rise up and knock down the walls which separate people from people. Each individual member of the society deserved self-respect and dignity.

In early 1977, CASA held a National Consultation in Bangalore to consider the change of thrust in CASA's orientation. During the consultation, Metropolitan Paulose Mar Gregorios observed that very few people thought that CASA was an expression of Indian churches for the wider society. Many regarded CASA as a 'foreign-controlled enterprise' to strengthen the Christian communities in India. He suggested that CASA needed an emancipation through a shift from "financing projects to organising projects".

By this shift, he envisaged a greater participa-

tion of the youth from the churches in the decision-making process of CASA and in its network. The youth could participate in CASA's activities as 'catalysts' of social change.

The National consultation brought out recommendations to sensitise the churches and Christian organisations to promote CASA's development priorities. The sensitising effort was crucial for pursuing the participatory role of the churches and Christian organisations. CASA intended to help the churches to reflect on the exploitative nature of the present social structure and build up a network for carrying out common objective.

The building up of a network was based on the understanding that the church should be where the people of God were present. It was not confined to any walls or structures. The church must be congregations which reflect and consistently renew its mission. CASA was to involve the local congregation in translating its belief in God into community action for development.

CASA being the auxiliary of the churches had to identify with the marginalised and provide stewardship and extended solidarity. The constituent churches strongly emphasised that the church as a whole is interested in fostering total social and economic development of all human beings. CASA could be a common platform for development debate and a means for the church to identify with the struggling people regardless of their colour, creed or religion. Finally with autonomy, CASA became a forum for better 'ecumenical rela-

tionships'.

As CASA had clarified the nature of its relationship with the churches in India, it had to redefine its development objectives and strategy. This was the second consideration at the Bangalore Consultation. The question was not whether there should be a change in its objectives and strategy or not. Rather, what was the nature of change in society which CASA should strive for? So far, CASA had been responding to calamities and human displacement through its relief work. It was just a channel for receiving relief materials and transferring them to the designated people. Was CASA to continue with this or was there anything more in terms of sustainable social change?

In the past, CASA had taken up relief programmes in association with other voluntary organisations. During the past few decades many of these voluntary agencies had changed their priorities and entered into programmes for social change on long-term basis. Many of the donor agencies had switched their support to issue-oriented development projects. The challenge posed before CASA was whether to take up issue-oriented social change as its priority. This meant a shift from the programmes designed to carry out relief to programmes of socio-economic change. If there was to be a shift, what should be the guidelines for the new thrust in development?

The new thrust in development should, first of all, consider the orientation of the existing staff in

CASA. So far, the staff had been oriented towards relief and volunteers were mobilised mainly to meet the requirements during relief operations. The change in objective and strategy would mean that the staff, trained and skilled in relief work, be reoriented in order to internalise the changes. This would involve not only the regular staff of CASA but also the contact persons at grassroots level and the leaders of CASA-related churches.

As far as the consultation was concerned, CASA's development programmes should be with people's participation. This meant organising people in terms of justice and human dignity. The consultation emphasised on 'justice, self-reliance and economic growth' as the future thrust of CASA's development programmes. Development was understood as an effort directed towards the transformation of social structure to ensure social justice and self-reliance of the community. Development started with the social and cultural factors of human existence.

However, this did not mean a deviation from responding to emergencies like calamities and human displacement. Keeping the response to natural and man-made calamities as the main thrust and the 'entry point', CASA would intervene in the lives of people for sustainable social change.

Although, 'disaster response' was emphasised in the Bangalore Consultation, the ultimate concern of CASA was to be socio-economic change. This change was to be achieved through people's

participation for the transformation of the whole community. Further, the people's participation in planning and implementation of operations should lead to an overall social development. Immediately after gaining autonomy, CASA initiated attempts to build up closer contact with the people so that their participation became more important and meaningful. Even the response to crisis situations and relief operations was with the people's participation.

The year 1977 witnessed CASA adopting a new outlook. That was to enable the oppressed of the society to become self-reliant in order to earn their livelihood and to ensure their dignity. CASA decided to be in partnership with the marginalised and the neglected. It aimed to give them the hope of liberation. CASA wanted the establishment of a "participatory, self-reliant and just society". The programmes of CASA were to be oriented towards developing a better socio-economic structure of the community at large. This change in perspective helped in the gradual initiation of movements for social justice, self-reliance, rural reconstruction, education and leadership training. The stepping stone was, of course 'disaster intervention'. Relief was not to be an isolated measure but part of an overall strategy for social development. This was a three-phased programme involving relief, rehabilitation and development to change the social situation from "total dependence to total independence".

For CASA, people constituted the vital element

of development. It understood the role of people in terms of participation in the process of social change and development. The individuals and groups needed to inculcate a sense of participation in the decision-making process with a clear understanding that the consequences of the changes were bound to affect them. To help people reassess the goals and objectives, some of the hopes and expectations cherished in the society should be brought to the forefront. Hence, CASA affirmed that community affiliations were integral to 'realising the dreams' and reassessing the goals of the people.

Nineteen seventy seven was also the year when India was going through severe floods and cyclones. The sea coasts of Andhra Pradesh came under severe cyclone and tidal waves that claimed thousands of lives. CASA made a contact with the traumatised community through its relief operations and the subsequent rehabilitation programme. In the North, about 100 villages surrounding Delhi were in the throes of an unprecedented flood. CASA had to launch its relief activities from its newly acquired office building in the national Capital. There had been administrative changes within CASA as a result of autonomy. Moreover, there had been a change in leadership and a new Director had taken over. In spite of all these changes, CASA mobilised volunteers from local hospitals and other Christian institutions. A major immunisation drive was initiated in the rehabilitation camps.

With the dawn of 1980, CASA initiated a process of evaluation, reflection and experiment. Case studies were made and success and failures were assessed on the basis of CASA's influence on the society. The evaluations revealed that there had been failures on mobilising organised people's effort for shaping their own future. A Forward Plan was drawn up in consultation with the churches. The Forward Plan became the functional document of CASA to translate development into reality. According to the Forward Plan, the concept of development was the organised and planned activity of the people to influence "social distribution, status, power and resources". Development was redefined as an endeavour to establish a society which promoted human welfare and social justice. CASA emphasised that it should encourage creating awareness and motivation for organising people in order to claim their rights and seek their dignity.

At the same time, CASA was firm on its understanding that economic advancement alone would not have any long-term impact unless it was preconditioned with social development. The evaluations and consultations in the 80s reinforced that the activities and operations of CASA should lead people to achieve self-reliance and social justice. Hence, CASA's development attempts should take into account human needs in the context of community. This paved the way for CASA to initiate a significant programme aimed at sensitising the grassroots on their rights, which

was its Core Programme.

Even in the early eighties, there had not been much change in the general understanding of development among the government as well as a lot of voluntary organisations. They understood development mainly in terms of economic upliftment. Many of the programmes of economic upliftment were meant for the rural population. Ever since the implementation of the First Five Year Plan, the government had been initiating programmes for rural development. One of the major programmes was the Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) aimed at raising identified target groups of rural population above the poverty line. Resources were allocated to create opportunities of self-employment in the rural sector.

Very little of the resources meant for rural development did reach the target communities. Often, these communities did not have even information relating to the benefits available for their development. Moreover, the Integrated Rural Development Programme did not adequately involve people at the grassroots level either in planning or in implementation. In many places, the government had not even been directly interacting with the target communities. Hence, the government did not have the expertise or experience on the model of development which included people's participation.

On the other hand, CASA realised that unless the deprived people were organised for corporate

benefit, they will not be able to claim their rights. Therefore, a practical model of planning and implementation was necessary which included the participation of the people. In the early Eighties, CASA took up this challenge and decided to work with the people at the grassroots level in order to mobilise them for socio-economic causes. CASA initiated an Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) aimed at organising the people for their own participation in the programmes benefiting them. CASA's efforts were concentrated on awareness creation in order to initiate social and economical activities for corporate benefit.

By 1982, the Integrated Rural Development Programme was introduced throughout the four zones of CASA. Community organisers were selected and placed within each selected community. The community organisers, in turn, identified needy areas and educated people to participate in the planning and decision-making process. The community organiser was to be a catalyst, not only to disseminate information about various IRDP programmes of the government, but also to impart organisational skills to the community. Communities were organised to plan and implement projects all by themselves.

While CASA's Zonal office in Madras was busy with the Integrated Rural Development Programme, an interesting request reached it from the Kanyakumari diocese of the Church of South India. Many members of this diocese had been going through a financial crunch and their day-

to-day survival was threatened. They had pawned their Palm trees to local money lenders. The Palm trees had been their sole means of sustenance and whenever there was a financial crisis, the immediate reaction was to pawn one of the trees. The money lenders used to charge enormous compound interests. The Diocese sent a distress signal to the CASA office asking for financial assistance to redeem the trees.

The request put the CASA office in a dilemma. There was very little CASA could do in terms of monetary assistance. On the other hand, monetary help was not a guarantee that similar situations would not develop again. The monetary assistance, after all, would indirectly cater to the greed of the money lenders. Ironically, the Tamil Nādu Government had passed an ordinance, the Debt Relief Act, in December 1979 providing relief to the debtors who had borrowed from money lenders. The debtors were to apply to the Taluk Officer and if the Taluk Officer was convinced he could order that the money lender waive the claim on the pawned property.

The Southern Zone Office of CASA found out that this Act existed only in Government Gazettes. Therefore, CASA decided to make use of the Act. Procuring a copy of this Act was next to impossible. Finally, when they managed to locate two copies of this Act in the store room of a government office, they were in English. If the common people were to understand the Act, it had to be translated into Tamil. The CASA staff

managed to procure one of the copies and got the official permission to translate it into Tamil.

As the next step, CASA formed a network of people for information dissemination. That was the time when the university students were to participate in community beneficial programmes as part of their curriculum. CASA made copies of the translated Debt Relief Act and engaged students to educate the people about its various provisions.

While undertaking the Debt Relief Programme, CASA realised that much of the welfare programmes of the government did not reach the target communities. Moreover, whatever little of these programmes were attempted among the communities, they were not effectively implemented. Many of the people were not even aware of the benefits and programmes available to them.

On the other hand, ignorance and being unorganised prevented the people from claiming their rights. CASA realised that it was important that the target communities understood the decisions made at the bureaucratic level and availed of what was rightfully theirs. This was possible only through their organisational strength. In the act of claiming what was already allocated to them they became strong enough to influence the process by which social justice could take roots within the communities. This paved the way for the Parliament to the People Programme (PPP) in the Southern Zone.

During the early Eighties CASA found out that

though there were several other social laws like the Minimum Wages Act, the Anti-dowry Act and the Land Tenancy Act, which governments both at the centre and in states have passed, very little information had reached the people about these pieces of enabling legislation. Hence, CASA decided to bring these laws within the scope of the PPP. By 1982, this programme reached all other Zones of CASA under the name—Social Education Programme (SEP).

The central thrust of these programmes was to create a network for the dissemination of information on government legislation and bank schemes. Information on government welfare programmes and the people's rights and privileges under various laws were passed on to organised groups. The dissemination of information was to take place through training and through various media. The purpose was to assist the target communities in securing benefits in the form of resources or social upliftment through legislation. The information was to be used for the upliftment of the marginalised and the oppressed sector of the society. If the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Parliament to the People Programme — in the North this programme was known as Social Education Programme — were to be implemented among different communities and to be made relevant, CASA realised that it should initiate planning and training programmes. The Eighties saw the emergence of the Core Programme, combining planning, train-

ing, the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Parliament to the People Programme in the South and the Social Education Programme in the North. The Core Programme focused on the marginalised, who constitute the victims of social and economic injustice. The overall objective was to bring about social justice through social action and through awareness creation. The members of the target community were to be enabled to participate in their own development by organising themselves. Creation of self-reliance was the primary element of the Core Programme.

The PL 480 was another major concern. The PL 480 had been a relief-oriented programme and the main means of restoring community infrastructure in the disaster-struck areas. However, this programme, using food as an incentive to construct community assets, had its limitations. During the Eighties, CASA found it strenuous continuing the PL 480.

The restrictions imposed by USAID initiated a rethinking whether CASA should continue to be a channel of food from abroad. There have been suggestions from within CASA to discontinue the programme. Since the Seventies, there had been concern as to what extent the utilisation of food helped CASA for the greater task ahead. Can food alone bring out an infrastructural change within society? If food was to be used for the future activities of CASA, should the organisation rely on donors from abroad? Moreover, CASA became aware that the food materials were not going

directly to the poor. A lot of things meant for the poor were within the easy reach of the rich.

By the early Eighties, it became clear that this programme could not continue. There was no guarantee that the flow of food could be sustained and any moment the programme could be called off by USAID. Hence, the PL 480 could not be relied on as a steady and secure source of supply for sustaining relief projects.

PL 480 was not supplementing the new development emphasis of CASA on enhancing the capacity of the marginalised. In order to participate in the nation's growth and to bring about major structural changes in the society the marginalised should be enabled to develop their own resources and infrastructure. The free flow of foreign food did not seem to enable the participation of the poor for structural change. In 1982, CASA decided to discontinue PL 480.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the churches had discovered that Christian mission so far could not realise the dignity of men and women despite the church's existence in India over the centuries. They realised that their concern must be to enable the weak, the powerless and the voiceless to attain their objectives and solve their problems by themselves.

Many of the churches realised that their charitable programmes, in spite of meeting the immediate needs left the recipients dependent upon the programmes. This observation questioned the sustainability of such programmes. Even if chari-

table programmes were to continue, there was something unfitting about it in the contemporary social situation. Something more than charitable programmes was called for. In a world of change and shifting economic priorities such programmes could not be sustained. The church had to adopt programmes which enabled the powerless to be aware of their situation. And enable them to change their situation to relate itself to economic and social justice.

This was a significant development in the relationship between the churches and CASA. CASA realised that exploitation of the powerless could not be overcome by industrialisation and economic development. In fact, the economic changes only worsened the plight of the poor. The need of the hour was to assign power to the powerless as a manifestation of the people's aspiration. That is by awakening the people's awareness about their own transformation.

The Nineties exposed the churches to a decade of 'justice, peace and integrity of creation'. For the church this meant identifying the forces that destroy the environmental foundations of life. The churches sought to live in harmony with the creation and confront the 'principalities and powers' that oppose God's will for justice, peace and integrity of creation. They found expressions in social and economic systems that have divided humankind. These forces perpetuated deep divisions based on race, religion, colour and sex. In this 'system of injustice' the churches were called

to join the "powerless of the earth".

When translated to development terms, this meant working with people and social movements committed to cherish the earth. It was to resist all those who work against life and plunder the earth. This required uncovering the violence against 'justice, peace and ecological responsibility'. It called for an involvement in the transformation of the whole earth.

In the early 1990s, CASA realised that its commitment is not only to the marginalised and the downtrodden but also to the whole creation. It was a vision for the transformation of the whole created world "seeking to be in harmony" with the creation. It was identifying and confronting the forces that undermine the foundations of life.

While CASA focused its development strategy on people's transformation, it derived an orientation towards Organisational Development and Human Potential Development. And this orientation, equipped with the need to redefine its approach to the prevailing social reality helped CASA to derive its vision and mission. The mission and vision give directions to CASA's effort. They are the statements of ultimate goal, founded on CASA's day-to-day interventionary role. CASA's vision and mission contain an analysis of the past and a yardstick to measure its future course.

The Nineties have been a period when the movement for women's right got momentum. There was an increasing awareness among the women about the need to organise themselves for their

rights. The NGOs played a key role in mobilising the women. They emphasised on empowering women in terms of women's equality and participation in the decision-making process. By 1993, the Indian Government initiated programmes to work in partnership with the NGOs on women's rights. The partnership was aimed at mobilising women's contribution to sustainable development. There was a great thrust to see violence on women as violence on human rights. Simultaneously, the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution of India came into being. These amendments ushering in Panchayati Raj propelled women from domestic life to a public life. It laid considerable emphasis on social justice and economic development of women.

The constitutional amendments created a series of discussions within the church on equality for women. Some of the churches felt that the role and rights of women need to be recognised in a pluralistic society like that of India. The women in India, even within the churches had internalised that it is taboo to demand or even to speak about their rights. An 'all-enduring' woman had been idealised in the society. All this reinforced the oppression against women. The churches' understanding on the equality of women must aim at the structural causes of the Indian society which dehumanise the woman.

The constitutional amendments provided CASA an opportunity to work for women empowerment and aim for a gender sensitive society. CASA

realised that the prejudice and the increasing atrocities against women should be a reason to identify with them and assert their equal dignity. Corresponding to the movements to assert gender equality, CASA initiated strategies to transcend gender discrimination in its referral communities. These strategies involved promotion of women's groups, enhancing their awareness level, and developing their skills to deal with issues that were relevant to them. This meant bringing women's organisations into a network to express their solidarity with one another and to build up their resources. CASA believed that only women's solidarity would provide a continuation for a sustainable development process involving women. The solidarity would empower women and ensure their participation in a process of change for gender equality. CASA also tried to bring about gender sensitivity in an environment friendly process of action.

The visit of the Prime Minister of Denmark, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, on September 14, 1995, was an opportunity for CASA to reaffirm its priorities once again. While felicitating the Danish Prime Minister, the Director of CASA, Major J.K. Michael, emphasised that the most important element of CASA's commitment to society was relief intervention during disasters.

These interventions expressed the solidarity of the Indian churches with the victims of disaster. And this solidarity is beyond colour, creed or religion. The relief intervention facilitates a con-

tinuous interaction with the community and, sometimes, it initiates a process of reconstructing the communities. Over the years, CASA has become a 'people's movement', a movement which organises the people to take up the responsibility for their own transformation. CASA has been able to play its role in critical areas like environment and gender sensitivity. However, the basic thrust remains the same—disaster intervention.

By 1996, CASA once again redefined its strategy and concept for social commitment. The shift was aimed at the transformation of communities through empowerment. The new thrust was on issue-based approach to the empowerment of communities. This new thrust would encourage the communities to take up greater responsibilities in the development process. Through its new approach to development, CASA would enable the community organisations to take up local issues at macro level. In addition, CASA would continue to support human resource development programmes at the grassroots level through effective networking of village groups, assistance to attain economic self-dependency and constant impact assessment studies. This redefined approach to development constituted the basic thrust of CASA's New Forward Plan.

Chapter 3

Relief, A Stepping Stone

THE Church's Auxiliary for Social Action was born as a relief agency during the Partition of India, in the midst of widespread human suffering. The response of CASA to the human suffering was the result of co-ordination among different relief agencies. Resources, especially medicine, were successfully mobilised from abroad. Persons like Bishop J W Pickett of the Methodist Church was integral to the transfer of relief materials from abroad. However, many of these leaders had not seen the relevance of the National Christian Council Relief Committee beyond the crisis of Partition. When CASA was born as a spontaneous response to human suffering, very few of its founding fathers could foresee the

organisation becoming an integral part of Indian society. There were to be emergency situations in the future which called for CASA's relief involvement.

Immediately after the crisis of the Partition, there was an exodus of displaced persons from Tibet into India. The Indian Government received them and rehabilitated them mainly in the upper regions of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh and the then Mysore State.

Very few of these rehabilitation camps had the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the large number of displaced persons. Many of these camps had virtually no drinking water or education facilities. Added to that, many of the Tibetans had contracted TB and some of them were in an advanced stage of the disease. It was not a situation where the Relief Committee could withdraw after the initial rehabilitation work. In the years to come, the National Christian Council Relief Committee would take up these refugee camps as one of its major concerns. The concern remained until the early Sixties i.e., even after the formation of CORAGS. During this period, CORAGS developed a sustainable infrastructure within the camps.

The first major task of CORAGS was to make drinking water accessible through bore wells. In many of these refugee camps, it shared the concern of the Indian Government and opened day-care centres. Considering the unchecked spread of TB in many of these camps, CORAGS estab-

lished sanatoriums in addition to schools and vocational training institutions. Many of those trained in these vocational schools were employed in the rehabilitation camps itself, for example the girls trained in nursing took up their vocation in the sanatoriums in the camps.

In 1966, famine broke out in Bihar. By then a new organisation, Action for Food Production (AFPRO), was in place. AFPRO included partners like CORAGS and divided areas for relief work among its partners. CORAGS concentrated on Palamau and Gaya districts of Bihar and co-ordinated the entire Bihar relief programme from Gaya. In November that year, CORAGS converted the Latehar mission compound in Palamau into its sector office for relief work. The immediate response of CORAGS was to initiate programmes like Feed the Children Aid Project (FCAP) and to set up feeding centres. Mobile medical units were pressed into action to check the outbreak and spread of epidemics. This was a major operation that CORAGS had undertaken. For the first time, food was used as an incentive to develop community infrastructure. Under this programme called Food for Work, CASA employed people on various development projects. This programme was an attempt to encourage the communities to develop permanent remedies for famine, which, needless to say, is a frequent situation in that part of the country, notorious for its backwardness and where life is an endless struggle for survival.

The Food for Work Programme was an endeavour

to build infrastructure that would benefit the community. This endeavour was flexible in its output depending on the requirement of the villages. The output could be a well or a road. This programme ensured equal distribution of benefits for the people's labour. The Food for Work Programme benefited the landless and the marginalised groups who contributed their labour to develop community assets. In many senses, it was a path-breaking programme which fired the imagination of countless governmental and non-governmental agencies.

During its involvement in containing the rigours of the Bihar famine, CORAGS found a new identity in relation to other voluntary organisations which were active in Bihar. This identity brought to the forefront CORAGS' potential for interacting and co-operating with other agencies as well as with the government. CORAGS could also mobilise a significant number of volunteers for the famine relief and realised that it did not have to work in isolation. It was an uplifting experience.

In 1971, there was once again an influx of displaced persons, this time from East Pakistan as a result of the independence movement in Bangladesh. By then CORAGS had assumed the present name Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). The refugee influx from East Pakistan cast a heavy burden on the government. Thousands of people had to be rehabilitated. The means available with the government were inadequate. Even after fully tapping its resources, the

government found that it could not cope with the situation. It had to rely on voluntary agencies to fill the gap.

CASA's involvement with the relief and rehabilitation of the refugees started right from the border camps. It set up transit camps in West Bengal and Meghalaya, bordering East Pakistan. These camps offered initial relief for the refugees who had been braving heavy monsoon rains without sufficient cover. At these camps the refugees received supply, sufficient enough to support them as they journeyed to the rehabilitation camps. As a preventive measure, the refugees were also inoculated at the border camps against epidemics. CASA was also active in the rehabilitation camps. Once the refugees managed to reach the rehabilitation camps, CASA provided them materials for shelter, food and warm clothes.

It was a major operation and CASA had to network with organisations like the Salvation Army. Doctors and nurses from all over India volunteered to serve the refugees. It made CASA's task that much easier. CASA organised mobile medical teams and field hospitals with the assistance of these volunteers, whose only motto was to serve the needy. They did not seek power or pelf as they squared up to the challenge of providing succour to the displaced persons. There were times when the mobile teams had to attend to as many as 500 patients a day. The threat of epidemic outbreak made it necessary for CASA to initiate a mass immunisation programme at fre-

quent intervals. The volunteers too faced the threat of contracting diseases but that did not deter them from carrying with their mission in the fond belief that serving man is serving God.

Children and expectant women were the worst affected. There was a large number of malnourished children who were admitted to the field hospitals. The sheer number of such children forced CASA to organise nutrition programmes. The efforts of CASA to respond to human suffering and try to alleviate it as much as possible had its results. The CASA camps turned out to be the best and were selected to receive visiting dignitaries, both from India and abroad.

By 1977, momentous changes had taken place within CASA that determined its future course of action. CASA had become an autonomous body by then. However, it was a testing time for the persons at the helm of affairs. In northern India there was unprecedented floods. Heavy rain had caused massive loss of life and crops. Many villages were cut off, roads were breached and the only way to reach the affected people was by wading through neck-deep water. CASA's relief operations often suffered setbacks due to the shortage of boats and lack of access to the affected areas. Added to all this, there was a severe crunch of funds. Until then, CASA being a relief organisation mobilised funds only after the disaster struck. In fact, the availability of funds determined the nature of CASA's relief operations.

In the southern region, cyclone and tidal waves

were creating a disastrous situation. The coastal region of Andhra Pradesh was the worst hit. The disaster started with a drizzle and within a few hours water had immersed the whole region. High velocity storm, followed by heavy downpour, destroyed all the infrastructural facilities in the area. Breaches in irrigation tanks submerged hundreds of villages. Some of the survivors had waited for days together, expecting relief to reach them. Emergency relief could not reach many of them as they were isolated due to the breakdown of communication and transportation facilities.

CASA's operations on the Andhra coast was the first it had undertaken after it gained a measure of autonomy. Small wonder that this operation marked a turning point in the history of CASA. In 1978, CASA held an evaluation seminar at Vijayawada to evaluate the relief activities in the wake of the cyclone disaster in Andhra Pradesh. A lot of 'strategic modification' surfaced during the seminar, mainly in terms of response to disaster. The experience gained during the cyclone situation was the motivation for the 'strategic modification'. This seminar was the beginning of a series of improvement on disaster management and disaster preparedness of CASA in the years to come.

After the Vijayawada seminar, CASA realised, first of all, that cyclones were not disasters in themselves. They were only the agents of disaster, which affect the vulnerable. They only change a vulnerable condition, a condition of being

defenceless to cope with the stress and shock of the disaster. Secondly, for any disaster intervention in future, CASA should be conscious of how the people would cope with the harsh environment after the disaster.

Human misery does not end with a calamity. It usually marks the beginning of misfortune. Often, cyclones are followed by heavy rain and huge tidal waves that cause floods. Most loss of life during cyclone is due to drowning or collapse of structures. The rise in water level in the sea increases salinity in the surface water and it can cause considerable damages to topsoil and crops. The normal patterns of life are suddenly disrupted and people experience dislocation, suffering and, worse, threat to life. After a disaster, the social structure tends to disintegrate. There could be sporadic violence as people compete with one another for food and space. The public health system gets disrupted. Hygienic public utilities are scarce. All available open space being used for public utilities would lead to spread of communicable diseases. There would be an acute need for food, shelter, medical care and other necessities of life. Often, the situation transforms itself into a social crisis.

Cyclone, or any other form of disaster exposes the inherent inequalities within an economic or social system. Suddenly, the victims are faced with the struggle of coping with the aftermath of the disaster, building up life all over again. They are exposed to the conflicts within the society.

The impact of these conflicts depends upon the efficiency or inefficiency of the social mechanism to manage these conflicts. This would explain the way the community is organised. The most vulnerable in this conflict will be those people who do not have adequate access to resources. Their response to disaster and their struggle to rebuild life depend upon the nature of dislocation they had suffered as a result of the disaster.

After the evaluation seminar, CASA was convinced that disasters demand a response that is rapid and effective. As a result, it initiated a few significant changes in its strategy to carry out future relief operations. Initially, it was the formation of an emergency cell. The concept behind the emergency cell was that a group of specialised staff could handle the emergency arising out of a disaster. Until that time, whenever a disaster occurred, staff from all the zones were mobilised to meet the emergency. This affected the regular programmes of CASA. While reducing the work load of other staff when their colleagues were mobilised to meet the disaster, the cell would handle emergencies at the local level which would speed up the response. A core group was also formed as part of the emergency cell with staff trained in disaster management.

Decentralisation was the second major step CASA took after the evaluation seminar. Decentralisation — a step to distribute facilities and resources at local levels — helped CASA to set priorities at local levels and work with local

institutions. Starting with decentralisation, CASA took certain integral steps at the local level on disaster preparedness and response to the post-disaster plight of the people.

The decentralisation enabled a reliable flow of information that was essential for decision-making at local levels. With the unhindered flow of information, CASA could speed up the planning and implementation of programmes, making use of the expertise and knowledge available at the local level.

A few local institutions willing to associate with CASA in the event of calamity and institutions like the church formed a network which CASA could always draw upon in disaster response programmes. This networking has been a significant strategy when it came to disaster preparedness. This strategy involved planning for the swift mobilisation of personnel and material resources to the area of disaster, a decentralised response to disaster. Under this decentralised response, CASA organised a chain of warehouses in disaster-prone areas and pre-stocked emergency supplies like food articles, clothes and blankets. These pre-stocked relief materials could be mobilised at short notice when disaster struck.

Cyclone shelters were another innovation after 1977. CASA identified disaster-prone areas and constructed cyclone shelters considering mainly the poor infrastructure and the physical isolation of the community of the region. CASA consulted the disaster-prone community on the location of

the shelter and involved it in the decision-making. Once the shelters were in place, CASA started preparing the community to identify the priorities in the event of a cyclone and on the nature of evacuation.

Towards the end of the Seventies, there was a notable change in CASA from being a relief agency to having a positive approach to development, based on human needs. CASA was convinced that it was not enough to provide for immediate relief during disasters and then to rehabilitate the victims. It felt that relief activities could be linked with development. Hence, the strategy to face a calamity could be used to emerge into long-term development programmes. Disaster management and social development need not work in isolation. If a situation calls for it, CASA could combine its relief activities with development programmes.

In the adopted villages of coastal Andhra Pradesh, after the 1977 cyclone, CASA initiated a process of involving the communities in a three-phased development programme. During the first phase, CASA provided relief material to meet the immediate needs of the victims of the disaster. The second phase centred around rehabilitation activities and developing long-term infrastructures like houses, irrigation canals and roads. The third phase started in 1979. This phase consisted of integrated development programmes designed to promote lasting benefits in terms of economic and social self-reliance. The third phase was marked

for three main elements — community organisations, economic activities and common village programmes. Community organisations provided the entry points for most development activities in the villages adopted. These programmes were carried out through independent community organisations. By 1985, CASA expanded itself to new villages.

By then the Core Programme was in place. All the different components of the development programmes were brought under the Core Programme. Then the Core Programme was brought under the direct supervision of the Sanghams, the village-level community organisations.

These Sanghams were the local units for development activity, managed by elected members from the village. Each inhabitant of the village is a participant of the Sangham. The Sangham met at regular intervals, once in a fortnight or once in a month. During the subsequent disasters, these associations took charge of the post-disaster situation and co-ordinated relief programmes.

The Sanghams encouraged strong village-level leadership to come up. The new leadership was to represent the interest of the marginalised on a 'common economic basis' rather than on caste lines. Hence, the Sanghams became independent of dominant groups, who traditionally monopolised village affairs. In the subsequent years, the Sangham promoted a solidarity among the marginalised through a process of awareness-

building. When it came to resolving community disputes and redressing grievance, the Sanghams provided a forum.

During the mid-Eighties, inadequate rainfall had created a period of 'unusually prolonged' drought situation in many parts of the country. The weather pattern had undergone changes and there was inadequate cloud cover, exposing the earth to increased solar radiation. As a result, the soil lost its moisture content and, ultimately, the underground water evaporated rapidly. Sustenance of any form of life was difficult. There was scarcity of water for drinking and irrigation. And people started migrating to the cities. When the drought situations became acute, the government in some drought-hit states suspended irrigation for agriculture to provide water for drinking.

The drought situation in many parts of India motivated CASA to initiate the Water for Tomorrow programme to meet the drinking water scarcity in the drought-affected areas.

This was an 'action plan' to install hand pumps. These hand pumps were maintained by the drought-prone community itself. CASA trained local persons on the repair and maintenance of these pumps and provided them with tool kits.

Cyclone and tidal waves once again struck the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh on May 9, 1990. The Krishna Delta region, Guntur and Prakasham districts were the worst-hit regions. However, in spite of its greater intensity, the disaster resulted in less loss of lives compared to

the previous disaster. As soon as CASA received the cyclone warning, it formed a team to co-ordinate relief efforts.

Due to its geographical and climatic conditions, India is exposed to frequent natural calamities every year. Until recently, the popular belief has been that nothing can be done until a disaster strikes. However, immediately after the 1990 cyclone CASA realised that one did not have to wait until disaster struck to intervene. Communities prone to disaster could be prepared to face the crisis, taking into account the motivational and attitudinal capacity of the people. Some communities have adequate resources of their own to face a disaster. In situations where the community lacks resources and infrastructure, CASA could build up a community-based disaster preparedness, a process of reducing vulnerability and increasing the community's capacity to face disaster.

To minimise the impact of disaster, a community could be identified as being under potential threat of a natural calamity. Then, CASA could initiate a programme for disaster preparedness well before the calamity struck. This process involved the disaster-prone communities preparing themselves for future calamities.

Communities at risk are typically poor, socially disadvantaged, and live in unprotected low-lying areas. Concentration, density and distribution of population increase their vulnerability. Often, during disaster, the affected communities doubt

their own potential to face the crisis. CASA believes that if someone prepares the community to face disaster, "half the battle is won". CASA assists these vulnerable communities to articulate what disaster means to them. This process creates confidence and helps the community to become self-reliant. The communities identify local resources, capacities and facilities available to them when disaster strikes.

And then proceed towards instituting safeguards. These safeguards reflect the ways in which the community conceptualises its preparedness towards disaster mitigation.

The main element of disaster preparedness was the disaster mitigation programme. Disaster mitigation was designed to save lives and limit the amount of damage that might be caused by the event. It was a multi-phased process to lessen the impact of any disaster. With proper planning, most mitigation measures could be integrated with normal development activities with very little and, sometimes, with no additional cost. Mitigation plans were to strengthen the social structure of the communities and they were to be helped to develop coping mechanisms from within. These coping mechanisms would absorb the impact of disaster and promote rapid recovery.

People's participation was essential throughout the process of disaster preparedness. Their participation was voluntary since it was their need to anticipate disaster and be prepared. People were encouraged to organise themselves to face a com-

mon threat and problem. It was they who planned a course of action with minimum reliance on external resources. Emphasis on minimum reliance on external resources was not to deny any external assistance. External resources were available to supplement whatever was readily available within the community. However, disaster preparedness was not to force the community to part with its resources but to strengthen its capacity to meet a common threat. It was about building up the capacity of the communities to make use of available resources from within as well as provide them access to other resources. People's participation ensured a sensible and practical system of operation, suitable to the need of the vulnerable community.

Obviously, disaster preparedness involved training since its objective was to sensitise the people on a possible disaster. Ever since the Andhra disaster, CASA had been conducting frequent training programmes on disaster preparedness. The training programme involved CASA staff at various levels, the nominees from the churches, representatives of the disaster-prone communities and partner institutions. They were trained to identify the best method to intervene and the nature of intervention. The training improved local management of resources, response to emergencies and the knowledge of the communities on their capacities and vulnerabilities. The training programmes also enhanced access to information, experience and to knowledge from other

regions.

In the years to come, the community members who received disaster preparedness training through CASA were able to mobilise the community to take advance precautions. Everyone would know what was expected of them. The cyclone shelters were in place by then and the community took adequate care to keep the shelters ready. There was co-ordination between the community organisations and the CASA team for evacuation.

On September 30, 1993, an earthquake that measured 6.5 on Richter scale hit Latur in the south-eastern part of Maharashtra and left a trail of death and destruction. Consisting of a series of seven tremors, the earthquake devastated about 67 villages in the districts of Latur and Osmanabad.

CASA lost no time in responding to the disaster. Within minutes of hearing about the disaster, the entire disaster management process was initiated. An 'advance team' from its Western Zonal office reached the disaster-hit area. Immediately after that, staff from the headquarters as well as from the zones joined the advance team. They mobilised relief materials and ensured an effective and quick delivery of the materials. CASA wanted the relief materials to reach as many people as possible with as less time lapsed as possible.

The main criterion of CASA while selecting villages for relief work is their remoteness and socio-economic backwardness. In Maharashtra,

the damage in the remote areas was as extensive as in some of the easily accessible areas. CASA deliberately chose to reach villages that were remote and almost inaccessible while many relief agencies chose to provide relief to the most accessible areas. They unloaded relief material and returned satisfied that they had fulfilled their humanitarian responsibility. As an expression of solidarity and concern, CASA organised emergency programmes and relief intervention in 35 villages in Latur and Osmanabad districts of Maharashtra.

Initially CASA distributed cooked food to the victims of the quake. Simultaneously, relief materials were distributed and temporary shelters were provided. After a few days, CASA withdrew the distribution of cooked food and substituted it with 'dry ration'. Dry ration consisted of pulse and other ready-to-cook food items, taking into consideration the local food habits and customs. The rationale behind substituting cooked food with dry ration was that, first of all, dry ration would encourage the victims of disaster to move out of their 'stupor'. It would help them to get back to the "cycle of living". Secondly, dry ration would be the first step towards reducing the dependency of the victims on the relief agency. Over the years of its involvement with relief operations, CASA learned that if any relief agency kept on feeding the victims of disaster, that would greatly endanger the capacity of the people to independently manage their lives, especially after the

relief organisation withdrew from the scene. In any case, CASA's emphasis has always been on helping people to help themselves.

CASA's relief operations in Latur were greatly dependent upon the successful management of information. There was continuous flow of information on the disaster to the headquarters and a 'movement control' team in the headquarters managed the information flow. The team was constantly in touch with various sources of information and passed it on to the field staff to co-ordinate the overall relief operation. The funding agencies also greatly relied on the team for the latest situation on the disaster. All through the relief operation, CASA had been networking among different organisations who were specialists in different areas of relief work. This network supplemented CASA's relief activities.

CASA's relief operation in the disaster-struck areas of Latur was not a mechanical process. There was pain and despair writ large on every face. Death was the dominant theme of conversation even among the children though they did not know what it meant. CASA had to respond to it. However, CASA realised that despite the enormous experience it had in squaring up to natural calamities, it was not adequately equipped to handle the counselling aspect of a disaster. Until that time, CASA had attempted trauma-counselling at a few individual level. But suddenly when CASA was face to face with the unique situation, it realised that it could not overlook the need for

trauma-counselling. As an organisation engaged in disaster management it had to stress the need to develop a systematic way of trauma-counselling.

A crisis created by a disaster can become an opportunity for social change and development. The relief steps can lead to long-term community development. After the initial relief operation in Latur which lasted for about 40 days, came the next stage. CASA decided to use the relief operation to initiate a development process. That was the stage where CASA had to learn the aspirations and needs of the affected people and understand how they wanted to rebuild their lives. The CASA staff in the field sat with the people and discussed about their needs. The rapport CASA built up during its relief operations naturally came in handy.

At this stage, CASA offered its service to the Government of Maharashtra to rehabilitate the victims of the earthquake. The government initially allotted two villages, Ganjankheda and Ekondi Lohara. Later, CASA expanded its activities to villages like Sarni, Babalsur, Hipperga Sayyed and Balsur.

Rebuilding the houses got CASA's priority. The Maharashtra Housing and Development Authority (MAHDA) provided the plan for reconstructing the houses. CASA, in turn, consulted the Department of Earthquake Engineering, Roorkee University, and made necessary modifications in the plan. Then, CASA went back to the State Govern-

ment, got the plan approved and initiated the construction activities. Right from the beginning, people were involved in the construction of their houses. CASA encouraged them to contribute their assistance and labour.

This also marked the beginning of socio-economic reconstruction in the affected communities. Initially, CASA placed community organisers, drawn from local communities, in their own respective communities. The community organisers, in turn, started organising the community into people's organisations like Mahila Mandal and youth groups. On their part, the community organisers encouraged the people to identify their problem and come up with their own solutions.

The members of the people's organisations started discussing their basic needs and problems during their regular meetings. Various topics of interest such as their economic development, social problems, health and selection of beneficiaries for different programmes came up during these discussions.

In one of their meetings, the members of the Mahila Mandal at Ekondilohara village discussed the growing menace of alcoholism in their village. They decided to organise other local-level groups to fight against the social evils. They joined with the youth group and formulated an action plan to tackle the growth of liquor shops in the village. They marched to the district authorities and submitted a memorandum to close down the liquor shops.

The people's organisations would decide the beneficiaries of economic development programmes like goateries. Initially, CASA provided a pair of goats, male and female. The male goat became the collective property of the village while one person took the ownership of the female goat. The people's organisation decided who should get the benefits of subsequent offspring of the goats. Such programmes generated income while it also augmented the interaction within the community.

All through the process of development in the disaster-struck villages of Latur, CASA was conscious that the social change must come from within the community. If an outsider tries to introduce changes in a community, the community may not like the idea. On the other hand, if the community itself feels the need for a change, it would be an easier process. Hence, CASA emphasised on creating social awareness on the necessity for social change. CASA believed that social awareness could build up confidence among the villagers and help them to internalise the changes. Awareness creation was also essential for preparing the communities for any future disaster. Even during its development programmes with the disaster-struck communities, CASA had made conscious efforts to inculcate disaster preparedness. It realised that the people would feel less vulnerable if they were prepared to face the crisis.

CASA also believed that once the people have

reached a certain level, they would start thinking beyond the immediate necessities of life. And at that stage they would need to interact with other like-minded organisations for mutual empowerment. CASA facilitated interaction not only among the people's organisations within the community but also with similar organisations in the neighbourhood.

Today, CASA considers that the women in the villages of Latur had contributed substantially towards the success of its socio-economic programmes. They showed a greater response to the need to be self-dependent. This is no mean achievement. When CASA introduced what is known as the collective savings programme, the women took initiative and decided to rotate each month's collection among themselves by turn. Whenever they got together they would discuss the nature of change they wanted. Lately, issues like Panchayati Raj are engaging the attention of the members of the Mahila Mandals.

This is not to say that the socio-economic programmes had a smooth sailing. There were occasions when the people's organisations had to face caste and class conflicts. Overcoming the conflict had been a time-consuming process. But then CASA tried to explain to the people that the programmes were for the overall improvement of the community and they understood it as such.

In Babalsur village, a Dalit women was elected as the president of the Mahila Mandal. This antagonised the upper caste women and they

stayed away. The upper caste women wanted all the privileges and benefits that were available through the Mahila Mandal but were not prepared to accept the Dalit woman as the president. However, in the course of time, the high caste women realised that the Mahila Mandal was asserting itself, enabling its members to learn about their own rights and thereby empowering itself. They felt that they were left out and wanted to join back the Mahila Mandal. They put forward a condition that one of them be the president, if they were to join. The Mahila Mandal welcomed the high caste women but the members were firm that the Dalit woman would remain as the president. It was the triumph of social justice at the grassroots level.

In November 1996, a series of natural calamities swept through coastal Andhra Pradesh. The coastal region of East Godavari and the adjoining districts reeled under high velocity storm and torrential rain. This disaster was the worst in recent history. However, the damage was not as severe as when it was in 1977 or in 1990. Ever since 1977, CASA has built up a relationship with the victims of disaster, a relationship founded on mutual trust and learning. This relationship paved the way for preparing the communities to face the cyclone in 1996. In addition, CASA had constructed infrastructure like cyclone shelters. The usefulness of the shelters was never felt so whole-somely.

Information and communication were vital to



Inauguration of the Consultation on Communication in Emergencies.



The Director, CASA greets the Chairperson Dr (Mrs) M. Arole at the Workshop on South-South Cooperation. Rt. Rev. F.C. Jonathan, former Chairperson, looks on.



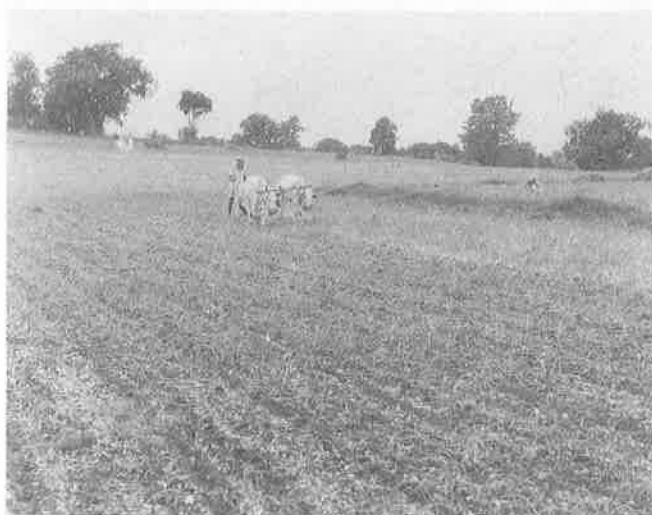
Feeding the hungry.
CASA's work with
Bangladesh refugees.



Refugees at Sealdah station cooking their meals.



New hope for the future. Earthquake resistant houses constructed in Latur.



Implementation of food security programme.



Mr Madan Lal Khurana, the then Chief Minister of Delhi, hands over a relief set to the flood victims in the presence of the CASA Director.



Life is not easy in desert area but effort is required . . .



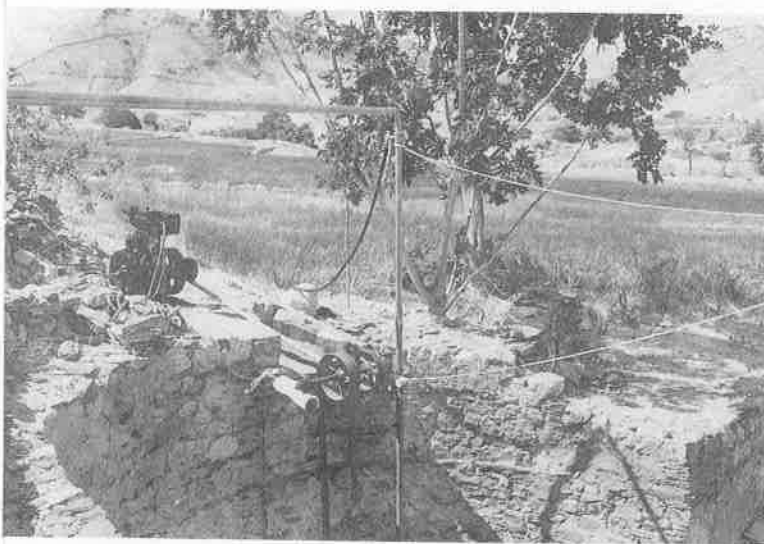
Relief material ready for despatch from a CASA godown.



Water for Tomorrow.



Self-determination of their destiny.



Ensuring food security at family and community level.



Developing community asset through participation—Food Security.



Non-formal education—Village Dumarchil.



Planning with People. CPDP Project—Littipara Health Survey by local volunteer.



A girl child demonstrates the benefits of a literacy programme.

limiting the impact of the calamity in 1996. The early warning system played a major role in reducing the loss of lives and property. Through this technology, the government had access to information on the movement of the cyclone. In 1996, CASA had made good use of the infrastructure available with the government to access information. People were no longer at the mercy of nature. With technology at their command, they could find out at precisely what time cyclone would strike. It was basically a question of disseminating the information to the people concerned so that they could move to safer places by the time tragedy struck them.

CASA did not pull out as soon as relief activities were over. CASA believed that it had a vital role to play, coping with critical phases of recovery after disaster. During the subsequent cyclones in coastal Andhra Pradesh after 1977, CASA was able to be swift and flexible in its response, especially since its staff were accustomed to the local situation. Both in 1990 and 1996, CASA's relief team could mobilise local resources since they were familiar with the referral community. Given these circumstances, CASA could continue in the area even after the government withdrew from the scene.

Disaster relief is the oldest and most important form of CASA's social intervention. Its priority during relief activities is to preserve human life and to reduce human suffering and hopelessness. This concern is without any religious, politi-

cal or caste bias. Today, CASA can identify and instantaneously react to potential disaster situation with maximum co-ordination.

Relief operations are seldom smooth. It requires diplomacy and tact. Occasionally, there have been times when people barely affected by the disaster, would organise themselves and castigate the CASA team for not providing them with relief materials. On one occasion, while enroute after distributing relief materials in an earthquake-affected village near Jabalpur, the relief team had to pass through a village less affected by the earthquake. The villagers challenged the relief team. Even though a few agencies had distributed relief materials in this village, they were in no mood to let the CASA team go. They felt that CASA was ignoring them and they blocked the only road. The officer in charge of the relief operation had to get down and reason with the village leader. It was not easy to convince the leader that CASA preferred to reach out to the most affected areas, known for their socio-economic backwardness. Finally, the village leader did realise the rationale of CASA's relief operation and let the team go.

Relief activities alone do not yield any long-range improvement in many of the disaster situations. The relief activities would only meet the immediate needs. In some cases, the victims of disaster should be led into the next stage, rehabilitation. Rehabilitation helps the victims to recover their means of sustenance, thereby putting them on the road to self-reliance. CASA's focus

during the rehabilitation process is to "restore the equilibrium" of life. During this stage, CASA initiates community-based activities to restore the local infrastructure and focus its attention on providing healthcare, sanitary facilities, semi-permanent dwellings, tools and so on.

Both in the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh and Latur, emergency relief and rehabilitation activities were the entry point for social change and to evolve sustainable development. At times, rehabilitation programmes lead to long-term development programmes for the planned development of the community. Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Latur were instances when CASA considered relief not an end in itself but a 'stepping stone' to foster economic and social development. It was a development process that built and sustained the capacity of the people to take charge of their own affairs.

Chapter 4

Towards Self-Reliance

AFTER the Second World War when several countries in the South emerged out of colonial rule they realised that their infrastructure and means of sustenance were far below average. However, the presence of Christian missionaries made some difference. In many of these countries there had been Christian missionaries who contributed considerably towards laying some kind of foundation for the sustenance of these countries, especially in education and healthcare. The missionaries had been working with common people, establishing educational and health institutions which, in turn, created a large number of educated people. In India these educated people were to take up the responsibili-

ties of nation-building during the years after Independence.

In India many of these English-educated formed part of the bureaucracy. After Independence when the main concern was nation-rebuilding the bureaucracy was geared towards economic development. The emphasis was on technological advance. It was an attempt to copy the technological expertise of the Northern hemisphere believing that it would bring economic growth, the vital ingredient for nation-building and development. Copying Western technology had not been an easy task. The West had been putting tremendous pressure on the developing countries to promote their economic and political interests. Technological transfer was the bait the Western countries used to put the developing countries in line.

On the other hand, right from Independence there had been small groups among the English-educated who were sensitive to the issues involved in development. They believed that development should be made humane and it should aim at enabling the people to take their own decisions that concern their life and community. As far as these groups were concerned 'economic independence' formed only a part of development and development should be addressed with equal emphasis on the social aspect of human existence. This paved the way for a critical approach to development concepts and strategies. All through the history of development activities in India, this critical approach was to stay as the yardstick for

various development approaches.

This critical approach to development came to the forefront during the Seventies. A lot of people's organisations sprang up with sharp criticism of some of the conventional concepts of development. These organisations were critical that the economic programmes of development so far were activities carried out in isolation. They wanted a more integrated approach to development since development was not mere economic growth. They emphasised that 'social change' must begin with a structural analysis of the society; an analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural situations of the society. Mobilising human resources and awareness building were essential in this analysis. These organisations considered development as a movement, a process and a partnership with marginalised communities.

While presenting his annual report of 1995-96 the Director of CASA, Major J.K. Michael, emphasised that over the years CASA's understanding of development has undergone considerable changes. The societal realities and the adaptability of development concepts and strategies were the main factors that promoted the changes. As far as CASA was concerned development concepts and strategies could not remain static. They needed defining and redefining in relation to shifting priorities in the socio-economic spheres of society. An integrated approach to development and an emphasis on critically analysing the social structure have been the un-

dercurrent of CASA's development approach since the Seventies.

During the Seventies, while CASA was developing its strategies to face calamities, it was also laying the foundations to launch long-term development programmes in the disaster struck communities. In 1977, thanks to the new leadership CASA took a few major steps which triggered a 'movement' in development. It was a smooth transition from "relief orientation to development orientation". CASA understood development as a process which involved organising the people so that they could work towards self-reliance. Development turned out to be a people-centred process; a process to empower the people to master their life and destiny. Ultimately, the process culminated in reducing the gaps between the haves and the have-nots, facilitated a power decentralisation and a change in the status quo. This was an integrated approach to development process considering the different dimensions of human existence.

The changed outlook emphasised on people orientation and social action. CASA realised that the people provided CASA the objectives and these objectives should be achieved with people's participation. The new role of CASA was to be an 'enabler' and 'people-centredness' was essential for developing resources at the local level and to form people's groups. CASA wanted the people to know that it was a partner with them for their own development. The basic philosophy was to

encourage the grassroots to involve themselves in their development. When the starting point of development became the people, the CASA-referral community relationship got rooted to the realities of the society.

The transition from relief to development enabled CASA to initiate a more intensive process of development among the rural poor. Since development meant people achieving their own self-reliance through their own organisations, the past of the community was vital to sustainable development. The past of the community was not to be completely obliterated. When CASA assumed the responsibility to form people's organisations, it wanted to sustain these organisations on their old foundations. But these organisations were with a new outlook towards their present social situation. They were to acquire the capacity and confidence to deal with the root causes of their marginalisation and address these issues in relation to their future. CASA encouraged these people's organisations to analyse their present situation and plan appropriate actions to change their present condition. The programmes of action should be effective and meaningful. This was the starting point of an integrated development with the participation of the community in decision-making, planning and implementation.

Now that the development outlook had been changed to one centred on people, it was necessary to orient the staff as well as the partners on the enabler role of CASA for people-centred deve-

lopment. The staff and the partners were to be 'enabled' to internalise the new changes in development concepts and strategies within CASA. Through this orientation of the staff and the partners, CASA intended to develop new expertise and adopt new operational strategies. As a result, an in-service training programme was initiated involving CASA staff, representatives of people groups and leaders from the churches.

The main aim of the programme was to achieve resource development. Resource development was understood as a process of acquiring knowledge, skills and experience. It meant an investment in human beings. CASA understood resource development as a creative and productive process involving both the organisation and the grassroots. CASA invited resource persons from other voluntary organisations, the churches and the government. During the process there was an unhindered free flow of information.

Chapter 5

Vision and Mission

ON December 13, 1979, the Tamil Nadu Government passed an ordinance, the Debt Relief Act. That was the time when the money lenders used to take whatever precious little capital the poor people had; even a 'thali' in return for some money. The money was lent on compound interest. One of the conditions of lending money was that if the material was not redeemed within six months, it would be auctioned to retrieve the money. After six months of pawning, the money lender would send a notice to the person who pawned the material. The person who bonded the material, often, would not have enough money to redeem the material since redeeming it would involve a huge amount.

The money lenders are an organised group even today. Whenever one money lender wants to auction something the bidder would be his colleague, another money lender. The auction would be a mock exercise with no money paid to the auctioneer or any material went to the bidder.

But it appears in the money lender's record that there was an auction. The 'auctioned' material would remain with the money lender and the person who pawned the material would never be able to redeem it. When the Debt Relief Act was passed, about two million people were expected to be freed from the slavery created by the money lenders. CASA acquired a copy of the Act, translated it into the regional language and involved students to sensitise the potential beneficiaries. For CASA this was the beginning of a programme which brought substantial changes in the society.

CASA's involvement in the Debt Relief Programme brought to light a few significant elements. If people were to get the benefits to which they were entitled, they had to organise themselves. There were legislations like the Contract Labour Act and the Fair Rent for Share Croppers Act which could directly influence the people's life. Many of these benefits went unclaimed. The people had to organise to claim what they deserved. CASA realised that the people had to form their own local organisations in order to claim development assistance.

Secondly, if the people were to organise, they needed to be aware of their rights and privileges.

Many at the grassroots level did not have access to information which can influence their day-to-day life. Hence, access to information was vital for people's organisation. Finally, only voluntary organisations like CASA had the experience, infrastructure and access to the grassroots to organise the people. As a result, in the early Eighties, CASA decided to take "Parliament to the people".

The Parliament to the People Programme (PPP) spread to the other zones of CASA with a different name, the Social Education Programme (SEP). CASA wanted to use the Parliament to the People Programme, on the one hand, to sensitise the people on the social justice they were entitled to under different parliamentary legislation. On the other hand, the programmes meant to give meaning to the legislation and schemes by organising the people to claim what they were entitled to. CASA wanted the people to be aware of the laws and organise themselves to enforce the implementation of these laws.

It is not only that the people should know about government Acts and schemes but also benefit from them. Hence, the Parliament to the people and social education programmes, in essence, were to prepare the people to demand their rights and privileges and to make these rights and privileges available to them. Through these programmes, CASA ventured into sensitising the referral community on the monetary assistance available through the government and non-gov-

ernment organisations. On the other hand, CASA itself initiated programmes to lead the community to economic independence. CASA wanted economic independence to become a way of life for the growth and prosperity of its referral communities.

The Parliament to the people and social education programmes triggered a process of social action among the unorganised communities. These communities were sensitised on their rights and privileges. CASA organised these communities with the help of volunteers, drawn from the community itself and trained them to form people's organisations around issues. This process assumed that increased awareness and knowledge would lead to socio-political action and to the maximum use of the ordinances and Acts. The spread of the programme was so speedy that in less than four years the programme reached as far as Kashipur village in Orissa.

Kashipur is a village of moderate size. Unlike its counterparts in the Eighties, Kashipur was not dependent on agriculture for its survival. Many of its inhabitants had a regular income through a steady job. A spinning mill a few kilometres away made all the differences. Majority of the villagefolk worked in the mill as labourers.

Although the mill provided them with regular income and an ongoing job, the labourers were paid less than what the government fixed as the minimum wages. The government fixed Rs.14 as the minimum wages while these labourers were

paid less than Rs. 8. Many of the labourers were aware of this under-payment. However, they were prepared to work for whatever they got as wages since it was more reliable than agricultural labour. For them having eight rupees was better than starving with no income.

However, things took a dramatic turn when CASA entered Kashipur with its social education programme. Through this programme, many of the villagers became aware that it is their right to demand minimum wages. But, they were not prepared to demand for it for fear of losing their sole means of sustenance. If they demanded minimum wages, the management of the spinning mill would terminate their jobs. Their families would starve and the men would be forced to migrate to the nearest city in search of job.

It was not until 1984 that the social education programme managed to make some breakthrough. In March that year a village committee was formed. The members of the committee went to the Managing Director of the spinning mill to negotiate minimum wages. The Managing Director was in no mood to entertain the committee members. These labourers were no match to his powerful connections in political and bureaucratic circles.

When the village committee realised that the Managing Director had ignored them, they went to the District Collector, the Labour Officer and the Director of Textiles. The District Collector and the other officers called a tripartite meeting involving the representatives of the labourers, the

mill management and the government officials. However, even the tripartite meeting could not persuade the mill management to provide the labourers what they deserved.

The labourers were pushed to the wall. They went on strike and all the work in the mill came to a standstill. Initially, the mill management adopted a 'wait and watch' tactic since it knew that the labourers would crumble under the pressure of starvation. When this did not work, the management declared that the strike was illegal. There were odd cases of workers going back to the mill with whatever the management offered as wages. The labourers found it a real strain to hold on to their solidarity. Finally, a compromise had to be reached with the mill management. The workers got far more than what the management gave them as wages before the strike but not as much as the minimum wages fixed by the government.

Chapter 6

IRDP — A Turning Point

THE Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) is one of the earliest initiatives of the government for rural development. But, when the government started implementing the programme it had not taken into account the experience of the referral communities. Hence, the community had little participation in the planning and implementation of this programme which was meant for their development. Many of these communities were not even aware of some of the benefits available under IRDP. Even if one had the information, availing of its benefits was not easy. It involved time, influence and 'bribing'. Moreover, the resources for the programme trickled down through a series of

layers and finally when they reached the community, a considerable portion of the resources were lost.

On the other hand, CASA realised that any programme for economic and social development should take into account the experience and dreams of the people. This meant introduction of income generation projects in order to promote a greater people participation in development projects. People participation, in turn, would enable the people to organise themselves around economic issues and be self-reliant. The outcome of these discussions was that CASA launched an Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) with a difference.

The prime concern of CASA under the integrated rural development programme was to enable the communities to form their own organisations. These organisations were to plan and implement their own activities for their overall development. CASA enabled the people's organisation first of all to develop their own strategies for the maximum participation of the community members. Secondly, to mobilise resources available within the community which included generating local resources for the future sustainability of development programmes. In the end, CASA expected the people to manage their own organisations.

Communities developing their strategies and gaining access to resources needs inputs. Since it is the people who would benefit from the changes

in the socio-economic system, CASA emphasised on the significance of community-level planning. Planning involved, initially, a survey of the situation of the communities which was followed by discussions on the limits and implications of launching an action plan.

Planning also involved an assessment of the needs of the communities and setting the priorities. While doing this, CASA considered the needs in relation to the resources available at the local level. This called for the allocation and distribution of resources among the needy in order to ensure maximum use of the resources. Through this process of planning, CASA sought to achieve the goals and objectives of the communities through inculcating a sense of independence within the communities.

Planning calls for an assessment of the objectives and priorities at frequent intervals. CASA does this through periodically reporting, monitoring and evaluating the importance of the planned objectives. The periodic assessment would further lead to refining the process of implementation of the plan. CASA continues this until such time as the objectives have been achieved.

CASA has managed to transfer its concepts and strategies on planning and mobilising resources successfully to the local level. The tribal villages of Arkosha and Saranghatu in Lohardagga district of Bihar are two examples. This area is predominantly an Oraon tribal belt. Towards the end of the Seventies the Irrigation Department of Bihar

had sanctioned two minor irrigation projects in these villages. But even after a few years, the projects were not implemented.

The Social Education Programme of CASA had taken roots in these villages by the beginning of the Eighties. In June 1983 the villagers formed a Central Committee and started discussing the pending irrigation project. The committee decided to send a delegation to the Sub-Divisional Office (SDO). However, the officer was not interested in the project. He started blaming the other departments like the Electricity Department. On their part, the officers in the Electricity department were digging up new reasons for not taking up the project each time the delegation went to them. Finally, the villagers decided to bring the concerned government officers to their village and meet the people. This was an 'abnormal' decision because there was no way one could persuade a government officer to visit the village unless the officer is convinced of some extra benefits.

The village committee managed to gain access to the Deputy Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner promised them that their demands would be considered. Within five days the Deputy Commissioner brought the SDO to the villages and in the presence of the villagers he instructed the SDO to take up the pending project.

When one talks about economic self-reliance, one should also consider access to economic resources with accountability. Often, monetary assistance programmes turn out to be a one-way

flow with no commitment expected from any of the partners involved. While this had been the trend, CASA wanted the people to understand that if they were to be made economically independent, there should be mutual accountability and co-operation. While keeping mutual accountability and co-operation as the essential principle, CASA went on to educate the people and their leaders on the various economic resources available to them.

This involved a training process which emphasised, on the one hand, the need to raise a critical consciousness among the disadvantaged sectors of society about socio-economic issues. On the other hand, the training was aimed to develop people's knowledge and skills to mobilise resources. Ultimately, the people should be able to express their organised power to establish their rights and privileges. For that, the people should reflect on social issues and to work for the establishment of a just society. CASA believed that the leaders at the grassroots level can play a significant role to enable the people for their own empowerment. An important strategy of CASA's training programmes was to develop the leadership available at various levels for social action. CASA identified potential leaders and trained them in various leadership skills. These skills were essential to form and effectively manage people's organisations.

CASA wanted the 'community leaders' to understand the nature of their own exploitation and

bring about necessary changes. The leaders can bring about transformation only through collective and organised effort. Hence, these leaders are 'one step closer' to the community to help them overcome exploitation and transform themselves through collective effort. These leaders were to help the people to assign their priorities, evolve plans, and take course of actions to bring about the desired change.

The training was a process of equipping a number of key figures from the community with skills, knowledge and experience which were essential for development. It meant imparting skills to grassroot-level leaders so that they could educate and organise people, communicate information and liaison between the people and institutions; both government and non-government institutions. The process equipped the leaders of the community with development skills, plan and strategies to fight poverty.

CASA has enabled the marginalised among the rural communities to initiate a more intensive process for their own development. The people's organisations were empowered for achieving self-reliance. As a result, a number of village-level organisations were formed and they acquired the capacity to deal with the root causes of social disparity. When people became self-reliant and independent, they created a new physical environment. The changed environment had a direct bearing on the people's attitude and motivation. While effecting these changes CASA realised that

the People to Parliament Programme or the Social Education Programme, the Integrated Rural Development Programme and Planning and Training could not be taken in isolation. They were mutually supplementing. Hence, CASA brought these programmes together under a single programme called the Core Programme.

One of the main contributions of CASA during the Eighties was the Core Programme. The Core Programme provided opportunities and participation at the grassroots level and created a sense of responsibility among them to participate in their own development. The Core Programme was the sign of the paradigm shift in development. So far, development was seen as an outside intervention. Some development agency would initiate a process that the agency thought would be useful to the community. The Core Programme was a deviation from this stereotype. CASA assumed the role of an 'enabler' rather than an initiator and encouraged people to initiate the process of their own development. While enabling new projects and organising the people to assert their rights and privileges, CASA emphasised that development was 'people's business'. The thrust was to enable the people to take over the development process as quickly as possible.

Community-based economic activities through CASA's Core Programme ensured that the economic growth of the communities kept pace with their social development. In the process, CASA helped people inculcate not only a critical con-

sciousness of the social reality but also a positive self-consciousness. This was to enable them to bring about a structural change in their situation; achieved through the organised effort of the community. Hence, development was understood as a process carried out by the members of a community to eradicate the causes of 'misery and deprivation'. The skills and attitudes that the people acquired through planning, training and motivation determined the future of their development. Today, in the villages where CASA works, people know their rights and their priorities and they are aware of their strengths and constraints. Having become the catalysts of their own change, people know that their dignity and existence depend upon their collective strength.

Since social action is the objective of the Core Programme, it requires a social awareness which touches the people directly. If people at the grassroots are to interpret, understand and critically analyse their situation and the social reality, they need to have access to information.

Information is power and it enables people to form their world view. The village-level organisations collect all facts relevant to the society, analyse and interpret them in order to create social awareness at the grassroots level. The process of awareness-creation enables the community to perceive and strive to transcend its social disabilities. In the process, there forms a new consciousness within a community. They know what they are, and they realise what they can be.

An awareness-creation strategy helps to form their solidarity around issues like exploitation and helps the community to achieve a better quality of life. The process of bringing solidarity among the marginalised is dependent to a great deal on motivating them and mobilising their opinion.

During the Eighties, CASA provided the village-level organisation with a comprehensive overview of development priorities, objectives, problems and possibilities. The members of the village-level organisations then identified and selected issues which were relevant to the community. Through a series of discussions, the village-level organisations and CASA would explore the objectives, strategies, phases and finance of the social action programme.

CASA recruited a cadre of volunteers and staff to transfer skills, information and knowledge at the grassroots level. CASA formed social action cells at the village levels. Volunteers facilitated the organisation of Mahila Mandals, youth clubs and co-operatives to implement the Core Programme. These community volunteers also shared information and facilitated critical awareness formation. They collected, preserved and disseminated information. They functioned as links between the sources of information and the 'basic communities'. They connected each member of a community with the source of information.

Chapter 7

Ownership to the People

IN spite of the technological advances since Independence, underdevelopment and disparities were still prevalent in India during the Eighties. Voluntary agencies were concerned about economic disparities and injustices experienced by different communities. During the Eighties, the dominant approach to development was need-based. However, CASA challenged this conventional understanding of development.

Realising that redistribution of resources could alleviate disparity and social degradation, CASA cultivated the potential for development at the grassroots level. It addressed the problem of disparity by mobilising the community to analyse the causes of inequality. This was done through

people's participation and formation of people's organisations. People united through community organisations could plan new strategies and undertake struggles to empower themselves. CASA encouraged the participating communities to take greater responsibilities in the development process. Grassroots community organisations encouraged people's participation in their own economic and social development. CASA's development activities emphasised building people's organisational capacity along with economic development.

The Nineties saw a marked shift in CASA's approach to development. From the earlier 'project and need-based economic development', CASA shifted to 'process and issue-based development'. This was a process of "giving life to the oppressed" which could be achieved only when the people themselves realised the need to struggle together for transformation. The transformation must emerge from the people themselves and influence their life context. This process of transformation reaffirms people's dignity and improves the quality of their lives.

This is a process which involves a series of actions over a period of time.

The action starts with the collective effort of the community towards solving their own problems. This journey to the fulfilment of people's aspiration is a process of change, a process to be owned by the people who must be ready to face the results of the process. Social change and subse-

quent social transformation starts with the grassroots movement.

With the issue-based approach, the kernel of CASA became the aspirations of the people and derived a holistic outlook of development. This 'issue-based development approach' was to bring about an overall change in CASA's development strategy. With this shift in emphasis, CASA had to articulate its position vis-a-vis the issues that served as the foundation for CASA's understanding of development. CASA had to take fully into account the nature of its relationship with the church and other voluntary organisations; partners in the development process. This also helped CASA to articulate its desired role in the future.

CASA deliberately redefined the nature of its social intervention — its attempt to enter into the life of people. In the new understanding of social intervention, advocacy — a deliberate, organised and systematic effort to positively influence the issues affecting the participating community — became crucial. CASA chose advocacy and lobbying as its new role. In a significant turn, CASA's advocacy role equated development with human rights, environmental sustainability and gender sensitivity. And CASA's efforts in advocacy and lobbying would enhance the development struggles of the communities.

The advocacy role of CASA called for a plan of action to achieve the desired social change. CASA realised that creating opportunities for negotiation and not mere resistance would bring social

change. It was observed that rallies and demonstrations were affective ways to build pressure and to create an atmosphere for negotiations. A pressure group could not be effective without the openness and participation of other development NGOs with similar objectives. Hence CASA initiated an exercise of networking and defining the desired relationship with like-minded NGOs and people's organisations.

During the Nineties, CASA also focused on the empowerment of people's organisations to confront issues. The interventions of CASA during the Eighties created a milieu for the participating communities to think in terms of their own empowerment. The thrust of empowerment during the Nineties was that the people and their organisations must identify social issues, analyse them and articulate actions for a sustainable change. Empowerment is understood as the self-realisation of the community about its own resources and potential for transformation. Through mobilising viable resources, the community could strengthen itself to support collective action for transformation. CASA believes that empowerment cannot be given but has to be generated from within the community. Though no outsider can make the community assume power, interventions and confrontations are essential for empowerment.

Empowerment requires that people be organised around issues that are relevant to them. That their awareness-level, knowledge and skills to

deal with the issues which confront them on their day-to-day life are enhanced. It is to create an atmosphere where people manage their own affairs and create their own destiny. Through empowerment, the people take decisions for their own life and society and in the end, empowerment brings a qualitative change that permeates the entire process.

During the Eighties, CASA brought out the significance of awareness-building and people's organisations as some of its priorities in development. In the Nineties, CASA realised that success of development process depends greatly on the participation of other voluntary organisations. Hence, CASA chose to interact closely with other development agencies. The purpose of networking was to reinforce each other's effort to organise themselves and jointly tackle issues at the macro level. Networking facilitated interactions and dialogues on issues hindering the development process and, in turn, created an atmosphere of sharing experiences and insights on common issues. It created a common platform for these organisations to come together and to create a common understanding of development philosophy among the partners.

It is not that CASA would surrender its individuality and principles through collaboration but emphasise mutual understanding and respect and co-operative effort among the partners. During the last few decades of 'development involvement', CASA learned that people-centred development is

possible only through creation of a platform for like-minded NGOs to dialogue on critical development issues. This concept of networking came handy when CASA wanted to reach some of the remote villages of Southern and Western Rajasthan in the early Nineties with its people-centred development.

This coming together in the 'spirit of partnership' gave birth to the Rajasthan Development Project in the early Nineties. The project is a network among 13 regional NGOs to reach 4,000 families spread around 40 villages, emphasising environment restoration and better living conditions. Simili, a hamlet in Choti Underi village, is one of the early projects taken up under the Rajasthan Development Project. Simili is about 20 kilometres from Udaipur and about two km away from the main road. There is only a narrow path connecting Simili with the main road.

Unlike many villages in Rajasthan, Simili could not depend on agriculture mainly because the fields were without adequate water for irrigation. Only one crop was harvested in an year. The yield used to be marginal. One sure way of sustainable income was brewing and selling liquor. The women used to brew liquor and the men would take it to Udaipur for sale. The police was well aware of the source of the illegal liquor and there used to be frequent police raids in the village. Hence, the people of Simili lived under constant fear of police. They were resigned to a fatalistic attitude towards their own life and would passively accept

their living conditions as unchangeable. They would not take any initiative to alter their conditions.

When the Rajasthan Development Project entered Simili a few years back, there were only 31 families. These families deliberately isolated from each other and were not keen on consulting each other on issues of common interest. One of the first things the Rajasthan Development Project did was to build up mutual trust and respect among the villagers and a good rapport between the project organisers and the villagers.

Gradually, the project organisers encouraged the villagers to sit together and discuss their common problems. Initially, they limited their discussions to personal and family levels. It took some time before the people started discussing other issues affecting their lives. When they started taking up the issues common to the village, there was a spontaneous expression of their feelings and opinions. There was a mutual appreciation for other's opinions and suggestions. Women came out in the open to participate in the village meetings and assert their opinions. Later, they themselves fixed a particular day and time for their meetings. The discussions centred around the problems the villagers face in their day to day life and the possible solutions. They identified strategies to implement the solution.

All through its involvement in this village, CASA provided guidance and exposure. However, the major work was done by the village groups. They

identified the factors that could improve their lives, like availability of water and land. After identifying how to improve their living conditions, they initiated the means to obtain them. The village groups started to deepen their wells, improve their fields and plant trees in slopes. The immediate result was access to water round the year as well as prevention of soil erosion. Finally, there was enough water and land for irrigation, grass for their cattle and sufficient firewood. Above all, the whole programme boosted the confidence of the people. The village is no longer dependent on liquor brewing and selling. There is electricity in the village and a road is under construction. There are frequent village meetings at the newly built community centres.

Much of the infrastructure developed under the Rajasthan Development Project was built through food for work programme, one of the oldest programmes of CASA to construct community infrastructure. Under this programme, a few villages would come together to identify their needs, plan a course of action, implement their plan and share the benefits of their common labour. This programme provided employment and food, while ensuring long-term development. The main objective of this programme is the creation of permanent community assets like roads, wells, infrastructure on communication and so on and so forth. CASA makes sure to involve the community in the decision-making process with regard to selection and scope of projects. And using the

programmes as the foundation for the development of the area in general. In many instances food-for-community-development has provided scarce employment and helped to prevent migration to the cities.

Chapter 8

Information is Power

THE major driving force behind development activities is the force unleashed by motivating people to use their own critical judgement, initiative and creativity. During the early Nineties when CASA identified advocacy as one of its roles, the main thrust was to motivate people's organisations to take up their issues for societal transformation.

This endeavour brought to the forefront the need to develop a sustainable infrastructure for people's action for transformation (PAT). CASA realised that participation in development begins with the availability of information. When there is unhindered access to vital information it would lead to a series of social changes. Information is

integral to awareness creation. Awareness leads to action, seeking solution to a given situation. The more one is aware, the greater the capacity to take the most appropriate action. Awareness enables the participating community to organise themselves for societal transformation. The process of awareness creation and the formation of critical consciousness channel the energies of the participating communities for building a new future. This had been the ideology behind when CASA initiated the people's action for transformation programme.

With CASA's development effort centred on issues, the entire programme thrust of CASA assumed a new perspective. Its activities converged on a single process towards people's action for transformation. It evolved out of the long experience of CASA in implementing its core programme activities. People's action for transformation removes the compartmentalisation within the programme themselves. The development effort of CASA will be termed as people's action for transformation (PAT), a process with thrust on people.

The people's action for transformation programme is aimed at transforming the present society into a value-based one. The value orientation is essential for a society where people can take charge of their own development. The value orientation can help each member of the community to have equal access to resources and reconcile with the nature.

The people's action for transformation

programme helps the partner communities to organise themselves around issues. The communities are helped to understand that their transformation is a process which is dependent on various resources available within the community. As a partner in people's transformation, CASA builds the capacity of the representatives of the people's organisation. Capacity-building includes training on various skills like strategic planning, issues identification, etc. What followed was capacity-building at various levels around identified issues. This was followed by developing the competence of the community to initiate a process to overcome the challenges.

Capacity-building increased the awareness on identified issues. CASA conducted several seminars and workshops as part of the awareness creation programme. The participants were encouraged to express themselves. Many of them came up with folk songs and paintings on their own transformation. CASA collected these songs and paintings and used them to support the process of awareness creation. The whole exercise has been a groundwork for sustainable social change and to help the participating communities to organise themselves on issues. Development became a participatory process of communities transforming themselves.

Awareness is essential for building people's movements and awareness-creation relies a great deal on access to information. CASA established resource centres under the people's action for

transformation programme, to offer unhindered access to information. The resource centre concept stressed that communication between communities is essential for people's transformation. The resource centres are a forum for these communities and their leaders to come together and reflect on their own transformation.

The aim of the resource centre is to provide a platform to organise the communities around a critical understanding of their social realities. The process of building up people's awareness and people's movement are supported through a process of networking among groups at various level. Resource centres are centres for information dissemination and a forum for mutual sharing of experience. Hence, at the centre of people's action for transformation are the resource centres. These centres will also be the centres for programmes and new initiatives and thus become the hub of transformation in the village.

The resource centres are instrumental not only in transforming the quality of people's life but also to create people-centred and people-controlled development. It is a place which inspires people to form their views on empowerment and collectively face the future. Through these resource centres, the participating communities identify issues and discuss sustainable changes in their communities. A great deal of ground work for people's transformation is done at the resource centres.

Considering the significance of having access to

information and making it available at the local level, CASA encourages the people's organisations to collect information available among themselves. When I met a group of volunteers at Eechampatti in Tamil Nadu, they were bustling with what they have learned through their interaction with the members of their respective communities. The information consisted of stories of people's transformation, orally circulating within the communities. The resource centres have awakened the community on the importance of collecting the information available among themselves and, hence, become 'willing participants' in the process of social change. Now there is a systematic effort to collect these stories and make them available at the resource centres. The information would be made available across communities for mutual reflections and motivations.

Facilitating people's transformation requires developing special skills and mobilising resources among partner communities. On the other hand, development organisation itself must be transformed before it can facilitate transformation among the partner community. Before empowering the communities, CASA realised that it had to mobilise its own resources and empower itself. In the early Nineties, CASA laid emphasis on organisational and human developments. As a result, CASA initiated a programme of organisational development (OD) and human potential development (HPD) in 1992.

Organisational development is an ongoing pro-

cess to create space within an organisation for continuous renewal. The continuous renewal requires a clarity on the future and present role of an organisation. Based on past and present experiences, the OD process clarifies the future path the organisation must take. The OD process itself needs a forward looking perception.

The Organisational Development process reviewed the potential of CASA to meet contemporary development challenges. The OD process was a systematic assessment of CASA's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the environment in which it had to function. Organisational development was aimed at organisational renewal. The OD process reviewed and assessed the prevailing strategies and objectives of the organisation. A periodic review was essential to keep the organisation in tune with the contemporary realities and to draw future strategies. The organisational development process helped CASA to understand its own structure, perspectives and strengthen its capacity. Organisational development also defined the 'occupational relationship' within CASA and developed an 'organisational culture'. Redefinition and clarification of roles, particularly of the "supervisor-subordinate relationship", contributed towards the professional motivation of employees.

In order to achieve the mission and the objectives of an organisation, the competence of its staff is crucial. In CASA too, adequate attention was paid to assess the staff learning needs and

provide them training opportunities. Along with the organisation development (OD), CASA initiated the Human Potential Development (HPD) process. Human potential development was designed to develop the competence of CASA's own staff and to bring out their potential to its fullness. This was a process to prepare the staff to play new roles that the changing development strategies demanded. CASA initiated the human potential development programme and organisational development in partnership with Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a Delhi-based non-governmental organisation.

As the first step, PRIA and CASA emphasised on jointly developing skills on strategic planning among CASA's staff. At a later stage, potential staff were selected and trained under institutions like the Jesuit-run Xavier Labour Research Institute, Jamshedpur, the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad. This training developed their understanding on current development issues and community organisation. The training equipped the staff of CASA with managerial skills to plan and monitor 'participatory development'. On a few occasions, CASA invited the staff of some of these institutions to conduct 'on the site' programmes on project management.

The human potential development programmes were conducted at three levels, the national, zonal and grassroots. The programmes were aimed at creating an 'organisationwide' understanding and

clarity of CASA's development philosophy. These programmes assumed three different characteristics.

First of all, the training of trainers (TOT) was meant to develop a 'facilitating capacity' among the selected staff. The staff trained under this programme was to assume the responsibility for future training programmes of CASA. Secondly, Training of Managers (TOM) was for developing the managerial skills and capacities among the staff. Through this programme, several persons who manage the programmes of CASA at different levels were trained. Finally, the training of community workers (TOC) which was meant for grassroots-level community workers. This training again included developing managerial skills. Along with these skills, the community workers were trained in implementing and facilitating programmes at the community level.

The twin programmes of organisational development and human potential development were mutually complementing. While the organisational development programme helped CASA to develop a clearer understanding of its structure and objectives, the human potential development programme helped to sharpen the capacities of its staff. The capacity development helped the staff to function effectively and be prepared for the future. Moreover, the programmes brought to light the significance of CASA's advocacy role.

A significant outcome of human potential development and organisational development was

that CASA reviewed its mission and vision. While CASA recognised that it may not be possible to achieve the vision completely, it realised that to have a vision was to have an aim. The vision of CASA is inspired by the Christian faith and values. The vision of CASA looks forward to a society where peace, justice and equality would prevail. This would be a society of communal harmony and equal opportunities irrespective of caste, colour, creed, language or religion.

The understanding of development, philosophy and values as articulated in the vision of CASA needed to be reflected. This was the main consideration when CASA's mission was articulated and reformulated. The articulation of the mission of CASA was based on its own experience and reviewed in the light of contemporary understanding of development. Mission was considered as the path CASA had to take to make its vision a reality. It was meant to answer what was to be done in a particular context and defined the scope of its activities within the framework of the vision. Accordingly, the mission has been articulated and reformulated. CASA's mission is to "work towards a just and sustainable society"

The roles of women in Indian society are limited. Hence, they do not have access to resources or adequate employment opportunities. Female children are considered as an economic burden. This explains the differences in the treatment of the female child in terms of food, care, dress and education. Sometimes, women themselves have

internalised their oppression and see little need to claim equal dignity. They are the most exploited among the labour force. In spite of equal hours of labour, they are given lesser wages than their male counterparts. Many women lack the confidence and assertiveness to bring about a change in their status in the society.

Today, there are signs of change as there is an increased awareness concerning the dignity of women and their role in the society. A change in the present status of women should be seen at two levels; the male accepting the female as equal and the women organising themselves to assert their equality. It should not be that the women should be content with whatever that trickles down through the gender hierarchy. But, can a woman achieve the changes through her single-handed effort?

During the Nineties, the government initiated a constitutional approach to the subjugation of women. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments initiated a political and economic decentralisation, the Panchayati Raj. It was aimed at the transfer of power to the local level. In this process one-third of the seats for members as well as Sarpanches at the panchayat level are reserved for women. Panchayati Raj, through the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment, is at least in concept, 'transfer of power' to the marginalised sections of society, specially to women. It is meant to increase the participation of women in planning, implementation and ad-

ministration at the local level.

CASA had its role to play in the empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj. It emphasised that the achievement of social justice, equality and equal opportunity for women can be achieved only through a process of empowerment. This process implies that the marginalised gain access to resources through participation in decision-making. As far as CASA is concerned, empowerment is the redistribution of power and control over resources.

The transfer of power to women under Panchayati Raj is significant to CASA. CASA intervened in a process of sensitisation at the level of people and the elected representatives of the people. Women were the main participants of the programme involving Panchayati Raj. CASA intervened at the grassroots-level for creating an awareness about the positive aspects of the amendments and the rights and responsibility of women under this amendment. CASA wants to ensure that women get their fair share under Panchayati Raj.

CASA's involvement to assert equal status for women is not limited in terms of Panchayati Raj alone. The women at the village-level are motivated to form their own organisations. These forums, Mahila Mandals, mobilise the entire village around common issues. The Mahila Mandals in the Mukhed and Billoli talukas of Nanded district of Maharashtra are recent examples of organised women power. When incessant rain lashed these

talukas, it caused destruction to standing crops. It left the people with a profound sense of despair, hopelessness and anxiety. The extent of destruction was such that the crop about to be harvested, germinated in the stem.

The Mahila Mandals in the talukas converged together at the Mukhed resource centre and formed an Action Committee. The Action Committee in turn discussed the issue and drew a plan of action. Having analysed their problems, they petitioned that the government purchase the germinated grain at the cost of Rs. 0.50 per kilogram and make available edible jowar from the government's surplus stock at the same price. They also demanded reconstruction of their destroyed houses and relief. However, their demands were not entertained. When the people realised that their demands were ignored, about 4000 people from Mukhed, of which about 3200 were women, participated in a peaceful demonstration on November 15, 1995. The local MLA was also drawn into the protest demonstration and appealed to the Tehsildar for relief. The protesters walked about four kilometres with green branches in their hands. Finally, the government sanctioned Rs 45 lakh towards reconstruction. The resource centre staff facilitated this process through networking and information dissemination.

The day-to-day survival of many of the countries in the Southern hemisphere is dependent on their agricultural produce. Any restraint on agriculture affects the rural population the most,

especially the rural women. In a country like India the rural population spends about 70 per cent of their income on food. Any restriction on their access to food can uproot them from their traditional habitat, forcing them to migrate resulting in insecurity and low income.

The political stability in many of the developing countries depends on how well their agricultural policies are linked to the overall development. The linkage between agriculture policies and other socio-economic programmes explains the need for stable agricultural support. Until recently the Indian Government had been giving emphasis to agriculture in the Five Year Plans.

Many countries in the South are dependent on the export of agricultural products. The developed countries also export agricultural produce, but out of their surplus production. This puts the developing countries in a bind. While being unequal, they have to compete with the developed countries on world market on an 'equal footing'. Considering the inequality between these two hemispheres, the 'equal footing' turns out to be yet another form of 'colonisation'. Many of the 'discussions' on converting the 'world into a market' takes place in places like Geneva. The voices of the developing countries that speak up for their survival go almost unheard in these 'discussions'. For them these discussions turn out to be 'marching orders' from the North. The General Treaty on Trade and Tariff (GATT) can be seen as one such order.

The major concern of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff is to 'rule' the world market. Under GATT, every country is required to provide a minimum 3 per cent of their domestic market access to import. This will impact on agricultural produces of the developing countries. When the Uruguay Round Table met in Geneva in December 1990, agricultural subsidies was a major issue of differences between the United States and the European Community. When the Uruguay Round Table met again in Geneva in January 1991, again the issue of agricultural subsidies surfaced. The developed countries demanded standardisation of agriculture subsidies both in the developing countries and the developed countries. They wanted the subsidies to be uniform. However, they overruled the fact that the agricultural farmers of the developing countries will be the most affected victims of this standardisation.

On the other hand, the subsidies in developing countries are the main protection for a large number of "subsistence farmers and vulnerable consumers". The agricultural producers of developed countries will be less affected since the agriculture subsidies in their countries help surplus production. And this surplus production makes export possible at subsidised rates. Considering the market orientation of GATT and the consequent policy changes in developing countries, Indian farmers are switching to cash crops to meet the market demands. These trends are affecting the food production and access to food.

Hence, access to food is not only a basic need but also a human right. This involves removing the disparity between the demand and supply of food so that everyone should have access to food. In other words, there should be a food security in terms of easy access to sufficient and nutritious food. Having access to food is primarily to eradicate poverty. However, one-fifth of the world's population suffers from food insecurity.

CASA introduced a food security programme in October 1994 in the states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. When it initiated the programme, it considered access to food as a social justice issue and the right of every citizen. CASA realised that the problem of not having access to food was a hindrance to sustainable development. In order to improve the quality of life of the partner communities, CASA believed that every member of the community must be 'food secure'. This meant improving the facilities to increase agricultural production.

CASA discovered, food security could not be addressed in isolation. Dealing with food security involves a multidimensional strategy which cannot be attained only thorough increasing food production. The food security programmes should address social justice, equality and gender issues and any element that would ultimately deny the marginalised access to food.

Hence the programme, first of all, involves the marginal and small farmers. CASA engaged them to improve the irrigation facilities in order to in-

crease agricultural production. Simultaneously, CASA promoted soil and water conservation and construction of infrastructure such as small dams. In addition, CASA introduced alternative technologies for cultivation and trained the farmers on some of the latest methods of cultivation. In order to achieve the objectives of food security, CASA ensures the participation of communities at all stages of agricultural production and distribution. While engaging the marginal farmers to improve agricultural production, CASA laid emphasis on the impertinence of being united in order to achieve their rights and privileges. In many of CASA's programme areas, the farmers organise themselves and meet the representatives of the government whenever they realise that they are sidelined.

In order to address the issue of gender disparity involved in food security, CASA initiated programmes on women and child development. CASA identified women and trained them to be community development workers. These women are the local persons available in the villages to provide assistance on health aspects. CASA exposes the women to monetary benefits available through the government and the banks and encourages them to save money. It contributes 50 per cent of whatever each women has saved up.

The food security programme initiated by CASA involves environment restoration, especially in the tribal belt. The tribals have been dependent on forest land for their survival. Lately, the forests

that are constantly diminishing turned out to be the largest single cause for food insecurity among the tribals. The decreasing forest land, in turn, affected the rainfall and increased soil erosion. CASA's initiative involves activities to prepare some sloppy areas in the tribal belt to help rain water go down and form ground water.

During the Nineties, CASA's development programmes have been concentrated on assisting the participating communities to rise above their circumstances and overcome self-perceived limitations. Through these programmes, CASA wanted to ensure that the participating communities may empower themselves to claim what is rightfully theirs. CASA went beyond the conventional interpretations of development, seeking to bring about a qualitative change in the lives of the people. In order to achieve a balanced approach towards development, CASA stressed interpersonal relationships within the village communities as well as encouraged a bonding between village communities and society as a whole. This was a process of building up group solidarity and collective power to restructure the society. It was a process that generated liberative action in the community.

While facilitating community organisation, several local organisations were formed with indigenous leadership. The community leaders developed accountability and effective management. Gradually, the village associations evolved action plans and took steps to put the plans into practice. CASA's development strategy has also en-

gaged people at the grassroots level to interact with other organisations and the government. During this process, CASA realised that the solution to the issue of disparity lies in mobilising the people.

There was a definite change in strategies during this time, in line with the socio-economic scenario of the Indian society. A clear articulation of vision and mission clarified the role of CASA in meeting contemporary challenges and prepared the organisation to be ready for the Twentyfirst Century. The articulation of vision and mission facilitated a participatory culture among the staff at various levels.

Further, CASA realised that development is also about giving power to the powerless. The powerless gaining power is a process and a struggle for human dignity. This struggle starts with inculcating in the minds of people the need for change. The traits of apathy and indifference among communities are replaced with a satisfaction in their achievements and a hope for the future.

Chapter 9

The Leadership Dynamics

NINETEEN Seventy Six was an year when the history of CASA took a decisive turn. It was a transition from being the development wing of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) to be the 'service arm of the Protestant churches' in India. The transition opened up new channels of communication between the Protestant churches and CASA. This resulted in CASA acquiring a profile quite distinct from what the NCCI had bestowed it with. In turn, the churches and CASA had to have a fresh look at society so that they could adequately express their concerns for the marginalised people in India.

Over the years until CASA got a large measure of autonomy in fulfilment of the changed needs of

the situation, there was a lack of clarity on the nature of the relationship between the churches and CASA. But with autonomy in 1976, there arose a concern that the Indian churches should assume a new role and provide leadership for CASA. The new role of the churches called for restructuring CASA with representatives from the member churches of the National Council of Churches in India on its Board. The first National Board meeting of CASA was held in New Delhi in March 1976.

The new perspective also called for CASA having easier access to resources for its manifold activities. There were discussions on the nature of resources which CASA would have access to after it became an autonomous body. With autonomy, CASA realised that the allocation of resources were not proportionate to the needs, while foreign aid remained as a critical source of financing the programmes. The World Council of Churches (WCC), the umbrella organisation representing almost all the non-Catholic churches, which was a major donor agency insisted that any organisation receiving assistance from the WCC should raise funds for its administrative costs indigenously. Given the perilous nature of CASA's financial resources, this appeared to be an impossible task to perform.

CASA was expected to continue functioning with financial resources transferred to it from the Christian Service Agency, another wing of the NCCI. But by the end of 1976, there occurred what is

known as 'capitalisation of resources' which hindered such a transfer of funds. In the end, the financial crunch was such that CASA had to resist pressure from different sources to close down.

It would have been disastrous for an agency that had over the years acquired a name for itself in the fields of relief and rehabilitation.

The change whereby the churches began providing the leadership was a major one. It opened up CASA's direct accountability to the churches. However, it touched only a part of the new perspective of CASA which badly needed a person of calibre to be at the helm of its day-to-day affairs. This was easier said than done. The members of the National Board began its search for a Director. Until then, Mr. P C Joseph was to remain as the Director of CASA.

In early 1977, Major J K Michael, took over as the Director-designate of CASA. That was the year when natural calamities of various hues struck several parts of India. During his first six months as the Director-designate, Major Michael toured most of the calamity-struck areas to see for himself the kind of relief operations CASA used to undertake. This six-month period sparked a debate on the role and identity of CASA. So far, CASA's primary role was to transfer relief materials to the victims of disaster. With the change in leadership, CASA was exposed to the responsibility for sustainable social change. CASA could no longer remain a passive spectator of social dis-

parity and wait for disasters before it could intervene. The debate opened up opportunities for CASA beyond the realm of relief. For once, it became conscious of the role it can play in the transformation of the prevalent social structure.

During the past few years the food for work programme was a major means for reconstructing infrastructure devastated by calamities. And PL 480 was a major source of foodgrains which was utilised to the maximum for infrastructure development. Side by side, the food for work programme ensured long-term development which resulted in the people becoming self-reliant. But, by the early Seventies, USAID changed some of its policies on PL 480 and CASA found it difficult to cope with the changed policies.

By 1977, there were recommendations from the National Board of CASA to call off the food flow from the US under PL 480. However, during his tour of the calamity-stricken areas, Major Michael realised that calling off the programme without an alternative source of food supply would seriously affect the rehabilitation programmes in the disaster-struck areas. It necessitated a momentous decision which only a person, who not only has an eye for details but also a clear-cut perception of what the future should be, could take. In essence, it was a do-or-die kind of decision. Major Michael was not found wanting in rising up to the occasion. He allowed the programme to continue for the time being.

When it came to facing natural calamities, until

1977, CASA approached each emergency situation as an isolated event. It was as if each emergency was a new crisis and no learning from the previous experience was applied to it. In the years to come, this approach was to have a significant change. CASA was to approach each disaster with the rich experience gained during the past involvement in disasters.

During his tour during the first six months as the Director-designate, Major Michael realised that the planning of CASA's programme was done at the top and then transferred to the grassroots level. The structure of the programme supported a power concentration at the top. The programme holders benefited more than the landless farmers. "As soon as I took charge as the Director, I had to undo this injustice", recalled Major Michael.

In 1978, CASA entered the next stage in its history of social intervention with Major Michael as the full-fledged Director. He initiated a process of redefining CASA's development concepts and strategies. This process was a smooth transition from the 'traditional beneficiary approach' in development to a strategy which ensured grassroots involvement in development. This strategy ensured that CASA's development orientation would be dynamic and responding to the needs of the society; whether it was a disaster response or a long-term involvement for social transformation.

After 1978, there was a different approach to disaster management. Each emergency situation gave CASA larger insights into the managing of

relief operations. Although many disasters in India were unpredictable, CASA could identify a few risk patterns of the disasters. Depending upon the identified risk patterns, CASA developed a systematic approach to its disaster response. The approach to disaster became a planned endeavour which enabled the personnel and resources of CASA to focus on the disaster without disrupting any of its ongoing activities. Today, CASA can talk about managing relief operations among thousands of families. Few other organisations have such vast capabilities. Over a period of time, its readiness to learn from experience prepared CASA to face emergency situations with new insights.

With the new leadership, CASA ventured into sustained community development. The idea was to enable the marginalised communities to organise themselves for their own transformation. Development became people's business and their participation became integral to the process of development. This new approach to development generated a positive self-consciousness among the marginalised and eliminated intermediaries in community development. CASA enabled the grassroots to set their own priorities. The community became the primary agent of planning and change. CASA took the inherent potentials within the communities as the starting point for development. The referral communities assumed the responsibilities of the entire process of their development, starting with planning and going all the way up to evaluating their own

programmes. In the end, CASA managed to do away with the injustice of planning at the top.

By the middle of the Eighties, Major Michael could foresee that having access to information was vital to transforming communities. Access to information would help organise communities, generate mutual support among themselves and become self-reliant. Hence, CASA initiated a process of decentralised access to information through systematic documentation and dissemination of information. This involved periodic updating of the data banks both at the national and local levels. Monitoring cells were set up both at the national level and the zonal level to ensure continuous flow of information. The flow of information was a two-way process and sustaining this flow was vital in order to determine the performance of CASA's programmes. This flow of information supported the planning and decision-making process throughout CASA's area of work.

By the mid-Eighties power decentralisation took strong roots in the administrative structure of CASA. Decentralisation was evident in major areas like planning, decision-making and implementation. The decentralisation strengthened local capacities to respond to emergencies and enabled local communities and institutions to take initiative whenever calamities struck. The decentralised approach made the best use of the knowledge, information and experience available at the local level.

During the years after autonomy there had been

deliberate attempts to build up the morale of the staff. There were frequent exercises to bring the best out of the staff and hence improve the overall performance of the organisation. For the first time, the staff were exposed to both national and international debates in the field of development. With the change in leadership after autonomy, there had been a new orientation among the staff to cope with any advanced concepts and strategies in the field of development.

The initiatives of Major Michael opened up a new area of partnership; the Tri-Agency programme. It started in 1987 involving the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCCB), the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and CASA. This partnership developed a mutual commitment among the three church-related development agencies to pool their skills and resources for common concerns.

The partnership programme sought to tackle jointly natural disasters in Bangladesh, Nepal and India through a common minimum programme. The programme primarily consists of a systematic approach to disaster, considering the vulnerability of these countries to natural calamities. The Tri-Agency Partnership promoted a mutual sharing of the expertise and information available, first of all, on disaster management. This involves disaster preparedness, disaster mitigation and disaster response. Secondly, the Tri-Agency Partnership looks at the effect of disaster on development process, especially the effect on

environment, women and children. Finally, the partnership aims to develop skills on planning and training on disaster management and to ensure people participation.

The Tri-Agency Partnership was also a significant initiative in the field of disaster trauma-counselling. During calamities, emergency relief and rehabilitation programmes are quite common. But not many organisations are equipped to provide counselling, which is crucial to the traumatised victims of disaster. The Tri-Agency Partnership took initiative to deal with this crucial issue of trauma-counselling and to strengthen the capacities of each agency and their related networking for post-disaster trauma-counselling.

Over the years, CASA developed a new understanding with the churches in India. According to Major Michael, "now we are partners and one family". Ever since autonomy, CASA has fulfilled the church's mandate for social change. The agenda of CASA has been to remain the development auxiliary of the Protestant churches in India. To be truly relevant to its mandate, CASA had to constantly define and redefine the nature of its relationship with the churches. CASA has enabled the churches in India to promote and strengthen ecumenism in the field of development. What form will the churches' involvement in CASA's development activities take in the future? The commitment of the church to the society, no doubt, will see further concrete signs of the involvement of Christian congregations in

development activities.

CASA now enjoys credibility not only with the resource-sharing agencies but also with its development partners and even the government. This kind of credibility, which owes a lot to the leadership qualities of Major Michael, improved CASA's networking potential, especially in the area of relief intervention.

When it comes to networking with the government, CASA knows that prior to any disaster, liaison with the government makes it easier to coordinate, reduce the impact of disaster and speed up relief and rehabilitation operations.

Gender sensitivity on development is a new phenomenon manifest since the early Nineties. This arose as a movement to integrate women into the development process and to mobilise them around vital gender issues. CASA's effort is concentrated on the issues concerning women and their role in the development process. CASA's leadership believes that the women should no longer live a dual life, divided by work and family and between private and public lives.

Where will CASA be ten years from now?

The emerging trend in the Indian society calls for social justice, peace and reconciliation. Only a value-based society can face the emerging trend of violence and exclusivism. This is where CASA sees its significance in the years to come. CASA has turned out to be a movement and this movement will gain momentum towards peace and social justice.

The vision of a value-based society is only part of what CASA can be in the future. During the last five decades CASA established itself as a relief agency. CASA will continue to play its role in disaster management with all the expertise it can acquire in the years to come.

After having spent about an hour chatting with Major Michael, I was curious to know how he felt about being at the helm of CASA for the last 20 years. "Looking back, I feel a sense of achievement", responded Major Michael. "A feeling that I have been able to build up CASA as my own family and not an organisation".

Chapter 10

Conclusion

CASA's history over the last 50 years has been a story of intervening in people's experience and facilitating social change. Fifty years back it had only a limited mandate, of caring for the refugees. That was a time when the experience and orientation of CASA did not go beyond relief. CASA's journey through the past five decades had seen several paradigm changes to meet the challenges posed by the external environment. However, even today CASA intervenes in disasters to reduce the impact of disaster and lead the victims to self-reliance.

When disaster suddenly disrupts the cycle of living and when people experience dislocation,

suffering and threat to life, CASA intervenes and strengthens the disaster-stricken communities. Strengthening is not confined to providing food, shelter, medical care or any other necessities of survival. Often, the concern of CASA goes beyond providing the necessities of survival or restoring basic services, housing and employment. Sometimes, the spontaneous intervention during crisis leads CASA to initiate a sustained effort for social change within the communities.

CASA believes that social change is an endeavour to establish a society, conditioned with human welfare and social justice. It is a process involving both the economic and social dimensions which are unique to each community. However, as every community is unique, the process of change is also unique. One significant element of social change is the economic dimension. CASA's approach to the economic dimension of social change is based on its conviction that poverty is the result of an unjust economic structure. Poverty prevents equal access to basic needs like health, education, employment opportunities and wages for labour. Thus, economic disparity leads to dehumanisation and marginalisation of a large section of the population. Ultimately, the marginalised communities become incapable of controlling their lives and destinies. The guiding principle behind CASA's programmes for improving the economy of the marginalised has been that the programmes must aim at freeing the marginalised from economic dependency. CASA

inculcates self-reliance among the marginalised communities through involving them as the primary agents to change their lives. CASA involves the communities in planning, implementing, managing and monitoring the whole process of creating economic self-reliance.

Social change is a process where the marginalised strive against any force that denies them dignity and that hinders their endeavour to decide their destiny. In this process of social change CASA enables the victims of contemporary social structure to take full charge of their lives, providing hope, aspiration and infrastructure. It is actualising the potentials for reflection and being able to form associations and organisation. To be able to take up one's own decision in every sphere of existence. People are integral to the process of social change. Only people can influence the distribution of power, status and resources within a social structure. Only they can provide the base for sustainability. This process starts with the marginalised becoming conscious of their strength and vulnerabilities. And then they acknowledge that their existence with dignity is the priority. Finally, they become the catalysts of change.

Hence bringing social change is a participatory process through CASA identifying itself with the marginalised. Consequently, for CASA each human being is the primary reality of social change. Through its social development programmes, CASA enables each human being to exercise the facul-

ties of free reflection and decision-making. The community is the planning subject, the primary agent and the authentic result of all CASA's development process. If someone other than the community is allowed to plan, implement and manage a development process CASA believes that it is negating the inherent potentials of a community. All what a community needs is orientation, education and gradual practice in actualising their potentialities. Any development process should give the people the responsibility to plan, implement, manage and evaluate their own programmes.

Social Development is a continuous process of liberating the 'bonded' from the existing oppressive system in order to enable them to enjoy the fullness of life. It is a process of establishing equal dignity among human beings and reconciling them with the whole created world. It is a process of educating and organising the suffering masses. It also means promoting self-help organisations which would give them the strength to act jointly. CASA aspires for a society where people can live in a healthy social and natural environment, able to fulfil basic human needs, have equal rights and opportunities. These rights must be exercised in the context of a community where the process of social change will continue into the next generation.

CASA's development concepts have not been static. They have gone through a series of changes, some of them ephemeral, some of them long-

standing. What has always been constant is change. All through this process of change CASA has been a learner. It believes that the most effective way to learn about community is through direct interactions. Through these interactions, one understands the community, its boundaries and the optimum possible use of the community resources. The learning process has been a co-operative effort between CASA and its referral communities. The basic thrust of CASA's endeavours has been the abolition of false values which create and sustain unjust structures. What the society deeply needs is a value system that addresses people's aspirations for justice, equality and self-reliance. The new value system should not only reign in personal lives and relationships, but should also be embedded in the system and institutions of the society.

CASA being a church-related agency has established a fellowship and understanding with the participating churches. While churches are called into action for the establishment of a just society, CASA played a significant role on behalf of the churches to bring about the desired social change. And the mandate of CASA covers people of all colours, creed and religions. Over the last 50 years, CASA, being the auxiliary of the churches, remained as the expression of the social responsibility of the churches in India.

Finally the question to be addressed is, what change has CASA brought forth in the society?

In the early nineties the Sirkali Taluk in

Nagapattinam Quaid-E-Milleth district which was known as the 'rice bowl of Tamil Nadu' had been going through social tension. This taluk which was dominated by agriculturists and agriculture labourers had been trying to cope up with a new form of colonialism, the aquaculture farms. Some multinational corporations had set up these farms all along the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu and the villagers were protesting against the alien invasion.

Aqua farming started in India when the Central Government's Marine Product Export Development Authority (MPEDA) identified shrimp farming as a thrust area. The new export policies of the government under economic liberalisation gave tremendous boost to commercial aqua farming. Considering its export potential, liberal loans and subsidies from the government were easily available to the farm owners. The World Bank also encouraged aqua farming by extending soft loans to the government. Transnational corporations and the rich who could afford to make huge investments jumped into the business. About 1,00,000 acres of land was acquired along the coast.

The capital investors acquired land much of which belonged to marginal paddy cultivators by promising employment to the local people. The deal sounded attractive since the local people thought that they might earn more than what their small patches of agricultural land would yield.

However, it did not take long for the people to

feel disillusioned. The farms were mechanised and the local people did not have the expertise for it. The transnational corporations were not interested in training the local people. Instead, they brought workers from Taiwan and Thailand. With their sole means of survival — the paddy fields — having been taken away from them without providing them an alternative source of income, the local people were on the point of starvation.

The 'rape-and-run industry' had been destroying the ecosystem of coastal Tamil Nadu. Trees and other greenery were bulldozed to create large aqua farms. Large quantities of sea water was pumped into the farms and mixed with fresh water, massively extracted from underground. This process deprived the local people of whatever little fresh drinking water they had because the ground water had been salinised. The salinisation of ground water affected the paddy cultivation in that region. The crops got decayed and the annual yield was reduced to almost half of what it used to be earlier. There were seepages from the aqua farms into the nearby paddy fields which further aggravated the salinisation. Moreover, the organic wastes and chemicals from the aqua farms were discharged directly into the agricultural fields.

There had been frequent violence ever since the shrimp farms entered these villages. The hired goons of the shrimp farm owners would stalk these villages, drag people out of their homes and set fire to their houses. Ironically, in many of these villages there were policemen trying to en-

sure 'law and order'. I

CASA had been active in Manigram ever since it heard about the 'betrayal' by the transnational corporations. CASA realised that if these people were to be helped, they should have someone to back up their resistance and support them until they got justice. What CASA could immediately do was to offer relief and give the people temporary shelter, food, and books for the school-going children. Clothes were collected from different sources and distributed. But giving temporary relief was not an answer to the problem. How long could the people be fed and clothed while the 'powerful' kept looting their bare minimum means of survival? There should be a permanent solution to the problem, however vexed it might be.

In Perumthottam village near Manigram, CASA had an active Social Action Committee (SAC) which provided moral support and guidance to the people's struggle. The social action committee took up a campaign for awareness creation through meetings, training and demonstration. The campaign brought about solidarity among the victims of aquaculture.

This was the time when Jagannathan, a Gandhian in his 80s, entered the scene. Jagannathan had been active, initially, for the removal of untouchability. He had also taken part in the Quit India Movement. The British imprisoned him for his activism during the Quit India Movement. Immediately after Independence, he moved through the villages of Tamil Nadu and

trained the youth to work for the landless people. When Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodhan movement was catching momentum in Tamil Nadu in 1952, he joined it and campaigned for the landless people. He still retains his commitment to the cause.

CASA joined Jagannathan and 'stringed in' local church leaders to form a partnership. They organised awareness creation programmes and staged protest demonstrations. And then, the issue was taken first to the High Court in Chennai and later to the Supreme Court. On December 11, 1996, the Supreme Court ordered the destruction of all aqua farms in India. However, the damage had already been done. As one travels along the Cauvery delta areas where the farms were set up, it can be noticed that the land was made fallow at certain pockets. On one side of the road there are paddy fields while on the other side the land is quite fallow because of the adjoining aqua culture. The delta is a mixture of fresh and sea water.

CASA is aware that any change within a social structure, like that in Manigram, can be 'catastrophic'. It is not easy to change the structure which had dominated the society over a period of time. But at least a 'scratch' on the surface' can be made and that will activate a change. And if this can stimulate the people, the momentum will build up gradually. Finally, development will become a people's movement. This, in turn, results in the transformation of the unjust socio-economic structure.



Church's auxiliary for social action

