



Synergizing the Process of Change



We strive to enable poor and marginalized people to sustain their livelihoods, participate in decision making and assert their rights.

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ERA - Experiments in Rural Advancement

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Message from the Director



Dear friends,

With accomplishing yet another successful year, it gives me an immense pleasure and satisfaction in sharing with you the progress in the year gone by as well as our aspirations in the years to come. As in the past few years we reinforced our excellence, with a distinct record of supporting local initiatives. A progressive idea and meticulous planning undoubtedly gives us an extra mileage. We devoted this year to Review & Plan of ERA as well as ERA support to Sarokaar.

I would also like to elucidate on the annual funding tune. Witnessing an upward direction in its annual budget up to the year 2004-05, it declined to Rs.96.51 lakh of which Rs.50 lacs has been earmarked for the 'Community Development Fund'. This enabled ERA to directly support local initiatives in a sustained manner, paving way for people's vision of development.

In spite of continued paucity of funds for developing necessary infrastructure to carryout our activities, I am happy to inform you that one more school building *cum* community centre is under construction at Tuni. Earlier four such centres have been established in our previous consolidated work pocket in Lohaghat block of Champawat district. These small interventions have enhanced the facilities and have shown a permanent impact in the work areas.

ERA is an embodiment of our aspirations and a benediction that should add to the professional excellence. The significance of training/ capacity building activities in the overall development of team members is indisputable. Two of our senior team members are doing MSW course, another two are being trained in budget analysis. It is no mean coincidence that ERA has undertaken budget analysis and development planning as tools for People centered advocacy.

In the forthcoming years, we propose to focus mainly in two areas - Entrepreneurship development and Leadership building. And for the purpose we have plans to initiate institutions offering professional/ vocational courses thereby giving our youth an opportunity to equip themselves with professional skills to compete in today's world. It shall remain my endeavour to better ourselves and constantly evolve, keeping in mind that a new vision is vital for all of us in this ever challenging world.

For all our accomplishments I am fortunate in having a vibrant and dedicated team who work with a devotion to the cause of service to humanity. I shall be committed in my pursuit to offer a blend of external and self-raised resources that will augment with the emerging civil society demands in the years to come.

It is indeed with your good wishes and sustained support that helped us in achieving much in a relatively shorter span of time. With your esteemed cooperation and our noble efforts, ERA will continue to scale new heights.

With best wishes

Sincerely yours

(Pawan Rana)

Experiments in Rural Advancement, popularly known by its acronym ERA, came into being in 1987. ERA is registered under:

- Society Registration Act,
- Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act
- Income Tax (Exemption) Act. u/s 12a and 80 G

Over the years, ERA has developed into a team of qualified, experienced and committed personnel. The team, since its inception, has been attempting to reach the unreached and serve the underserved people. It initiated working from a couple of villages, remotely located in area bordering river *Kali*, ... gradually expanding its activities now to more than 350 villages across Uttaranchal. Here, ERA has strove to frame all its programs within a comprehensive plan in its endeavor to enlighten the villagers on all aspects of life and living.

Programme/ Project activities include:

- Establishing Child Rights,
- Strengthening Civil Society
- Enabling local initiatives to improve the access & quality of elementary education

Beneficiaries of ERA's programmes:

In fact, we are primarily concerned with the following arterial area of activities:

- elementary education and health care for **children** in the purview of Child Rights;
- economic program for poor & destitute **women**, and for small & marginal **farmers**;
- promoting local **youth** to foster real development.

On its part, ERA had attained a reasonable level of success in all its projects. Innovative experiments in water management and elementary education made ERA a household name. Solutions were refreshing but the impact was invisible mainly due to its limited reach. This was beyond ERA to achieve all by itself. But the gap, it seemed, could be filled by strengthening community initiatives and by bringing them under the same scheme of things. And ERA, with the wealth of experience at its command, was certainly in a position to do so.

A stress on organising and strengthening local initiatives has been laid from the outset itself. With this germinated the idea of mobilising financial support for other local initiatives, eager for synergic action. This culminated into emergence of a broader platform - Sarokaar. Members mandated Sarokaar to evolve into an autonomous People's Organisation. Sarokaar is synergising action to help ERA and its partners attain the set objectives through networking and alliance building at various levels

ERA's current mandate is an invigorating challenge to cope up with the self-assigned new role. Collectively working through the spaces available within constitutional and democratic framework is envisaged to mould public policies that enable the people to sustain their livelihoods, participate in decision making and assert their rights.

Now, ERA is financially supporting more than 17 organizations and many more non-financially, to evolve an entire package of integrated program for the overall socio-economic upliftment. Cumulative coverage extends to more than 350 villages falling under 7 districts in Uttaranchal.

The intervention is unleashing into path breaking initiatives in the areas of collective action, strategic alliance and policy influencing. The initiative is envisaged to evolve into a broader mass movement, encompassing whole range of livelihood issues of the poor and marginalised.

We are steadily heading in the direction, building milestones. At each milestone, retrospection is continued process to adopt correctives to have a positive impact on our activities. The continued retrospection provides further opportunities to see our collective mandate through. Building on the experience thus gathered the ERA team has charted its new course of ACTION that reframed its approach and defined levels of working.

The Approach

ERA now combines elements of service, empowerment and advocacy in its approach:

- service that solves specific problems;
- empowerment of people in need so that they lead in achieving those remedies; and
- advocacy to address those needs in a more systematic way.

In cognizance with the approach, ERA works at three levels:

Grassroots level

Direct grassroots intervention is undertaken only at experimentation level to yield useful insights that seek to develop a better understanding on the issues to endorse policy changes.

Intermediary level

- Promoting and strengthening, local initiatives, CBOs and NGOs thereby increasing overall impact through their organizational growth.
- Network these initiatives and linking them to similar initiatives, for advocacy both within and outside the region.

Policy Research & Advocacy

- **Documentation** of relevant information,
- **Policy research & analysis.**
- **Public education** on development issues.

Funding

The funding is mostly on project-to-project basis, annually renewed in case of CRY Trust. Main source of funding continued to be private Indian organizations - mainly Child Rights & You (CRY) for establishing child rights and for Sarokaar to pursue its advocacy activities. This year additional support was received to analyze the allocations made for children in the Uttaranchal state budget.

Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Mumbai renewed its project for 'Strengthening Civil society' in Uttaranchal.

Project funding under FCRA was received from National Education Group (IGSSS) for construction of one school building cum community centre at Tuni.

Additionally, liberal donations and voluntary inputs were received from individuals.

THE YEAR 2005-2006

The year embarked with the partner's continued recognition of the need to align and strengthen each other to synergise the process to bring positive change.

To express its current of thoughts and actions, ERA was able to carry out the following projects during the year:

CONTINUING PROJECTS

Establishing Child Rights

Central focus of the program is establishing child rights granted under the legal framework and under the purview of international commitments made thereto.

Community Education program, humbly initiated by ERA, has now been running full steam. Elementary Schools initiated in the process, are being managed by the partner organizations.

The program entails:

- Reactivating govt infrastructure to provide elementary education and primary health care;
- Delivering services to solve local-specific problems - organising health care camps, facilitating child participation, etc.
- Educating and organizing community around child rights and related predominant local issues; and promoting collective action to transform it through interventions made in the direction of asserting their basic rights to health care, education, and livelihood issues.

This year's thrust was surveillance of partners' pockets of influence to look beyond constitutional's rights. Public debates were elicited around consequence of the 'Right to Education', 'Right to Information' and 'Employment Guarantee' Act. Strength provided by partner organizations has multiplied our capacity to reach more people in a larger area.

Strengthening Civil Society

The Project was launched in March 2004. It is envisaged to foster real development by strengthening and synergising People's initiatives for development & their institutions in the state of Uttaranchal.

The project entails unleashing people's capacity to better understand their own situation and its linkages with the external trends. It attempted to organise community around predominant local issues, thereby promoting collective action to transform it through interventions made in the direction set by their own genius.

This eventually led to overall review of ERA, in particular its support to Sarokaar - a real Strategic Planning exercise. The review and planning process was conducted with help from external facilitators. Thus enriching public debate around people's core issues and building a mass movement for policy influencing.

Partner Organisation's participation in the review of the project and consequently response to 'Leadership Building' workshop was truly encouraging.

PROJECTS COMPLETED

The project '**Plan of Action to create agrarian-based support mechanism for promoting micro-enterprises**' was a follow-up of the Small Grants Program to support the process of Organizing Medicinal Plants Growers' Forum in Uttarakhand. Non-receipt of second installment hindered the progress for the project completion.

Similarly, a **Watershed Development** Project was being implemented in 17 villages of Tons (Left) Micro Watershed area of Chakrata Development Block of Dehradun district. Even this project has to be closed due to non-receipt of funds from CAPART. The process however is being continued.

The idea behind entire experiment is to create jobs for the jobless, enhance cash income of poor farmers through promoting rural enterprises by bringing their fallow land under profitable cultivation, without digressing them from subsistence farming. ERA, understanding the need and scope of the project in the state of Uttarakhand, is poised for promoting action-oriented research, conducting field studies, training and occasional publications in this arena.

PROJECTS COMMENCED

This year construction of one school building cum community centre at Tuni in Bawar region of Chakrata block was initiated with support from NEG (IGSSS), New Delhi.

Non-Funded Programs

Although, we are going in for issue based campaigns, but we are still struggling with the problems that are inextricably linked with the paucity of funds. However, we have efficiently managed to utilize our scarce resources to the maximum and have continued and initiated a lot of activities, which are not funded. Of these, organizing consultations, perspective-building workshops, public meetings, facilitating rally and demonstration, etc. is an ongoing process, depending on the availability of resources (finance) and suitability of time.

ERA is also trying to evolve the modalities for an integration of all the programmes with entrepreneurship development and leadership building. Imparting professional skills followed by initiation of economic activities suited to their localized condition shall be an integral part of the drive.

Our office set up at Dehradun extends support to a number of local initiatives, engaged especially in development and socio-cultural activities. It has networking with a number of other organizations and is being perceived as training cum resource center, to cater to the needs of emerging local initiatives in the region.

Similarly, a large number of local people motivated by ERA, who have formed their own organizations, are growing. We are providing crucial inputs to them on a regular basis. They are gradually being strengthened and linked with donors for support and lobbying for advocacy on issues.

PROJECTS UNDERWAY

In lieu of globalization, the fast changing definition of development is now becoming a major concern. There is a felt need to facilitate wider discussions encompassing real issues of the marginalized and guide people's movement from grassroots to the center stage. For the purpose, documentation and publication of case studies of small refreshing solutions and continuity of a (issue-based) newsletter/ occasional publications has to be ensured. Likewise we plan to promote Internet advocacy on various issues.

ERA's website has been updated/ improved, Web publishing is yet to be undertaken, and representatives of people's groups and local NGOs have to be facilitated with opportunities to participate in issue related workshops to develop better understanding of the issues affecting them. Funds for such initiatives are difficult to mobilise.

We need to enhance our reach and coverage to include more organizations and individuals for support, which shall pave way for people's vision of development i.e. to provide much required educational and economic opportunities for the local youth.

Convergence of all these processes shall perhaps be a more effective way to fight against the systematic oppression and increasing inequitable social trends. The movement signifies the validity and the hope for a new direction. Our efforts shall continue to apprise our partners and feelers with our activities and to draw their remarks.

Acknowledgements

We remain thankful to Child Rights & You (CRY) Trust and Sir Dorabji Tata (SDTT) Trust for their continued support to our programs. We are also thankful to NEG (IGSSS) for their faith in our objectives and abilities and extending much needed support.

Moreover, a lot of individuals, local groups and voluntary organizations have been closely cooperating with us on various issues.

Strength provided by partner organizations has multiplied our capacity to reach more people in a larger area. In addition to partner organizations, increasing number of volunteers have been a major source of strength to us. We gratefully acknowledge their role in our endeavours.

Hopefully, these relationships would continue with much better spirit in the coming days.

The Team

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| Size of individual membership | 36 | Partner Organizations | 21 |
| Volunteers - more than | 10 | Total paid personnel at ERA | 18 |

Our audited statement of accounts is available on request