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Book Reviews

Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, **Training for Transformation: a Handbook for Community Workers**. 3 Volumes, Mambo Press, Gweru, 1984 Z\$20, 18c per set.

A new handbook for people working with communities at grassroot level was published in 1984 in Zimbabwe. The book, 'Training for Transformation', is suitable for those who are concerned with the process of transforming society, and is particularly invaluable to adult educators, social workers, community development workers and also to church workers. This easy-to-read handbook makes generous and extensive use of illustrations. Furthermore, discussion questions and exercises in different formats are provided, presumably to encourage total involvement when using the book. One other refreshing aspect of the handbook is that it has a 'human touch'. For instance, the authors point out at one stage that the exercises in the book are a "means to help us express our love and concern for people more effectively" (vol. 1 p4).

The handbook has been reproduced in three parts (or volumes) and the authors argue that this will make it easier to use in the field rather than one large bulky book. I beg to differ: in my view it is easier to carry around a single bulky volume in the field than carrying three different (though less bulky) books. Part one covers the theory of Paulo Freire on the issue of developing critical awareness and how to put this theory into practice. It argues that development and education are first and foremost about liberating people from all that holds them back from a full human life and that development, liberation and transformation are all aspects of the same process. It further contends that because the bonds of poverty and oppression make the lives of vast numbers of people increasingly inhuman, it is amongst the poor and oppressed that development programmes and adult education must start. This section also tries to show how community workers can create a friendly climate in the community so that even the shyest person will gain sufficient self-confidence to contribute his/her experience and insight to the common search for solutions to the enormous problems faced in today's world.

The second part addresses itself to ways of breaking what Freire termed the "culture of silence". It argues that in order to achieve this people need to gain a sense of self-confidence and know that what they think is important. There is no better way of achieving this goal, argue the authors, than through the importing of group skills necessary for conscientisation. Conscientisation can only be achieved, in the main, through dialogue; and dialogue begins at the local level, in small units and thus in groups. Groups should be able to facilitate a climate of participation. Various aspects of general group work theory and group dynamics in particular (including issues such as room arrangements that facilitate maximum participation, group size etc.) are covered. My only reservation here is that those community workers who may not have had prior training in general group

work theory, might find it a bit difficult to follow certain aspects of this section. To me the workers seem to have assumed, wittingly or unwittingly, that all those who will use the handbook would have had a background in group work theory, and the assumption may not be necessarily correct. In my opinion, the handbook itself cannot serve as an introductory text for training in group work theory.

A number of practical exercises, complete with directions for application, the time scale required for each exercise, and the material necessary for role play, etc., are also included in the book, and the user will certainly find them useful. The often controversial issue of leadership is also dealt with at length. The 'myth' that leadership is a mysterious 'charismatic' quality is dismissed with the contempt it deserves and a more realistic view that leadership can be a skill that many people can develop if they are willing to give it a go, is strongly advanced in the book. Various leadership skills such as those in decision-making, action planning and organising workshops are dealt with at considerable length.

Part three concerns itself mainly with the social analysis necessary for the development of critical awareness among individuals. It also deals with the steps needed for building a spirit of solidarity in people's everyday activities. A number of tools necessary for carrying out social analysis are identified. Furthermore, the reader's attention is drawn to an introduction to simple economics where economic aspects such as types of production and distribution of resources are covered. The handbook tries to show, in a most refreshing manner, that not only is it impractical to divorce politics from development issues, but it is equally unrealistic to divorce religion from the same question of development.

On the controversial question of politics, concern is raised over the topical issue of why the poor remain poor. An argument is developed that in a capitalist socio-economic order, society is divided into three classes — rich, middle and poor. In such a system, although functional change is required in order to take some of the wealth from the top group and distribute it among the poor, this in fact is not enough. What is required is structural transformation; there is need for people to get involved in production and hence in development of their society. A bottom-up approach is therefore advocated. It is further reasoned that a bottom-up approach is best workable in a climate of socialism. But, while socialism is thus advocated, the book is quick to charge that the present blend of socialism pursued in most countries is unfortunately based on bureaucracy. What is needed is a community based movement. Thus the people themselves must participate, and this implies of course that there must prevail a climate conducive to the realisation of self-determination. Adult education and literacy training are identified as some of the most important tools for the achievement of this goal.

On the issue of religion, the handbook goes out of its way to try and show that there is a positive relationship, not only between Christianity and development, but also a tripartite one encompassing Christianity, socialism and development. Various quotations either from the Bible or from

prominent church and state leaders are cited in support of this contention. At one point, the book even argues thus "There is no doubt that the message of Christianity calls us to complete commitment to the struggle for a world where every person will have the opportunity for full human development . . ." (volume 3 p. 49). This should make the book even more appealing to church workers in socialist countries, particularly since this is often an area fraught with controversy. The parallel with the stand taken by the churches in South America is obvious and we must wait and see if churches elsewhere in the Third World follow this lead.

Perhaps the central question to be asked about the book is: How does it fare in its venture to rewrite Freire's philosophy in a simplified form? In attempting to answer, one would first point out that it is always a daunting task to rewrite something in a simplified form and still manage to retain completely the original meaning. Having said that, in the work under review the authors seem to have fared reasonably well in this task, and it seems to me that the basic theory of Freirean philosophy has been retained with considerable clarity.

The general impression one gets from browsing through the book is that the book should be welcomed in all socialist societies, but in capitalist societies the 'status quo' might feel threatened by the themes from such a book. However, some critics have also argued that in socialist societies some 'powers-that-be' do not feel comfortable with the Freirean philosophy because conscientisation, by definition, implies a confrontation with authority; in centrally planned economics and societies such an attitude is not judged acceptable.

One final comment: some readers, after going through the book, may feel that they have heard it all before, while others might feel that it is too much of an oversimplification of Freire's ideas. Even those who feel they have heard it all before should find the experience of reading this handbook a refreshing, and above all, a rewarding exercise. In spite of the book's flaws and controversial statements (some of which have been cited above), I can only hail it as a valuable and welcome contribution to the field of social development. I would urge all those who work with communities in developing countries, (in whatever capacity) to read it, in spite of their different political or religious persuasions.

Reviewed by R. Mupidziswa, School of Social Work, Harare.

Robert Chambers, *Rural Development; Putting the Last First*. 246 pgs, Longman, London, 1983 price not indicated.

Chambers, a Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, has subtitled his book *Putting the Last First* indicating not only the ideological position he is taking up but also that the book is aimed primarily at the 'professional', both the academic and the practitioner, who is concerned with or working directly or indirectly in rural development and rural poverty. Chambers takes a refreshingly positive but critical look at the problems of rural poverty and the role of the 'professionals'. His concern is in many respects primarily with the 'outsider', 'the rural tourist', who plans for and designs programmes for rural development. The outsider in this case may be an expatriate but also includes local people who are urban based (and biased!) and who do not spend extended lengths of time with the rural poor.

The first half of the book is taken up with looking at the problem of the 'professional' and the problems of rural poverty, with interesting concepts introduced including the 'deprivation trap' and the 'poverty ratchet'. While Chambers has strong bias throughout the book to the importance of the analysis of situations, the chapter on causes of rural poverty is not entirely adequate and satisfactory but does isolate a number of issues which are of growing concern to anyone working in rural development—concerns expressed earlier in the writings of Freire, Illich, Shumacher and others.

The latter half of the book tries to look at and open up areas of action and ways of operating which will correct the biases and reverse the trend of poverty in rural areas. Chambers uses a number of examples from Asia and Africa south of the Sahara to build up a picture of the possibilities for action. Most of these possibilities, in line with the major aim of the book, focus on the 'professional'—their attitudes, ways of working, interaction with the rural poor, rural elite and political structures. A strong call is made for a committed professional whose values are geared to putting the 'last first'—by listening to and learning from the rural poor and encouraging the development of local control over decisions, resources and actions, and building the capacity of these generally vulnerable and powerless groups to analyse their own situations and act on them.

Chambers is calling for a number of what he calls 'reversals' which in the long or short term must lead to a major change in the status quo in rural areas and in the attitudes of those involved in rural development. These reversals include reversals in learning (who learns from whom?), reversals in management (who makes the decisions for whom and at what levels? from the top or the bottom?), reversals of personal action and commitment on the part of professionals, reversals in the conventional methods of gathering information from rural people (the survey method comes in for a great deal of criticism), and a reversal from participant observation to participant organisation.

Chambers's concern is that the 'new professional' should be a person who can and does critically examine his own actions and biases, a

multidisciplinarian who is open to new information and ideas, to dialogue with the poor, and is innovative in his approach to action. Above all the new professional is a person who knows, cares and acts.

Rural Development is a highly readable book, from cover to cover or 'dipping' into it, and should be recommended reading for all students and professionals in the social sciences and in other disciplines that are involved in one way or another with the rural poor—particularly administrators, planners, policy makers and research workers. The development of the 'new professional' who is critical of his own situation and his own actions is long overdue.

Reviewed by Brigid Willmore, Harare.