

THE TORONTO STAR

Established 1892

Tuesday
November 29, 1983
25 CENTS
October Monday-Friday
paid circulation 507,823

Global aid group harnesses 'people power'

Institute helps reduce poverty in 50 nations including rural Canada

By Haroon Siddiqui Toronto Star

In a rambling old house on Bellevue Ave., off Spadina and College, Brian Williams turns on his video to watch a 15-minute film he has seen dozens of times.

Introduced by Ben Kingsley, Oscar-winning actor of Gandhi, it's about Williams' employer, the Institute of Cultural Affairs.

The institute doesn't have much to do with culture. It deals more with the mundane reality of rural development.

Harnessing "people power" in a perfect manifestation of small-is-beautiful, the institute is directing about 1,000 grassroots community projects from Vancouver Island through the Alberta highland to the Maritimes — and around the globe.

While foreign aid has largely been mismanaged by Western bureaucrats or misappropriated by Third World dictators and despots, the institute is doing some solid work in Canada and 50 nations.

Quiet efficiency

Its volunteers are *not* what one might suspect them to be — white do-gooders or missionaries or liberals expiating their guilt. Operating in Canada since 1976, they have worked with quiet efficiency and a low profile, so low the public has hardly noticed.

But some high-profile agencies as UNESCO and high-powered people have and are logging for it:

□ Robert McNamara, former president of



High-powered help: Senator Florence Bird and former World Bank president Robert McNamara support institute.

the World Bank;

□ Andy Young, mayor of Atlanta;

□ Cyrus Vance, a former U.S. secretary of state; and from Canada

□ Film producer Norman Jewison;

□ Senators Florence Bird and Richard Stanbury;

□ MP Doug Roche; and

□ Lewis D. Whitehead, publisher of the Brandon Sun in Manitoba and former president of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association.

Whitehead heads the volunteer board of directors for Canada. A suave bachelor equally at home in his native prairie pastures as in the boardrooms of Madison Ave., New York, where he has had business interests, he's taking time out from his hectic corporate life to peddle the cause of the institute:

"Millions will die this year alone through famine in central Africa where if our projects are made known and made available and put into practice by us and by their

governments, we could save people from starvation.

"If the process could be repeated worldwide, the institute could be the one thing that could eventually feed the entire world."

Williams is the institute's executive secretary and he's also in charge of its Toronto office, one of six across Canada.

A veteran of development work, he came here recently after five years at the institute's headquarters in Brussels, and five before that in a model village in western India.

In Maliwada, near Bombay, he helped motivate the entire population to work together in raising sanitation, health, agricultural and economic standards.

Amazed at the transformation he helped bring about, the Indian government came through with grants, and banks gave loans for cottage industries.

"The institute's contribution consisted mainly of staff serving as consultants, bringing people and ideas together in a process that worked from the bottom up, not top down," says Williams.

Overcoming problems

But in pulling off such miracles, the institute people do run into problems.

In Maliwada, for instance, "the villagers' first suspicion was that we were missionaries out to convert them to Christianity," says Robert Yallop, a native of Australia, who now works here with Williams. "But slowly, they developed confidence in us."

Maliwada now serves as a model of development in the Third World.

The ideal of group self-help emerged in 1954 from the World Council of Churches. In 1973 came the institute, a lay body whose members went beyond their Christian inspi-

ration to professionalism. Divesting themselves of their religious moorings, they were soon on to a mission without being missionaries — helping aboriginals in Australia, the indigenous people of the Marshall Islands in the Pacific, and the Metis in Manitoba.

Public, private mix

A community is brought together to identify its problems and hopes, and chart an economic and social program using existing resources — local government, service clubs, chambers of commerce and business in a happy mix of private and public sectors.

The institute has launched a three-year program to share its success stories with others.

Last summer, it brought 115 people from 36 Alberta projects to Lethbridge and Stony Plain. About 130 met in Orillia to exchange know-how. Similar meetings were held in the Yukon, Saskatchewan and the Maritimes.

The institute has selected 12 top projects from across Canada to represent us at an International Exposition of Rural Development, Feb. 5-15 in New Delhi, India.

Unlike other global assemblies where politicians and bureaucrats talk in officialese, this New Delhi gathering will bring together field workers, community leaders and government and voluntary workers from 56 nations — a live united nations of real people.

These folk will take new ideas back to their home communities. The best of them will be published in a resource book, a manual of practical global ideas for improving the human condition.