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STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF DISTRICT RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY IN ASSAM : A CASE STUDY

C.S. SINGHAL

In the fifties when community development programme was introduced in the country a nation wide organisational network was created in the shape of community development blocks integrating various sectoral departments at the sub-district level. The community development programme, over the years, lost its identity, but the "Block" as an agency for rural development administration at the grass root level continued to function though its original structure had changed considerably.

The subsequent rural development programmes were implemented through various district and area level agencies like Small Farmer Development Agency (SFDA), Hill Area Development Agency (HADA), Command Area Development Agency (CADA), Tribal Development Agency (TDA), etc. The agency approach was a product of an idea that there will be more operational flexibility in the programme implementation.

In order to bring about integration in administrative arrangements at the state and district level and consequent upon the extension of Integrated Rural Development Programme to all the development blocks of the country from October 2, 1980, a new District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), emerged as a distinct administrative body for planning and implementation of rural development programmes. All other programmes such as SFDA, DPAP, wherever in existence, were merged with the DRDAs on the recommendation of the then Ministry of Rural Reconstruction, Government of India. Since then DRDAs have become a nodal agency for the planning and implementation of all rural development activities at the district level.

The present paper is aimed to analyse the structure and functioning of District Rural Development Agency in Assam. The paper is based on a research study conducted by the present author with the following three objectives: (1) To analyse the manpower position and nature of task carried out in DRDA of Assam; (2) to analyse the arrangements for co-ordination between DRDA and other sectoral departments; and (3) to suggest some measures for improvement in the functioning of the DRDA in Assam.

The data were collected through scheduled interviews of DRDA

officials (N=25) working in various districts of Assam. It includes Project Directors (PD), Project Officers (P.O.), and other officials like Executive Engineers, Assistant Project Officers. In addition 10 members of the governing body of the DRDAs were also interviewed through a structured schedule. The study was mainly focussed on DRDA of Kamrup district of Assam. The distribution of the sample is shown in table 1.

Table NO. 1: Respondents of the study.

Respondents	Total NO.	District(s)
DRDAs Officials		
1 Project Directors (P.D)	12	Barpeta, Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Golaghat, Jorhat, Kamrup, Karimganj, Nagaon, Nalbari, North Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Sonitpur
2 Project Officers (P.O.)	06	Darrang, Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Kamrup, Karimganj & Karbi Anglong
Other Officials (Os)		
1) Executive Engineer	01	Kamrup
2) Assistant Project Officer		
Agriculture	02	
Monitoring	01	
Technical	02	
Inspector of Statistics	01	
Governing body members		
MLAs & head of different dept.	10	Kamrup.

STRUCTURE OF DRDA's IN ASSAM

The DRDA is a semi autonomous body registered under the societies registration act 1860. The agency has full time Project Director, who is a senior officer of Indian Administrative service Cadre or an equivalent officer of the state civil service. Besides PD, DRDAs in Assam are also have a Project Officer, who is drawn from state civil services. The agency is strengthened with an Executive Engineer and about eight (8) Assistant Project Officers in various disciplines relevant to the requirements of the districts viz. (1) APO Agriculture (2) APO Veterinary (3) APO Credit (4) APO

Industries (5) APO Monitoring (6) APO Technical (7) APO Irrigation (8) APO Women Development

DRDA has a governing body comprising heads of various sectoral departments, elected representatives of people and distinguished social workers. Like in other parts of the country, the Deputy Commissioner is the ex-officio Chairperson of the DRDA. The agency is supposed to meet once in a quarter.

Success of any development programme would depend largely on the efficiency of the administrative staff. Since inception of the DRDA time to time various new programmes have been introduced at the national level which were handed down to DRDA for implementation. As a result both the shape and size of DRDA has also been undergoing change. Started as a small agency mainly for implementation of IRDP, it was loaded with the burden to implement JRY, TRYSEM, DWCR, BIOGAS, PASMAFP etc. from time to time.

MANPOWER

The majority of officials (56 percentage) felt that staff in DRDAs and blocks are not sufficient. Some of the observations/Suggestions of respondents regarding manpower are as follows:

I) The various posts of Assistant Project Officers and of technical staff in DRDAs and at the block level remains vacant.

II) The existing manpower at DRDAs would be sufficient provided they are used effectively. Very often the appropriate job are not assigned to the officials at DRDAs. The Project Directors should be oriented towards the technical task to be performed by various officials at DRDAs.

III) Professional management personnel should be posted as Project Directors and experience and leadership qualities should be given due weightage in appointment of officials in DRDAs.

IV) One Sectional Assistant at Gaon panchayat level should be posted for proper supervision of construction work under JRY.

V) Secretarial staff do not possess required skill to perform their job. These staff members should be provided opportunity to develop required skill in job.

Staff Requirement

The officials are posted at the DRDA on deputation basis from various sectoral departments. Table 2 shows responses of respondents about mode of requirements in DRDAs.

Table 2: Respondents opinion about mode of recruitment

S.No.	Category of Respondent	Opinion about mode of recruitment				Total
		<u>DIRECT DEPUTATION NO RESPONSE</u>				
1.	Project Directors	--	12	--	12	
2.	Project officers	5	1	--	6	
3.	Other officials	4	2	1	7	
Total		9	15	1	25	

All Projects Directors were in favour of deputation as mode of selection for DRDAs officials while Project Officers (83.33 percent), Other DRDA Officials (57.15 percent) and members of Governing body were in favour of direct recruitment.

Training

The distribution of DRDA officials according to their exposure to training programmes is shown in table 3.

Table NO. 3 : Exposure to training programmes

Training Courses	PD	PO	OS	Total
Attended	11	5	6	22
Not attended	01	01	01	03
Total	12	06	07	25

Table 3 shows the detail account of training attended. The majority of officials (88 percent) had undergone training and found it useful to great extent in their day to day job. Some of the suggestions given by the respondents were as periodical training for DRDAs officials, specially separate programme for Assistant Project Officials (APOs) and technical officials working in DRDAs and blocks.

The seminar/workshops on specific programmes with involvement of state, district and block level officials of various development departments should be organised.

Job Satisfaction

The distribution of the respondents according to their opinion about their job satisfaction is shown in table 4.

Table 4: Job satisfaction of the respondent

Response	PD	PO	OS	Total
Very satisfied	01	02	01	04
Some what satisfied	11	04	05	20
Not satisfied	--	--	01	01
Total	12	06	07	25

Table 4 shows the opinion about satisfaction in the present job in comparison to earlier one. The majority of officials (80 percent) find their job some what satisfactory followed by very satisfactory (16 percent) and unsatisfactory (4 percent).

Coordination

The majority of DRDA officials (64 percent) were not having any problem while 32 percent officials had problems in dealing with other departments. The problems mentioned were harassment of beneficiaries by financial institutions, some bank delayed sanction of loan proposals, block staff do not inform date of disbursement and delay in submission of reports and input supply without coordination from sectoral departments. Some of the operational problems made coordination bitter were as having false certificates with applications were forwarded to bank; viability of scheme forwarded to bank was not seen; no effort was made by DRDA officials to see whether scheme will generate incremental income or not; corruption in sponsoring quite a few applications to bank and DRDAs.

The Governing body members were also not satisfied with the existing coordination between DRDA officials and sectoral departments. The reason behind lack of coordination between bank and DRDA officials were; non-cooperative attitude of local bank branches; corruption and some genuine problems.

The Governing body members were in favour of collective responsibility between banks and DRDA officials and were of the view that Dy. Commissioner as chairman of DRDA should try to achieve coordination, more meeting and personal contact were advocated for better coordination.

Physical Facilities

The physical facilities like vehicle/office building, furniture etc. influence significantly the working of DRDA officials. The majority of DRDA officials (68 percent) felt that required facilities were not available while only 16.67 percent officials reported it as available. The office accommodation at DRDA, Kamrup found inadequate and staff quarters were not provided to the officers of DRDA.

Task of DRDA Officials

The Project Directors (PDs) mentioned their main responsibility as to act as Chief Executive and management of financial aspect like release of funds to block (50.30 percent), planning, implementation of IRDP, TRYSEM, JRY, DWCRA etc. (50 percent), administrative task (41.67 percent), coordination with bank and other departments (33.33 percent) and preparation of annual action plan (25 percent).

The majority of POs (83.33 percent) mentioned their main work as to plan, implement, monitoring of work related to IRDP, TRYSEM, JRY, Bio-gas etc. and to provide assistance to PDs as and when required (16.67 percent). Table 5 shows the responses of officials about their association with various programmes/ schemes.

Table NO. 5: Respondents association with programme / scheme in DRDA

Programme	PD	PO	OS	Total
IRDP	12	05	04	21
TRYSEM	05	03	01	09
DWCRA	01	--	--	01
JRY	12	03	04	19
BIO-GAS	11	03	02	16
PASMAFF	05	--	--	05
OTHERS	02	--	--	02

The PDs are not able to concentrate properly on rural development task as they have to attend frequently Secretariat/ Directorate, law and order as part of their duty.

The DRDA staff devote most of their time in routine official work. The paper work is too much. They hardly get time for identification and preparation of innovative projects, visit to sectoral departments and qualitative monitoring which are their main job.

The computer does not work in most of the DRDAs. If it functions properly the paper work can be reduced considerably.

At the block level, the existing technical staff are not able to cope up with the required task of supervision in construction work under JRY because the schemes are scattered and labour intensive.

Suggestions

- 1) The existing manpower of DRDAs would be sufficient provided that it is used effectively. The Project Directors should be oriented towards the technical tasks to be performed by various officials in DRDAs, so that they can utilise the existing staff in a better way;
- 2) Professional management personnel should be posted as PDs and experience and leadership qualities should be given due weightage in appointment of the officials in DRDAs ;
- 3) Appointment of a sectoral assistant on the pattern of PWD at Gaon Panchayat level should be considered for proper supervision of employment programmes like Jawahar Rojgar yojna (JRY);
- 4) The vacant posts of Assistant Project Officers and technical staff at DRDAs and block level should be filled on priority basis and secretarial staff needs to develop required skill in job;
- 5) Funds should be released in time to DRDAs/ Blocks so that staff may get enough time to implement the programmes ;
- 6) The government should formulate a solid recruitment policy and rules for appointment of officials and administrative staff in DRDAs;
- 7) The posting of officials at DRDAs should be minimum for a period of three years. The option of officials at the time of posting should be considered for better performance ;
- 8) The service conditions of DRDA officials should be made lucrative to attract talented persons. The DRDA officials should be given deputation allowances as per government rules in place of special pay ;
- 9) The seminar/ workshop on specific programmes with involvement of state, district and block level officials of various development departments should be organised by NIRD/SIRD;
- 10) Periodical training/ refresher courses for DRDA officials specially for Assistant Project Officers, technical personnel of DRDAs & block administration should be organised regularly ;

11) The orientation courses/ workshops for field staff like Extension Officers, Gram Sevaks / Sevikas should be organised on priority basis in SIRD/ETCs ;

12) There is a need to organise intensive training in the operations of computers in different functional areas to reduce the workload and streamline the functioning ;

13) The Governing body meeting should be held regularly once in a quarter as envisaged in guideline and there should be detailed discussion on the problems encountered in implementation of various rural development programmes. The active social workers, Academicians and Industrialists should also be involved as members of Governing body to revitalise it ;

14) There should be collective responsibility between bank and DRDA officials and deputy Commissioner as Chairman of DRDA should try to achieve coordination

15) The physical facilities of DRDAs and block administration level need to be improved for better performance of the staff ; and

16) There should be a government decision not to deploy DRDA functionaries for non DRDAs works so that they can devote more time in implementation of rural development programmes.

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BOOK REVIEW

S.N. Chaudhary

1993 : **Community Power Structure : Search for Alternative Paradigm**, New Delhi. Har-Anand Publications, pp 161, Rs. 195.

The concept of power although attracted the attention of social scientists and philosophers from the very beginning as reflected in their thoughts and writings but a systematic analysis of the notion of power became popular only after Second World War. The book under review claims to take a note of the development in the concept of community power structure in last four decades and as its subtitle suggests, it also makes an attempt to formulate an alternative paradigm for the analysis of community power structure.

The book is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter, the author introduces the theme of the book and provides a comprehensive picture of the concept of power in historical perspective. Here he also explores the relation of the power with some other concepts like authority, prestige, influence, dominance and force.

In the following chapter, three major perspectives on power - Marxist, Elitist and Pluralist - are discussed and an attempt is made to highlight the strength and weaknesses of these approaches. The author argues that despite of all merits all these theories project only one sided picture of the phenomenon and have certain limitations when employed to the analysis of power structure at the micro-level.

Therefore, in the third chapter, he reviews four models - reputational, decision - making, control and resources - developed for the study of power structure at the micro-level. The author then discusses the contribution of Jacobsen and Cohen in integration of these models for the micro-level analysis. Here, it is argued that the play of power is not always vertical but sometimes power also works in a group at the horizontal level. In the fourth and fifth chapters major dimensions and techniques for the measurement of power are discussed in a comprehensive manner.

In the sixth chapter the author attempted to take a note of the major studies on community power structure in India. Here first he describes two models used for such studies namely, Dominant caste model and Rich Peasant model. Then, he goes further and selects a few sample studies from north and south zone of the country. From the north zone the Yogendra Singh's study of eastern Uttar Pradesh and F. R. Frankel's study of Bihar are taken into consideration while for the south zone Andre Beteille's study of Sripuram is selected by the author.

He first summarises the major findings of these works and