

# Community Development -- A Review

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT -- A REVIEW.

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The Community Development Programme was inaugurated in the country twenty years ago on 2nd October, 1952. I propose to review the working of this programme during this period.

There were various schemes of Rural Development in India prior to the First Five Year Plan such as L. Brayne's experiments in Gurgaon District of the Punjab, Rural Development Scheme in Baroda State, the Sarvodaya Scheme in Bombay and the Firka Development Scheme in Madras. However, the first attempt on a National Scale for a comprehensive plan for rural development throughout the country came with the Community Project Programme inaugurated in 1952. To start with 55 projects all over India with a budget of Rs. 65 lakhs each for a period of three years each project covering a population of two to three lakhs. Subsequently it was realised that the area and population was rather large and smaller areas with a population of 66,000 were taken up for development. The area taken up was named a block. Every year a few blocks would be taken up under the National Extension Service with a budget of Rs. 5.5 lakhs for 3 years. But before the expiry of three years it would be converted into a Community Development Block with a budget of Rs. 15 lakhs for three years, after which the block would reach the post intensive stage when the staff would be retained without central assistance programmes, it being assumed that such funds would be forthcoming from the Departments concerned of the State Government. As these periods of three years were found too short, later two stages of 5 years each were introduced, the block reaching the post-intensive stage after 10 years. The original idea was to cover the entire country under the programme by the end of the Second Five Year Plan, but the country could be so covered only during the Third Plan.

There were three basic concepts inherent in the scheme viz. area development, coordination of development departments and people's participation. Right from the beginning it was realised that no development programme for the rural areas would succeed without the active participation of the people concerned. The slogan at that time was it was not a 'Government programme with people's participation' but a 'people's programme with Government participation.' The Grow More Food Committee which recommended the introduction of this nation wide programme recommended that a direct link should be forged between the extension and the administrative organisations and that the existing administrative machinery should be transformed into a welfare agency. The block was to be the lowest administrative-cum-development block.

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The launching of such an ambitious programme created several administrative problems. I propose to deal with some of these.

In the first instance it was soon realised that mere availability of funds did not help in carrying out a development programme. At the end of three years, it was found that most of the large Community Projects inaugurated in 1952 could hardly spend even 50% of the amount provided. In the first instance the necessary administrative machinery had to be created, the co-operation of the various development departments had to be obtained. Administrative procedures had to be modified and lastly the necessary people's organisations had to be created so that these could come forward to meet the people's share of the various works programmes. Moreover as the N.E.S. and C.D. Schemes were to be <sup>of</sup> relatively limited duration questions were asked about the future of the organisation at the end of the development period.

In Madras this question was posed for discussion at the Collector's Conference held in May, 1956 when various suggestions were made by the Collectors and the Heads of Departments. A Committee of Senior Officers presided over by a Member of the Board of Revenue was appointed to go into this question. I was a member of the Committee as I was in charge of Community Development in the State at that time. One view expressed at the Collectors' Conference was that even at the post development stage a separate set of staff should be continued in the blocks to look after the extension work and the development work in the Second Five Year Plan and that there should be no merger of this staff with any other departmental staff. The other view was that, at the post development stage, as there would not be so much developmental work as in the intensive development stage, and as there would be considerable overlapping of functions of the B.D.O. and the Tahsildar, the B.D.O. could look after certain revenue functions as well and the B.D.O. - cum-Tahsildar could look after <sup>two</sup> blocks. But the size of the block and the staffing pattern for technical services, including Grama Sevaks should be the same as in the intensive stage. The Committee took note of the views of the Planning Commission that there should be no separate department for "National Extension Service". It is essentially a pattern of administration under which a team of technical officers work under the leadership of an administrator who co-ordinates the work of the various officers. This pattern is applicable as much at the block level as the sub-divisional level and district level where the Revenue Divisional Officer and the

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and the District Collector function already as leaders. The Revenue Department has all along been the Department of General Administration and in its traditional role of adjusting itself to new duties, has been, in the present context of a Welfare State, devoting more and more attention to development work also. The Committee felt therefore that it would be appropriate and would secure the maximum efficiency, if the developmental activities were entrusted to the same set of persons who function in the general administration - a principle already recognised in the case of Collectors and R.D.Os. Since, at the post intensive stage, the development work would consist only of extension work, and what has to be done in the block under the normal aegis of the departments working under the schemes in the Second Five Year Plan, it would be quite possible for one officer to look after both functions. "The Committee however felt that during the intensive development stage such a combination would not be satisfactory as the officers' time would be so fully taken up with the task of co-ordinating the activities of the extension team and mobilising all developmental activities that shall area like a block to discharge any revenue functions in addition. The Committee therefore recommended that, at the post intensive stage the B.D.O should be asked also to discharge the revenue functions of the Tahsildar inside their blocks.

While the arguments advanced by the Committee could apply to States where the ryotwari system was in vogue with a Tahsildar (or mamletdar) in charge of a Tehsil or Taluk, the position in States where the permanent settlement was in vogue was completely different. In States like West Bengal or Bihar there was no officer similar to the Tahsildar or mamletdar dealing with revenue and general administration work below the Sub-Divisional level. Bihar promptly took advantage of the post of B.D.O and gave him the power of collection of land revenue as also certain other administrative powers in the revenue field, but not compulsive power. The block revenue unit is co-extensive with the development block and the B.D.O practically became a Tahsildar.

In Rajasthan the Tahsildar was made the B.D.O. and given an additional Tahsildar to assist him in his revenue work so that he could devote the major portion of his time to development work. In Bombay the Mamletdar (Tahsildar) who was already overworked was in addition made the B.D.O. without the assistance of an additional Tahsildar. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee found that the Bombay system had certain very serious drawbacks, the block was too large, the Mamletdar had little time for developmental work and the cadre of the Tahsildar recruited under the then rules unsuitable for developmental work. The Committee therefore felt

that only when these defects were eliminated would it be possible to combine the revenue and developmental functions in one functionary at the block level.

The Administrative Reforms Committee of Kerala has also discussed this question in its report (1958). The Committee considered the objections to the combination of Revenue and developmental functions in one officer. The main objection was that regulatory and developmental functions should not be combined, as the officer charged with development has to have close contact with and have the confidence of the rural people. The Committee agreed with the Madras Committee that the Tahsildar could deal with revenue and developmental functions in the post intensive stage and suggested that the size of the existing Tahsils should be reduced to make this possible. The Committee suggested that in the intensive stage also the functions could be combined, an Additional Tahsildar being appointed to assist the Tahsildar in revenue work during the intensive stage.

Though I was a member of both the Kerala and Madras Committee, in retrospect, I feel it would have been unwise to combine the revenue and development functions. In subsequent years the pace of development has increased so fast and the work connected with revenue and general administration increased so much, that it would have been impossible for one officer to deal with both items even in a reduced area. These recommendations were however not implemented as there were subsequent developments connected with the introduction of Panchayati Raj.

The Central Ministry of Community Development was somewhat concerned with these suggestions for the combination of revenue and developmental functions as it feared that development work may suffer. At the same time it was anxious that the basic objective of Community Development viz. the association of people with developmental activities so as to make it a 'people's programme' should not be lost sight of. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was appointed in 1956 to study among other things, the contents of the Community Development Programme and to report on the system, organisation and methods of work adopted for the implementation of the programme, coordination between the various departments and bringing in greater speed in the despatch of business. The Committee was also asked to enquire into the pattern of existing district administration and suggest its re-organisation, so that by stages determined in advance, democratic bodies at higher levels and organically linked with Village Panchayats would take over the entire general administration and

development the district or its sub-division, with the exception of certain fields like law and order and administration of justice. The Committee submitted its report in November, 1957.

The Committee observed that one of the least successful aspects of the Community Development and National Extension Service programme was its attempt to evoke popular initiative. The programme evoked in its early years considerable interest and participation in development work and achieved good results in providing amenities like village roads, school buildings, drinking water wells, etc. But it was soon realised that it was not capable of meeting fully even the basic needs of all villages and more significantly it failed to generate momentum in the field of economic development. The Committee noticed that attempts made to harness local initiative by the formation of adhoc bodies which were mostly nominated and advisory in character had not succeeded. These bodies had given no indication of either durable strength or leadership necessary to provide the motive force for continuing the improvement of economic and social conditions in rural areas. It, therefore, came to the conclusion that -

" So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution, which will supply the local interest supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development". The Committee recommended the establishment of bodies at three levels. At the village level would be the Village Panchayats. At the block level there would be a Panchayat Samiti, to be indirectly elected by the Village Panchayats with some representation for municipalities and co-operative organisations within the block. This body is to be assigned specific functions and specific items of revenue. At the District level there is to be a co-ordinating body called the Zila Parishad which will consist of the Presidents of Panchayat Samities, member of the State Legislature and Parliament and all district level officers of the development departments as members with the Collectors as its Chairman.

It will be observed that the recommendation for a three tier system of Panchayati Raj laid emphasis on the middle level body, viz. the Panchayat Samiti as the effective body for rural development. The Committee felt that the purpose of democratic decentralisation would be most effectively served by devolving power on a small body. It however left it open to the States

to transfer power to bodies at District or Sub-Divisional level.

The implementation of the recommendations varied in different States. In Madras the scheme was more or less in line with the Committee's recommendations. The Panchayat Samiti or the Panchayat Union Council as it is known in Madras has been given the necessary finance and certain powers for implementing schemes of rural development. The block level development staff have been placed at its disposal and the B.D.O. acts as the Chief Executive Officer of the body. Certain ~~xxx~~ safeguards have been introduced to prevent abuse of power. The District Development Council is purely a co-ordinating body. In Maharashtra and Gujarat, the body responsible for development is the Zilla Parishad at the District level. The Block level bodies are only committees of the District body. A senior I.A.S. Officer is its Chief Executive Officer. The staff at District level and below of the development departments have been transferred to the Zilla Parishad. While most other States have followed the Madras pattern of an advisory and coordinative body and supervisory body at District level, in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar certain executive functions have been entrusted to the Zilla Parishad. Kerala is yet to pass the necessary legislation and Orissa abolished the Zilla Parishad in 1968.

When the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee was under consideration some of the Development Commissioners had grave doubts about the wisdom of giving wide powers to democratic bodies as past experience in this regard had not been satisfactory. There was the possibility of abuses especially in personnel administration in the matter of transfers and promotions. Factions might develop among the members which would adversely affect the pace of development. In reply it was pointed out <sup>that</sup> these defects were inherent in any system of democratic administration. The country having adopted the democratic system at the National and State level, such defects were possible at these levels also. On the other hand such defects in a body administering a small area would soon come into the open and the members would have to be more sensitive to ~~xxx~~ local opinion than members elected to State or National level bodies. It was also argued that the local bodies would act as a training ground in administration to members seeking election to the higher level bodies, so that in course of time these higher bodies would have members with experience in administration. In implementing the recommendations each State

has introduced such safeguards as it considered necessary and the working of these bodies is constantly reviewed. Some of these reviews have shown a few cases of abuse of power. In some States it was found that the teachers of primary schools were frequently transferred at the whim of the President of the Zilla Parishad or the Panchayat Samiti. In a few cases political factions have sprung up, seriously affecting administration. On the other hand quite a few Presidents of Panchayat Samiti have earned such good name that it is said the area M.L.A.'s are jealous of their popularity. On the whole the abuses follow more or less the same pattern as likely abuses at the State level and if the State Government is a stable one and is sufficiently vigilant prompt corrective action can be taken.

It has been mentioned already that one of the objectives of Community Development is co-ordinated approach to the problems of rural development. There are several departments of the Government dealing with the rural people and sometimes even within the same department there are officers charged with different specific activities. As the activities of the Government increased the Departments grew vertically. Officials belonging to one Department in a locality were often not aware of the activities of another department working in the same area. If some problem arose affecting two such departments the procedure was for the official of one Department to write to his superiors who might in turn even address the Government and the Government would then requisit it to the other Department. There was no agency to co-ordinate the activities of the departments at lower levels. Co-ordination could be effected only at the highest level viz. the Government under the Community Development programme this co-ordination has to be effected at the block level by the B.D.O. The B.D.O. being responsible for all the developmental activities within the block, it is his responsibility to evolve a co-ordinated programme involving the different departments of the Government for the development of the area under his charge, and he has to ensure that this co-ordinated programme is carried out by the officials of the different departments working within the block. He will have to issue directions to these officials from time to time in this regard. The superiors of these officials at the District and State level were initially resentful of the imposition of a generalist over the activities of their officials at the block level. They were afraid that their authority over these officials was being eroded by this arrangement. They questioned

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the competence of a generalist like the B.D.O. to give directions to technical officials. Some Heads of Departments asserted that they would be able to show better progress in their respective spheres if there was no B.D.O. One Director of Agriculture asserted that progress in agriculture was better outside a community development block than in-side. ~~The~~ It had to be pointed out to him that he was as much responsible for agricultural development inside the block as outside. He did not realise that the B.D.O. was there to assist his officials in their work. There were discussions on this point at various levels. It has been finally established that the departmental superiors would be fully responsible for technical supervision over their officials at the block level, while the B.D.O. was responsible for co-ordination and administrative supervision. While this arrangement implies a dual control to some extent and as such might not be as efficient as single line control, such dual control is essential for progress. The position has been in a sense further complicated by the introduction of Panchayati Raj where the non-official President of the Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Praishad has also been given powers of supervision over these officials. On the other hand the introduction of Panchayati Raj has to some extent silenced the superior officers as they could not very well object to a democratic body having control over their officials. The Chief Executive Officer of the Panchayat Samiti or the Zilla Parishad then acts on behalf of the body in much the same way as a Secretary to Government acts on behalf of the Government. In a sense the B.D.O. is himself subject to dual control under Panchayat Raj. Some technical departments have come to realise that the community development programme has added strength to their activities. It has enabled them to act promptly in the case of Agricultural pests or epidemics among livestock as such cases are promptly brought to the notice by the Grama Sevaks. The Departments have been able to intensify their activities with the support of the democratic bodies. Requests for additional funds for such activities would be more easily forthcoming when they are supported by democratic bodies.

However, the debate between the technical heads of departments and others in this matter is still going on. While the Heads of Departments are reconciled to the intervention of the B.D.O. and the Panchayat Samiti for their normal programmes they tend to have separate set of officials for special programmes undertaken by them on the ground that they would be able to supervise such progress better, if they had direct control over

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For instance the staff. In Maharashtra where the democratic body has been deliberately established at the district level to permit wider powers being delegated, important schemes such as seed forms, tractor ploughing, soil conservation, key village schemes have been outside their control and are administered directly by the departments concerned.

It is pertinent to note here one important consequence of Panchayati Raj. It has helped to preserve the integrity of the Community Development Programme. But for this the Heads of Departments would have made representations to their respective Ministers to withdraw more and more activities from its scope. Often Ministers tend to support the Heads of Departments under their control and do not take a wider view. This trend on the part of the Ministers was seen even at the time of the report of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. This was one important consideration in favour of Panchayati Raj. Once Panchayati Raj bodies are established and given certain powers the develop a vested interest in their activities, and Ministers and even Legislatures would find it difficult to withdraw such power. The implementation of development programmes has resulted in considerable additional work on the district Collector. Some States have given him the assistance of an additional officer designated as District Development Officer. In Tamil Nadu the Collector has been given the assistance of the District Revenue Officer so that he could give more attention to development work.

Though the programme has been formulated on a National Scale under a centrally evolved pattern there have been variations between States owing to the different conditions prevailing in each State. But there has been substantial progress in rural development in all the States during the twenty years since the Community Development Programme was launched.

The Community Development Programme was launched with a programme of a limited duration in each area. It was then conceived that in this limited period the area would have been brought up to a certain stage with the funds pumped into the area so that thereafter the normal activities of the departments would be sufficient to look after it. Experience has however shown that developmental activities can never come to a saturation point after which economic development will continue under the momentum generated by such activities. The needs of rural population have been growing so fast that it is unlikely that saturation point will be reached in the near future. These activities will therefore have to be continued without time limit, the programmes being modified from time to time to meet the requirements of changing needs.

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Constant vigilance is required to see that the B.D.O. and his officers do not fall in routine bureaucratic activity. There is also a wrong notion that the quantum of work is dependent on budget allocation. While this may be so in the case of the Engineering personnel connected with works programme, the work of the extension officers for Agriculture or Animal Husbandry does not depend on his budget allocation. The success of their work depends on the number of people to whom they can carry their message of extension. Development staff have to be dynamic and constantly on the lookout for modifications required from time to time, to meet the requirements of the changing situation. There is a tendency on the part of Governments to look upon their staff as merely a set of officers having contact with the rural people and thus use them for collection of funds, such as defence funds, red cross funds etc. Such collection detracts them from their work besides as a certain amount of pressure has to be exerted for such collection, people keep away from the block staff during such collections. This defeats the very purpose of the existence of such staff as the rural people should feel free to take their problems to them at any time. I would suggest that any such fund raising should be left to the Tahsildar and other revenue staff.

One of the objectives of Community Development is to ensure people's participation in developmental programmes. While in a sense participation of people's representative has been brought about by the introduction of Panchayati Raj Institutions, it is difficult to say that even after twenty years, the rural population at large have any sense of participation in the programme. No doubt enterprising and well to do cultivators have reaped the benefit of the programme by getting loans and timely supplies of fertilizers and seeds, the weaker section of the rural community like Harijans, and Agricultural labourers have practically been unaffected by the programme. Where the members of the Panchayati Raj body has shown interest in the weaker sections some progress has been made. But by and large the interest of these members is in the more local and well to do sections. To this extent Panchayati Raj has not made the requisite impact on the community as a whole.

Certain broad conclusions emerge from the foregoing:-

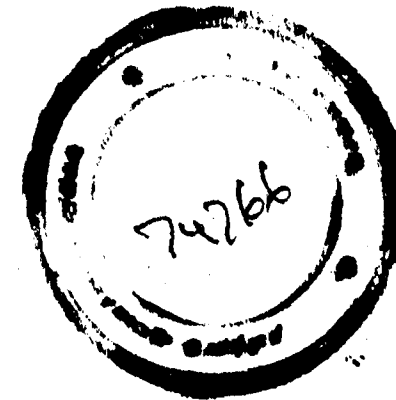
- 1) Rural development is a continuous process and there can be no time limit.
- 2) Combination of revenue and developmental functions in one officer is undesirable at the block level in view of the heavy burden imposed by such combination.

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- 3) Co-ordination of the work of different development departments is essential.
- 4) Panchayati Raj with responsibility for rural development has come to stay.
- 5) Little impact has been made on the weaker sections of the community. A feeling of participation of all sections has to be fostered.
- 6) There should be a constant review of the working of the programme from time to time and modifications made as and when necessary.

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