CHAPTER III
OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: DEFICIENCIES AND POTENTIAL

Governance and development, as the earlier chapters indicate, are processes steeped in communication. In view of this basic contention, in the discussion below what are technically and conventionally viewed as official structures of governance and development are being viewed more as official channels of communication. Keeping this contention in mind, we shall now evaluate both the deficiencies and potential of such official channel. In this context the researcher will analyse the concerned administrative apparatus that deals with rural development as there is the existence of dual administration. The study will cover not only the offices under DGHC but also those under the state government. However, at the same time it is also important to understand the structural part of the offices that have been entrusted with the task of improving the lives of the local rural people.

1. Structural Order

1.1. The State

1.1.1. District Panchayat Rural Development Department

The District Panchayat Rural Development Department (DPRDD) is one of the important departments of the DM office. The DPRDD solely functions and works under the DM office. The department has been constituted for monitoring, supervising and inspecting the working of the GP body. It also works with the Block Development Office. Besides, it is also the head office for four Block Development Offices that comes under Siliguri sub-division. Interestingly, Darjeeling Hills have a single-tier Panchayat system, where as the rest of the state follow the three-tier system. Thus, the departmental scenario is such that for the Hills they have very little work as the majority of work is under the control of DGHC. But for the four Blocks they work normally as it should be following the three-tier. Since the transfer of Panchayat to DGHC has left the DPRDD with little work as vis-à-vis the GP and development of the ordinary rural people. The department is totally responsible and answerable to the District Magistrate for exercise of official proceedings and it
implements guidelines, instructions and notifications by the same. Above the DM office stands the state government where all reports and other official documents are placed before the Panchayat and Rural Development Department (PRDD) of the government, which is circulated from the district headquarter.

The department is headed by the District Panchayat Rural Development Officer (DPRDO). Under DPRDO some of the important officers are the Deputy DPRDO, the District-Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) and the Panchayat Accounts and Audit Officer (PAAO) (4). Below these officers are the Accountant, Upper Divisional Clerk (UDC) or locally known as Bariama and Barabou, lower divisional clerk (LDC) and the group -D staff (5).

3.1: District Panchayat Rural Development Department

1.1.2. Block Development Office

The emphasis on effective, systematic and proper development of the villages has been the central objective for the establishment of the Block. It is an important institution, for which a well-designed communication strategy can help to achieve the objectives of rural development programmes. It is the lowest rung of the administrative system having direct relation with the people at the grassroots level.

The Block Office is directly under the DM office (DPRDD) and the entire official proceedings, reports, documents, establishment matters (6) circulate between them.
Such official reports and documents, after scrutiny and compilation, are sent to PRDD of the state government from the district headquarter. Besides, the Block also works with DRDC which is under DGHC. For instance, the Block works with DRDC for the implementation of the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) programme. SGSY has been discussed in Chapter V.

The Block is headed by the BBO, who works with the Joint BDO. Some of the important extension officers who work under them are Block Relief Officer (BRO), Block-PDO, Block Welfare Officer (BWO), Co-Operative Officer, Sub-Assistant Engineer(7). There are also other officers attached to the Block but are under DGHC. For instance officers like Fisheries Extension Officer, Women Development Officer (WDO), Extension Officer for Mass Education etc (8). This is followed by the UDC, LDC and the Group-D staff.

1.2. The DGHC

What we have seen above is the official structure of the state government. It is also equally important to explore the channel adopted by DGHC to reach the local rural people for the promotion of rural development activities.

The transfer of the GP body to DGHC and the establishment of a single-tier Panchayat Raj system have changed the genuine image of the working of the local self-government in Darjeeling. It is only the third and the lowest tier, i.e., the GP that functions at the local level. DGHC has taken over the powers and functions of the Zilla Parishad which is the top-tier. The second-tier, i.e., the Panchayat Samiti virtually stands relegated to non-existence by DGHC. The DGHC has complete control over the GP as the fund, development programmes and schemes are solely under its operation. Hence, the DGHC keeps direct relation with the GP for all transactions. Another important department that works for development of the rural areas is the DRDC.

DGHC also created the Branch Secretariat after the GP was transferred to DGHC. The primary objective for its establishment was to have its own independent line of administration to make their organization more effective at the village level. As a matter of fact, they were neither interested nor willing to include the Block Office, which works under the state government, in their administrative course.
However, this new wing of rural administration could not be successful as the DGHC had expected. A major setback was the absence of their functionaries belonging to the Branch Secretariat at the grassroots level. In fact the frequency in the official interaction with the GP staff was far from what it was supposed to be. More confusion was apparent after the dissolution of the GP in 2005.

1.2.1. DRDC

DRDC has its office at Darjeeling at the Lewis Jubilee Complex (9). It works under DGHC. DRDC has been constituted for the ‘upliftment of the rural masses’ and with a major contribution towards socio-economic development. This organ at the district level oversees the implementation of different anti-poverty programmes. SGSY and TSC are the two significant projects that are implemented by this department at the grassroots level. Besides, it also has co-ordination with several departments like forest, fisheries, agriculture, livestock, and any other project that is rural-based. The Project Director (PD) (10) is the head of DRDC. Under the Director, there are four Deputies for monitoring, credit, livestock and training. The Deputies have other extension officers working under them like Livestock Development Officer, Statistical Investigators, Training Coordinators (11) and the like.
1.2.2. **The GP**

The decision of DGHC to have a single-tier Panchayat system indicates the intention of the same to control the development activities of the rural areas. The nature of local self-government functioning in rural Darjeeling is different. As mentioned earlier, the GP is the only working and existing tier operating at the grassroots level. The GP is dependent on the DGHC for implementation of development programmes, release of fund and other administrative proceedings. The GP is also attached with the Block Office for various official works which are being discussed in the sections to follow.

The GP is an elected body that serves a period of five years. The elections are held as and when the term gets over. A GP is divided into wards and the number of wards depends on the total population of each GP. The local rural people directly elect the members of the GP on the basis of universal adult franchise (12), and in turn the elected members from amongst themselves elect the Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan. The rest of the members represent their wards in the GP (13). The number of members varies from 7 to 31.

![3.3: GP Staff](image)

Besides the elected body, the GP administration is also handled by staff who works under the state government. They are responsible for the administration and
functioning of this local self-government, thus providing assistance to the Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan. They include the Secretary, Executive Assistant, Job Assistant, Gram Sahayak and the Karmee (14).

2. Beyond the Structure

2.1. GP and PDC

Participation, as already emphasized, can be regarded as a democratic process, which is supposed to provide equal opportunities to the rural masses. The GP is the medium to ensure development of the individuals and the community. Generally, the GP is the most important and appropriate body in adopting communication as the process for disseminating information and implementing development programmes. Effective functioning of the GP would also mean the active contribution and involvement of the local rural people, both male and female.

However, in the context of my study areas, its operation has deviated from what it should have been. Deepak Kharka, Secretary of Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I, has an honest opinion: "Had there been a three-tier Panchayat system than what it is today, there would have been much transparency, efficiency and rapid socio-economic development" (15).

This was not only his view but a belief shared by most of the staff of other GPs. Another important factor that has paralysed the smooth functioning of the GP is the sudden diversion in the political affairs of Darjeeling Hills after the dissolution of the GP body in 2005. In fact, this event aggravated the already stagnated rural development activities. In other words, not much had been done for the development of the rural areas since the formation of DGHC. Hence this reality has severely affected development, which limits people’s participation as well as communication, instrumental in programmes devised to bring about a change.

2.1.1. Rural Connectivity

In spite of the obstacles the GP is facing, there are channels that assist them to reach the rural masses. According to Ranjit Rai (16), Executive Assistant, Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I- Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha constitute important channels of communication. He is of the opinion that they are a unifying force enabling the local rural masses to participate in the identification and implementation of programmes.
meant for their welfare as well as provides solution to their problems. These meetings are an opportunity for the GP to have a close interaction with the people and understand their needs and requirements. The people too get to know about the extent of work undertaken by the GP and the kind of schemes and its allotment to the beneficiaries.

3.4: Gram Sansad- Upper Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block

Information on various programmes and schemes are propagated during the time of the Gram Sansad by the GP and at the same time the people get an opportunity to present their needs and problems. As a non-participating observer I have studied the meetings of the concerned GPs. For example, in a Gram Sansad in Lower Ecchey GP that an ordinary villager Jas Bahadur Niraula spoke on Right to Information (RTI) for the audience to realize its importance in there daily lives. He seems to have procured the information from a local newspaper and denied the spread of such an important message by the concern departments of the government (17). At the same time one cannot overlook the caste factor that affects the people’s attitudes and actions, and most important, their communication. Here a large chunk of the population belongs to the Brahmin and Chettri community (18), who dominate over members of other communities.
Deepak Kharka, Bimal Bahadur Rasaily and Kiran Acharya (19), staff of the same GP, seem to have taken their work seriously, despite the difficult state of affairs. They are seen working scrupulously through the week, from 10am to 4pm, and have build a ‘sound rapport’ with the local people which is confirmed by the local people, there interviewed by the researcher.

The GP staff comment on the difficulties they face in running the office but at the same time they feel that the Gram Sansad and the Gram Sabha are a ‘platform to make the people understand’ how the GP is working, to encourage them to participate in the identification of their local demands and problems, and place the financial status (income and expenditure) of the office before the masses. The community meetings are an important channel to enhance the communicating skills of the local rural people.

However, it is very important to mention here that due to political disturbance accompanied with the lack of fund Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad have not been held in Darjeeling from the year 2008.

Posters and banners also seem to be a viable communicating channel to reach the masses. For instance, the pulse polio programmes (20) are usually publicized through banners put up at strategic locations, for everybody to see, in centrally located village shops, walls of houses situated on the main roads, GP notice boards etc. In the GP
office of Samtar and Upper Ecchey banners have been put by the postal department on the necessity of saving. Posters are prepared and put up at central locations by the GP staff announcing date of meeting of Gram Sansad, Gram Sabha, form filling for voter identity card etc. Sometimes individual notice (See Annexure III-A) is also send to the people that gives them information about the Sansad dates. They are usually written in the local language-Nepali, an important factor to take information to the people at the grassroots level.

3.6: Banner for Pulse Polio Programme

3.7: Banner for Saving Awareness, Postal Department, Government of West Bengal
Communication has become viable today with the presence of the cellular phone. Interactions with most of the staff reveal that they are heavily dependent on this gadget. The same is also used by the higher authorities to communicate with them. The GPs usually follow a trend by which they communicate with the ‘bigwigs’ (rich farmers, local political leaders or government teachers) of the concern ward to circulate the information to the villagers.

Schools too serve as the medium of communication. For example, Michael Lingdang (21), primary teacher and husband of Philomena Lepcha (former Upa Pradhan of Samtar GP), seems to take active interest in his spouse’s work. He reveals that khabar (message) and suchna (information), written in Nepali are sent through the children for their parents. He feels that it is an important channel of communication as they can reach even to the most far-flung villages, simply because the children cover miles to walk to school. It is also advantageous because the children can read the messages to their parent’s majority of them being illiterate.

L.M. Lama (22), former Pradhan of Chongtong GP, DP Block, is of the opinion that the people themselves constitute an important channel of communication. According to him, the ordinary people visit the office to make various documents like character certificate, birth and death certificate, resident certificate etc and they use this occasion as an opportunity to send across information, if any, at that particular time. However, all the eight GPs are highly dependent on the SHGs which they place above everything else to reach the masses.

They see the SHGs in their term as their dinae hath (right hand), and accept the fact that with their help they have been able to work among the people living at the grassroots level. Jagat Man Rai (23), Secretary, Relling GP, Bijanbari Block echoes the same, “SHG today has become the primary medium that has helped us to circulate information on development schemes and other various programmes even to people living in the most backward and remote villages”.

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The GP staff’s dependency on SHG is tremendous and all of them agree that it has become a major mode of organizing people and the principal way of communicating to the people, especially the poor and the marginalized residing at the grassroots level. The reliance is such that for every small information to be communicated, they call for the SHG. They too are aware of the fact that SHGs, if harnessed properly, has the potential to expand developmental messages in the village, both at the individual and community level. An emerging channel, so crucial that it has become a route for awareness building, active participation, economic upliftment of the ordinary people at the juncture of developmental crisis and political instability. Therefore, the SHG has been closely monitored and put in a separate chapter in this study. Thus, notice has to be taken of the fact that there is maximum usage of inter-personal communication as compared to the mass and traditional medium of communication. Despite the fact that the functioning of the GP has been affected due to the political imbalance and disturbance in the Darjeeling Hills, work has to continue. Although the elected GP body stands dissolved, the Secretary, Executive Assistant, Gram Sahayak and Karmi have been holding the guardianship of the GP to ‘work for the rural people’. In the absence of the elected body, the GP staff has taken up the entire
responsibility for the management and administration of the GP. It is difficult without them but they have their duties.

In Upper Ecchey GP Kalimpong I, the researcher observed that the Gram Sansad was held in a way that the people stayed back till the end of the meeting. In a deliberate move individual- and community- based applications, petitions and announcements of received scheme (24) are kept at the end of the meeting.

2.1.2. The Ground Reality
Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha are to play an important role in bringing about some degree of community participation. The Pradhan, Upa-Pradhan and members also have an equally important responsibility to propagate information and messages to the people at the grassroots level. However, field visits reveal, that all is not well in all the GPs. In the last Panchayat elections held in the year 2000 in Relling GP, DP Block, the post of Pradhan went to a tribal contender by way of 'aberration' (25). Following this condition, Pinto Sherpa (26) was elected as the Pradhan. He is a rich farmer with little education, politically naive, and lacking the skill and experience to interact with the voters of his area. Moreover, a distance of 10km stands between his house and the GP office which has to be covered on foot. These factors have a negative effect on the working of the local self government. During the Gram Sansad (27) held in his village he hardly spoke and the entire meeting was conducted by the GP Secretary, Jagat Man Rai. His presence is barely seen in the GP and most of the people are yet to see or interact with him. In fact, the dissolved status of the GP has made the situation worse. Interestingly, the Sansad in this village was held after a long gap, only because I as a researcher wanted to attend it as part of my exploration. The visits from the representatives of the government have been scarce. It seems the officials are most reluctant to penetrate those sectors of population that are ‘traditional, backward’ and alienated too. Under such circumstances a major part of the development interventions remains static. Pinto Sherpa simply lacks the knowledge on the various schemes and benefits, and he does not possess the communicating ability for facilitating people’s participation in development programmes. A feeling of disappointment and helplessness is all they can express when they see their elected representative so docile and passive.
Another very interesting fact that surfaced at Jephi GP, DP Block, was the active presence of the husband of one elected representative at the GP office. Meena Subba (28) the Pradhan of Jhepi GP, is only the legal and elected head on paper, and her husband Jas Ram Subba actually has taken over. For instance, the Gram Sansad of Kankibong II (29) was conducted by Jas Ram Subba on the pretext that the Pradhan his wife, is not keeping well. More surprises were to come when he took charge of the Sansad at Bahun goan (30). B.L. Subba, a retired teacher, (31), took charge of the Gram Sansad at Thapa goan (32) as well as the Gram Sabha that is held annually. A close study revealed that the Pradhan’s lack of education and her inability to address meetings kept her husband busy.

The awkward state of things makes the ground reality quite fluid, delusive and deceptive. The rural poor people often become just silent on-lookers in the game of politics. As a result of these factors, development suffers and with communicating networks dwindling, people’s participation too take a backseat. With this kind of ignorance and lack of interest on the part of the Pradhan, it is assumed that she lacks the skill to communicate messages to her voters, relating to their welfare, which could promote community participation. In the melee the disadvantaged and the poorest of the poor lose their strength to raise voice and this constitutes a major communication problem.
Nayanore GP in DP Block too presents a bleak scenario and its remoteness and lack of motorable road make it more vulnerable. People are eager to participate ‘to see the village develop’ but close scrutiny shows that the government agencies (33) are not willing to take the trouble to walk uphill for facilitating PRDC at the grassroots level. The researcher’s interaction with the people of this area reveals little use of communication channels by the government personnel to raise awareness of issues and problems. For example, RTI and TSC are not heard of in this area.

The prospects of PRDC seem to have also been largely affected by the trickle down nature of the budget. The Annual Action Plan (AAP) (34) is formulated according to the needs and requirements of the local rural people. However, our study reveals that the fund is released according to the wishes of DGHC, and not according to the AAP submitted by the GPs. For example, Seokbir GP has only received Rs.69000/-, the highest since the creation of DGHC, though they had submitted plans even to the tune of Rs.10 lakhs. No communication occurs explaining the deduction. Under such circumstances it becomes difficult to manage where there work becomes priority based.

2.2. Role of Gender

The Seventy Third Amendment to the Constitution of India heralded a new epoch in the Indian Panchayati Raj System. The Act which came into force from April 24, 1993, ensured a minimum of one-third participation of women in all the three tiers of the Panchayat. This has opened the gates for women in the rural development process, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Such reservation of seats has, at least theoretically, strengthened women empowerment, giving them the opportunity to work in the affairs of their area. As they can participate they can continue to sharpen their communication skills and reach the rural people. However, the patriarchal roots of the society remains too strong and they continue to have substantial impact.

A very prominent example has already been mentioned, where by the former woman Pradhan Meena Subba of Jhepi GP is a mere ‘rubber stamp’ in the hands of her husband. She is usually kept aside as her husband along with the local leaders continues to discharge her functions. But to some extent the condition is better in Seokbir GP where Hari Maya Pradhan the former women Pradhan enjoys her independence to function. Her greatest disadvantage is her little education. She is, however, assisted by her staff, particularly the Secretary, in all administrative matters.
Survey also shows a majority of male as ward members.

Table 25: Total no of Male and Female ward members in the Eight GPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name of GP</th>
<th>Total No of Members</th>
<th>Male Members</th>
<th>Female Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Chongtong</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jhepi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Nayanore</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Relling</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Upper Ecchey</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Lower Ecchey</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Samtar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Seokbir</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above mentioned data are according to the last Panchayat election held in 2000 (35). The table shows a majority of male members. The women members are present.
because of the provision of seat reservation (36). However, it has also been seen that even if the seats fall in the open category (37) it is usually the male contenders who take command of the seat.

Interactions with the women members reveal several factors that have been responsible for their limited participation. Meena Rai (38), ward member of Relling GP, pointed out certain constraints like (a) burden of household work (b) custom and tradition (c) disapproval by the husband and family (d) illiteracy. Similar kinds of opinions were shared by other women members. As the women are also preoccupied with their household work they get less time as compared to their male counterparts. Inadequate awareness of rural programmes and their duties and dependence on the male members further obstruct their work. The dissolution of the GP has further weakened their position.

2.3. GP: Mode of Working

‘Good governance’ has the supposed objective of instilling the attributes of transparency, accountability and participation in administration, by which the voices of the poor, down-trodden and marginalized are taken heed of, acted upon and made a part of the decision-making process. As mentioned in Chapter II the Indian government has taken initiative for implementation of ICT at the grassroots level. Following the centrals footsteps the state government has undertaken some initiatives to make information accessible. Its vision is E-Governance of Panchayats with the utilization of the power of ICT. In the general context, several programmes come under its fold but there are a few that needs to be specifically mentioned.

- The PRDD of the state government inaugurated the departmental website (www.wbprd.nic.in) on March 27, 2003. The site provides information on various important programmes, circulars, notifications, allotments etc, and a “grievance box” for the people to articulate their problems and needs, maps of the GPs.
- Computerization of the accounting systems of 8 Zilla Parishads, 32 Panchayat Samitis with the use of the software known as Integrated Fund Monitoring and Accounting Systems (IFMAS).
- Computerization of GPs with the use of the software known as Gram Panchayat Management Systems (GPMS). Issue of various certificates,
licenses and registration of birth and death certificates are also carried out through this software.

- E-Mailing facilities at district, subdivisions and blocks.

But compared to the GPs of other districts of the state, the GP offices in the study areas lack the basic infrastructure. Except a telephone and a typewriter, modern gadgets like fax and computer are absent although they come within the purview of the stipulated budget. In September, 2008, eighteen GPs under Kalimpong I Block were allotted one computer set. But the computers do not function smoothly due to fluctuation in electricity and increased frequency in 'loadshedding'. The telephone too does not exist in many GPs and a few that are present mostly do not function. Radio Telegraphy sets (RT Set) (39) were also used but today it stands unutilized at one corner of the GPs. Thus, the staff are left with little choice as most of the work has to be done manually which is time consuming. I was not able to see any official gadget that would have made communication easier for the staff. Interactions with them reveal that they are not aware of the modern facilities enjoyed by the GPs of other districts.

3.11: RT Set- Samtar GP Kalimpong I Block
The staff also blames the DGHC for being indifferent to the expansion of communication facilities, and not providing the GP with the necessary infrastructure. Administration gets affected as communication with higher authorities is not swift and spontaneous. Cellular phones have in some cases become the only way of communicating. Most of the GPs are far flung, some more than 80km from the district and subdivision offices. If these gadgets, which act as communication services are integrated with the development system, than work becomes easier.

It is to be observed that the GPs selected for study is already poor in infrastructure, there is acute dearth of fund for development activities. It is a fact that infrastructure is a requisite but it is also to be understood that it is not a sufficient condition for ensuring PRDC because, as we shall continue to reiterate, it primarily puts human beings at the centrestage.

Dependency on the DGHC for fund allocation leaves little space for transparency. There is a facility for fund transfer account (40) for implementation of the development programmes and projects, which is very much in practice in other districts of the state. In Darjeeling too, the accounts have been opened but there has been no transaction as fund has been diverted to the DGHC. It is a ‘top-down’ process in which the GP works at the behest of the DGHC, a process in which identification of needs, problems, possible solutions and opportunities becomes a challenge to communication.

As mentioned earlier, the political disturbance in the Darjeeling Hills has taken its toll on the rural administrative machinery as well as on the developmental programmes. This has delayed the launch and implementation of the programmes and projects. NREGS was introduced in the Hills only in the month of November 2007, where as in the other districts of the state the programme began a year back. However, fluctuation in the release of fund, ongoing political crisis and absence of the Nirman Sahayak (41) has hampered the smooth implementation of the scheme. For example, in DP Block, the twenty three GPs are managed by a single Nirman Sahayak who has come on transfer (42). It is a difficult situation where the GP staff has to request the sub-assistant engineers of the Block to do their work. Interestingly, no fresh appointment of Nirman Sahayak has been made for the Hills.
2.4. Pivotal Role of Ward Members

Communication plays a pivotal role in creating awareness and rallying the local rural people to be a part of the developmental activities. The elected members of the GP also act as an important agent to take information to the people at the grassroots level. Interactions with the people reveal that they too are dependent on the members who are regarded as 'their' representatives to the government, those who bring the issues of bikash (development) to them. Since the members live in the village, they are most compatible with the language, life-style, culture, thinking and tradition of the ordinary rural people. It also becomes easier for them to transmit information in the local Nepali language and at a level which the people understand.

The ward members are also important for the GP staff as they help them to identify the people belonging to the particular ward when it comes to various functions including issuance of certificates or any other documents (43). The usual trend followed in all the GPs was to take into confidence the members before the completion of any paperwork of the local rural people. This dependence too has come to an end after the GP was dissolved in 2005.
It is a time-tested principle of communication that interacting with the local rural villagers in their own local language or dialect is most effective. People will cooperate better for implementation of programmes of rural development if they are understood. Hence, the members, living alongside with the villagers and familiar with their needs, are able to ascertain the kind of needs the local people conceive to be most important. Mahesh Tamang, former member of ward No 2 Upper Dara Goan, Upper Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block comments, “We have to communicate according to the level of understanding of the local rural people and their background” (44). Members like Tamang are willing to disseminate information amongst the masses, build awareness and facilitate people’s participation. But the observation needs to be qualified.

At the other end, the loss of power and legal status and withdrawal of the allowance (45) after 2005 has made lot of members reluctant and disinterested to work for the people. This is most visible in Nayanore GP (46) where the people are not happy with the laidback attitude of the members who have failed to interact with the ordinary people. At the same time, the actions of the members do not reflect optimism. The poor villagers reveal that they are not happy with the work of their members. They are generally dissatisfied with:

- Lack of interest to reach the poorest of the poor living in their wards
- Partiality in the distribution of schemes
- Lack of uniformity in the spread of information
- Inadequacy in the field visits
- Lacks detail knowledge on schemes and projects

Thus, the possibility of ward members to act as a reliable source of feedback in the form of responses from the villagers seems to have lost ground. This is despite the fact that the members can play a pivotal role in the promotion of rural development activities and act as a bridge between the people and the government. In the study areas they have also not been provided with adequate exposure and training, which could have been productive in communicating with the local rural people.

2.5. GP: Limitations

To reiterate, the ground reality of the study areas is marked by a ‘top-down development process’ where the rural masses is left with little freedom but to accept what is ‘planned and granted’ from the higher administrative authorities. For instance, the state government and the DGHC never made an effort to understand why more
fund is needed in the Hills. Despite being aware of the geographical features of the Hills, high cost of transport and raw materials, lack of skilled labour etc the fund released by the DGHC was never sufficient. Such a sensitive issue was ignored making it difficult, particularly for the GP, to implement programmes.

The Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha are supposed to be the viable channels for PRDC, as their focus is on people’s participation in the identification and implementation of rural development programmes. They also provide the local rural people the opportunity to openly interact, share their views, their problems and place their demands.

Everything looks so perfect on paper, but the AAP, comprising of the voters demands and needs, remains at the mercy of the DGHC. The DGHC has started giving schemes directly to the beneficiaries, based on its whims and fancies. Consequently, the rural local people have to bear the brunt of their decision. As Swarna Bahadur Rai of Relling GP remarks, “Every year we take part in the Sansad with an expectation that our demands will be met, which does not materialize. So submission of application every year has become a mere formality.”(47).

Effective communication requires efficient and committed staff. But in the study areas there is irregularity in the attendance of the GP staff. Most of the staff do not stay in the office and they usually have ‘fixed’ dates and days to keep the office open. The situation is worse when the staff are transferred to far off areas, sometime taking more than three to four hours to reach. Ironically, they are all present at their respective Block Development Office on the 1st of every month to receive their salaries. However there are exceptions among them as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

This has shaken the faith of the people on the government agency. A general view among the local villagers is that they cannot get their work done as the staffs are either missing or the office is closed. This is waste of time as they have to leave their precious work and even walk for more than a mile to get to the office. This kind of problems has hampered regular communication, which in turn limits participation.

Thus, in the context of my area of study, the basic purpose, functions and objectives of the GP have been stagnated, stultified and crippled—not only in terms of administrative process but also in terms of communicative dimensions.
3. DRDC: Functions & Role

The DRDC has also been established in Darjeeling district on the same pattern as elsewhere in the state. Initially the DRDC worked under the DM office but later was transferred to the DGHC. Thus, currently the department is completely under the administration of DGHC. Financial aid comes from the central as well as the state government in the ratio of 60:40. 50% of the fund that comes from the central directly enters the account of the PD at State Bank of India (SBI), Darjeeling, and the remaining 40% - that of the state fund - is received by the Principal Secretary (PS) (48), DGHC, who forwards the fund to the Treasury (49) at the DM office, and according to the allotment order, cheque is released.

Administrative fund like salaries of staff, contingency, to name a few, and scheme fund to implement programmes are the two types of fund received by the DRDC. The two important and major schemes implemented by this department are SGSY and TSC. The SGSY programme is implemented through the Block, which forwards it to the GP, to reach the rural masses. DRDC has assigned the TSC programme to NGOs who implement the same at the village level (50). But as clarified at the outset of this chapter, let us move beyond the confines of structural dimensions to focus on the communicative modes of the DRDC.

3.1. Communication Networks

The PD of DRDC, Doma Sherpa, admits that “Only appropriate communication messages and techniques can help us to reach the people of the most backward and remote areas” (51). Keeping with the present trend, the department uses the electronic mail (e-mail) for all official interaction with the central and state government. This includes all monthly, quarterly, half-yearly reports as well as all important data. Fax and the postal system are also utilized for communicating. Besides these, video-conferencing too takes place which is conducted depending upon the programme and the extent of emergency. Guidelines for the implementation of a programme is a frequent topic for the video conferencing. But there is more to communication than administrative convenience.

Since the DRDC is highly focused on SGSY and TSC, they have adopted means and measures to facilitate the local rural people’s participation in the programmes that will help them to improve their livelihood. Suchna, Siksha ani Samprasaran which the department locally refers to IEC, a programme that forms part of SGSY, has been
taken up by the DRDC, with an objective to 'approach the ordinary people at the village level'. This programme is supposed to play a crucial role in creating awareness, rallying people and facilitate healthy participation and transfer of skills and knowledge among the ordinary people. One of the important features of this project is a set of training manuals containing the basic information about the process of formation of SHGs, bankers' role in generating economic activities, the day-to-day knowledge for maintaining hygiene and proper health for overall improvement in the quality of life of rural poor and skill upgradation in simple language, with illustrations. The manuals have been made available to the implementing agencies.

The DRDC has appointed WDO and the Gram Sahayikas, who are attached with their respective Blocks. They are supposed to work at the grassroots level. But we found that they lack the interest and the commitments to work among rural people, mainly because their urban affiliation cannot make them feel the pulse of the rural people. However, they do have an 'excuse', when they blame the scattered villages and the long distance. Interestingly, they are active only when any officer from the district level comes for field visit.

The DRDC under IEC have utilized leaflets, booklets, audio-visual and kits for dissemination of information. It is consciously done at the eye level, i.e., sitting on the floor with the people for interaction. Issues mostly relate to the methods of formation and benefits of being a part of SHGs, ways to be financially independence, maintenance of health and hygiene, child development. The SGSY has become one of the most important platforms to convey messages and information to the poorest of the poor, including those residing in the remote and backward villages.

IEC is regarded as the most logical and systematic method for disseminating knowledge, skills and information to the people at the grassroots level, that prepares them to accomplish a decent living. TSC, another important project for the local rural people, funded by the central government is also under DRDC. Under this scheme, beneficiary contribution is 20% for people in the BPL category, with the rest 80% borne by the government. Since the scheme involves the contribution by the ordinary people, emphasis has been on inter-personal communication in the form of door-to-door survey. Implementation of this project has been given to the NGOs, as mentioned earlier. DRDC has given instructions to the NGOs for the utilization of
posters and charts for spread of information on health and hygiene and the necessity to have a toilet in every house.

3.1.1. Communicative Distortions

"Transmitting the right message to the right persons at the right time is often a crucial factor in successful communication" (54). Communication message also fails when it is not people-oriented. Scholars like Aggarwal, Sachidananda and Jha, Sankaran and Sinha indicate that "The channel of communication is lacking in interest and commitment on the part of its functionaries. Much information is lost or distorted in the process of travel from top to bottom" (55). DRDC too faces limitation in the planning of communication programmes and in the identification of the channels for motivating and facilitating the rural local people to action. Some of the vital constraints can be identified:

- There is no specific provision for a special contingent plan for Darjeeling Hills. For example, the roads are in bad and deplorable condition and more severe up-hill. As a result, even after huge consumption of petrol the vehicles are not able to reach the remote areas. The fund is allocated at par with the plains, but in view of the difference in the geographical features of the hills, it is never sufficient.

- Lack of inspection bungalows makes it difficult for the officials to reach the most remote, backward and rural villages. The PD had made some efforts to set up camps to interact with the villagers but for 'security reasons' it was not possible for female officers to be in camps. Thus the villages remain largely isolated and detached from activities which could have made their lives better.

- There is inadequate personnel at the district (DRDC), Block and the GP levels. When manpower is weak, it becomes difficult to work, which in turn, leaves a vacuum between the official stakeholders and the ordinary people.

- Lack of sufficient fund on certain specific segments has taken its toll on the proper implementation and co-ordination of the IEC programme. Fund is required to set up workshops, meetings, vehicles for transport, food and other miscellaneous expenses. Under such circumstances the PD had decided that to reach the poorest of the poor, massive hoardings on awareness programmes in the local Nepali language would be conducted in 'critical areas' of the GP,
especially relating to health and hygiene and necessity of a toilet in every house. The fund crunch did not make it possible.

- The DRDC theoretically welcomes various types of training sessions conducted and sponsored by the central and state governments. Generally they are conducted in English, but at the state level, Bengali is extensively used as a means of communication. Except for a few officials, most participants do not understand the language, and despite requests for translation in English, the participants are denied the scope. This leaves a negative effect on the sustenance of people’s participation.

- The instructions and guidelines for various programmes, meant for the people at the grassroots level, as well as the training material are in Bengali. This causes an additional expenditure as the materials, booklets and brochures have to be translated in Nepali. Even the images used are not always relevant. The pictures and images in training manuals wear dhoti, lungi and saree (56), which need to be replaced by the traditional Nepali like daura sural and guneu cholo (57). It involves a tedious process whereby time energy are wasted in interpreting the entire subject matter.

- The Block and the GP level government staff lack efficiency and the interest to work among the rural masses. They lack the attitude and concern for awareness creation. This pathetic scenario at the village level makes the people detached from the process of rural development.

- The absence of legal status of the elected Pradhan, Upa-Pradhan and the Ward members in the GP has affected regular communication. Since they are locally based, it would have been easy to have direct interaction with the local people but lacking legal status, the interactions largely remain unauthorized and informal.

These inadequacies have impeded the smooth functioning of the DRDC. However, even in the face of scarcity and obstructions, the PD stresses the importance of conveying development messages to the people who she feels are the “source of ideas, decisions and actions for rural development” (58). It is important to understand that this department, if provided with sufficient fund and proper method of communication, will go a long way in bridging the gap between the government and the rural people. This can be done by encouraging healthy dialogue among people and
disseminating innovative knowledge. Do these distortions make the DRDC a meaningless entity? The answer is in ‘no’ because it would be like throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Having made a close observation, I can assert that DRDC still can make a contribution in the identification and implementation of development policies and programmes, localized channels of communication, which can reach the poor, hapless and deprived at the grassroots level. The advantage of working with rural based development programmes provides the DRDC ample scope to work among the masses, feel their needs and problems and provide solutions that are locally based.

The PD in an interview with the researcher expresses the desire “to raise the rural masses from poverty” and she has been placing the practical problems with the policymakers (59). The PD also argues that Darjeeling Hills needs more fund and communicates this to the higher authorities, but somewhere along the line the message is lost. The Chairman of DGHC, Subash Ghising, too added to the problem as official meetings with DRDC officers on rural development activities remained a distant dream.

4. DM Office

The DM office, constituted in every district of the state looks after the administration, law and order of the concern district. The DPRDD, one of the wings of the DM office, is primarily concerned with rural development in the Darjeeling Hills. However, under the present scenario the DPRDD has not been able to work with full force. Its most important functions have been taken up by the DGHC. According to the PDO of DPRDD, “The absence of fund and schemes has paralysed the normal working which does not allow us to reach to the masses” (60).

DPRDD works with the institutional issues, revenue mobilization and establishment matters. The institutional issues cover supervision and monitoring of the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha that includes functions like preparation of reports for a number of Sansads taking place in the concerned GP, percentage of male and female attendance in the Sansad and Sabha etc. Revenue mobilization deals with the collection of tax and non-tax and all other matters related to it. It also handles all establishment matters like salaries of the staff of the headquarter, Block Office and GP, transfer of staff, promotion and gradation list on seniority basis and the like. Besides, the
department also has the responsibility of report collection from the GP and the Block, compile and present the same to the Commissioner, PRDD, of the state government.

This clearly indicates that the development schemes are handled by DGHC and the district administration looks only after the institutional aspects. This is definitely a complex working system, increasing hurdles at both official and field levels.

The DPRDD has no direct linkage with the DGHC in matters relating to the GP and upliftment of the rural beneficiaries. However, according to the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, Part VI, Chapter XIX, Section 205, “The state government shall appoint a Director of Panchayat and such other officers as it may consider necessary for the purpose of inspecting or superintending the work of all, or any class of GP, Panchayat Samities or Zilla Parishads” (61). But our study reveals that the officials hardly make GP visits unless it becomes absolutely necessary. When asked, the officials, however, identified “The dissolution of the GP and the withholding of elections since 2005” as the major cause for lack of field visits (62).

4.1. DPRDD: Obstacles to Communication

Despite the limitations in their functioning the DPRDO regularly conducts on the sixth of every month meeting with her deputy officers (63), together with the PDOs of all the Blocks. The PDOs submit their monthly reports on tax collection, GP inspection etc and receive any new notification or circular from the state government. For example, a month before the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meets are held, the DPRDO prepares a circular that is received by the GP through the Block Office. Under section 16A, of the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1973, it is required to “…give public notice of such meetings by beat of drums as widely as possible announcing the agenda, place, date and hour of the meeting. A notice of such meeting shall also be hung up in the office of the Gram Panchayat” (64). The beating of drums is an anachronistic practice now. However, the district headquarter does send messages, specifying miking and poster for notification of the dates of Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meets.

According to the PAAO of DPRDD, “A communication gap between DGHC and DPRDD, in terms of papers, official and written reports, leaves us unaware of the developmental work that takes place” (65). Rural development may have come to a standstill but the official proceedings continue between the state government, the DM
office and the Block. The department heavily depends on the postal system for official transactions, with fax, telephone, cellular phones, e-mail and video conferencing too forming important channels of communication. However, they too are not without obstructions.

Thus, for instance, video conferencing is a vital tool for communication. But the D.M. office has been provided with the facility of ‘Receive Only Terminal’ (ROT) system (66), by which one can have one-way interaction with the officials of the state government. The officials of DPRDD participate when there is any programme concerned with rural development activities. However, such an innovative method lacks the ‘local’ spirit as the Bengali dialect (67) is the primary medium of interaction. English is used only to a limited extent. This hinders the participative mood and poses barriers to the communication. The infrastructure exists but it is not helping to broaden the PRDC. Moreover, the frequency in the use of this system is less - hardly thrice in a year. What could have served as an important communication bridge is lost simply because it lacks the use of the dominant language of the concerned areas.

The head clerk of DPRDD is of the opinion that the GP staff should be well motivated and trained in order to reach the poorest of the poor (68). He talks about his experience with schemes like Provident Fund for Landless Agricultural Labourer (PROFLAL) (69) about which the GP staff has shown least interest to encourage the ordinary people to deposit Rs.10/- for their benefit. At the same time, he feels that some kind of incentives could have boosted their strength to walk to the scattered and remote villages for deposit collection and propagate the benefits of the scheme.

When such vital issues concerning the people are neglected, there is always a tendency for the people at the grassroots level to remain ignorant, unless the relevant communication approaches are adopted to mobilize the rural masses. At times insufficient information, operational skills and local knowledge on the part of the government agency create a communication barrier. Training workshops for the officials on various schemes and programmes have been undertaken with the ultimate objective for disseminating information to the ordinary people. Yet, it seems to lose ground as the local language- Nepali is neglected. It is perhaps the most disadvantageous aspect which ensures only a thin possibility of immediate response
from the audience and severely weakens the emergence of a two-way flow of information.

The PDO of Kalimpong I Block Office had a difficult time at the training she attended, as the lecture was delivered in Bengali (70). Thus, in the prevailing milieu, the effective use of communication methodologies and techniques with the local rural people are lost. The top-down communication process marked by the instructions and programmes prepared at the higher policy and governmental level does not benefit those for whom they are formulated.

4.1.1. Top-Down Process: Survey Goes Wrong

The DPRDD also have their grievances about the structure of the Rural Household Survey (RHS) (See Annexure- III B) (71) conducted by the state government. The parameters (72) set for the ordinary people were not according to the prevailing local conditions. Nor were they suitable to the way of life pattern of people of Darjeeling Hills. In fact, the survey format had been prepared and designed keeping in mind only the people of the plains (73). For instance, for parameter three- “Average availability of garments”- is highly misleading. As per the climatic condition, the rural hill people will always have more than five garments, more in comparison to those of the plains. But this does not mean that the people will necessarily belong to the APL category. They are poor but they need to wear warm clothes particularly during the winter. But the survey failed to take note of this fact and the net result was those that who are to be listed in the BPL category were all elevated to the APL category. This had a negative impact, affecting the implementation of the rural development programmes. A chaotic scenario emerged when the deprived, marginalized people of rural Darjeeling, who deserved to receive the BPL facility, were categorized as APL. Petitions were placed by the DPRDD for restructuring of the parameters to the state government but only few changes were made and “claims and objections” (74) were invited by the state government. Accordingly, hearing was conducted by the Block at every GP but the final list of the BPL category of people still awaits confirmation and finalization. Such awkward situations like these minimize people’s participation in development activities and they lose faith in the working of the government agency. A more sincere endeavour could be made by having pre-survey communication with the local officials and people.

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4.2. Effects of Dual Administration

The DPRDD seems to experience a kind of barrier when it comes to reaching out to the rural masses. This has become more prominent with the transfer of the Panchayat system to DGHC. However, the confusion is greater as DGHC alone does not administer the Hills. The state government too has its role in DGHC (75). This has rather increased administrative complexities in the Hills. One cannot overlook the ‘internal’ struggle for power between the state government and DGHC. Ultimately the sufferers are the development agencies working under them. A general view among the staff (at the District and the Block) is that such kind of administration has created a ‘vacuum’ which has in turn affected the dialogue between the government and the rural people. As in the case of RHS, had the policymakers been alert and conscious in designing and formulating the methods and information content, the rural poor and the needy could have avail of the benefits of rural development programmes.

Thus, a viable and decentralized rural development communication system to achieve a new socio-economic order remains a distant possibility. Consequently, the DPRDD has not been able to work independently, cater to the needs and demands of the local community, collect feedback and establish rural development communication network for dissemination of information and messages and ensure two-way communication between the rural local people and the government functionaries.

DPRDD has an important role to play as a key ‘communicator’. The department usually disseminates messages and information in the community through the Block Office, who disseminates it to the GP, which finally trickles down to the people at the grassroots level. In each and every district of all the states in India, this is the pattern usually followed and practiced except for Darjeeling Hills. But the existence of a single-tier Panchayat system has curtailed the powers and functions of DPRDD. This has a negative effect as its role in the planning, development, implementing and evaluating of communication programmes needed for development policies and activities. Communication, as we have asserted earlier, is to be conceived as a process to ensure people’s participation in local development, and for this it needs better organizational base. If only the DPRDD had more responsibility and power it could have helped to identify the target groups, the local communication networks and the resources that are available but remains ‘invisible’.
The DPRDD staff feel that the existence of dual administration has not improved the situation in the Hills. As they argue, it has added to complexity (76). Under such circumstances lack of communication hinder community participation and improvement in the rural livelihood.

The researcher is of the opinion that these official channels of communication have lot of potential, if backed up by PRDC. But the various limitations mentioned above have put the people at the receiving end.

5. Block Development Office: Struggle for Relevance

The official pattern of functioning of the Block Development Office in Darjeeling Hills has deviated from the usual mode, since the time DGHC opted for a single tier Panchayat system. In fact the office does not directly receive schemes and programmes from DGHC for execution at the village level, except for the recently launched programme NREGS.

The Block works under the DPRDD of DM office. Though schemes and fund constitute a major transaction, it is scarce to come by. Meetings are regularly held, in which the district headquarter is kept informed of the business of the Block. For example, the PDO and the PAAO of each Block report monthly to the DPRDO for all Panchayat and rural development matters, tax collection, vacancy position etc. The salaries, pension, service book, promotion and other establishment matters of the Block are looked after by the DPRDD.

Role of the Block in Darjeeling Hills is based on the following functions:

- Maintenance of law and order of the Block area. For example, combating political clashes, communal violence etc.
- Grant of permission for all public and social programmes and events, miking, putting up banners, festoons and hoardings.
- Monitoring and inspection of Madhyamik and Higher Secondary Examination (77) for schools within its Block area.
- Supervision and holding of GP elections, which include the whole process—from nomination to the declaration of winner candidates. The Block has a partial responsibility in the conduct of Parliamentary and Assembly elections.
• Registration of voters, preparation and issue of vote identity card.

• Distribution of salaries, other allowances and benefits of the Block and GP staff.

• The Block takes all establishment matters with the DPRDD at the district headquarter.

• Preparation of report returns, tax collection reports for submission to the district headquarter.

• Participation in GP affairs. For example, in the form of NREGS and SGSY.

• Issue of ST, SC, OBC certificates, residential, character and migration certificate, BPL and APL card etc jointly with the GP (78).

• Conducting human and economic census and the report submitted to the DM office.

• Providing relief measures in time of natural calamities.

The transfer of fund and schemes to DGHC has left the Block Office with little development programmes and projects. In spite of the limitation, the Relief department, now known as Disaster Management department, social welfare like buro bhatta (old age pension) commonly known as, sutkaery bhatta (maternity benefit), handicap pension, Border Area Development Programme (BADP) (79) and Member of Parliament Land Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) (80) are implemented by the Block. Among the schemes, the Disaster Management section has an important role to play in facilitating participatory rural communication. It has been studied in the section to follow.

NREGS, a centrally sponsored scheme, is implemented by the Block in association with the GP. The BDO functions as the Council Development Officer (CDO) (81) for the same programme. The Block to some degree is also involved in the SGSY programme which requires people’s participation (to be discussed in chapter-V). Another very important scheme known as Special Central Assistant (SCA) (82) has not been continued, with the DGHC taking over the rural development programmes.

Lack of sufficient funds, limited schemes and programmes, has reduced the power of the Block, which naturally has affected the degree of interaction and the capacity to reach the people at the grass roots level. Moreover the presence of a dual
administration has also hindered the smooth functioning of the Block, particularly when it comes to decision-making, planning and the implementation of development objectives.

5.1. Block: Communication Devices

CfD, as stated at the outset, is closely linked with the strategies of planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation, with people as the ‘protagonists’. The value of communication is such that it has become a facilitating force for taking information at the grassroots level and for opening the door for people’s participation. The Block therefore, can play an enabling role in enhancing sustainable development-oriented communication at the local level. However, the use of communication by the Block, particularly for the rural population, to participate in rural development stands minimal.

As reiterated earlier in the chapter, the existence of a single tier Panchayat system has considerably reduced the power of the Block. Observation reveals the absence of distinct communication tools for reaching the rural poor. There has been little initiative for the implementation of communication devices that could have facilitated the rural masses to participate in programmes meant for their socio-economic development. Uses of projectors, mobile television van, mike etc are not widespread at the administrative level.

Internet and e-mail, considered to be the fastest means of communication with the higher authorities are yet to be developed as most of the Blocks are without broadband facility. Although the state government does have an official website (83) it access is limited.

Video conferencing is the latest addition in the Block level communication network. The ROT system is in operation where the Block and the GP staff participate in rural based programmes (84). Fax, telephone and the postal system remain the most common form of communication. However, there are instances of the inter-personal communication. The Block conducts its monthly meetings with the district headquarter, in which circulars, notification, instructions from the central and state governments are explained and discussed with the Block officers for dissemination to the rural local people.
5.1.1. Importance of the Block

The very existence of the Block lies in the existence of the GP. In other words, without GP the Block has no viable identity. The Block meets twice a month with the GP. The meeting in the first week of the month is with the GP staff and that of the last week is held with the SHGs. Maintenance of cash-book, reports of various programmes, tax collection, PROFLAL etc constitute the agenda of the meeting.

The deviation of fund and the power of implementation of development programmes and schemes by DGHC have affected the relationship of the Block Office with the GP. As a result, the Block Office has not been able to bring up schemes for the benefit of the poor, which should have been the normal scenario. In fact, the Block Office often faces difficulties with regard to rural development as the elected GP body stands dissolved. This is despite the fact that the GPs constitute an important communication channel to reach the rural masses as the GP members live and work among the ordinary people, and are familiar with the local environment. This is exactly the point which is echoed by the BDO of DP Block, “The GPs are most important for providing feedback on local rural people’s needs, problems, knowledge and ability, and to ensure their response for participation in programmes meant for them” (85).

Thus, the Block can be an important channel of communication, a platform of two-way sharing of information, if properly channeled. It has the capability to enhance participatory decision making at the local level, with communication playing a major role. The advantage that the Block share is the close relationship and interaction with the GP. This can be developed as a strong bond, which if properly harnessed, can be a powerful impetus to the evolution of a successful PRDC.

5.2. Training: An Effective Communication Channel

“Implementation of various programmes as well as promotion of local governance requires tremendous amount of training and capacity building” (86). Keeping this goal in mind the state government has allotted the responsibility to the State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD) (87). Training courses are designed for both the officials of the District, Block, GP level and the elected members of all three tiers of the Panchayat by this institute. The focus is on making the government officials accountable to the panchayats and educating the elected office bearers on the respective subjects related to their functioning.
This kind of initiative enhances and strengthens the competence of the functionaries. Although elaborate training programmes have come to benefit the officials and elected members of the rest of the districts it has not been the same for the study areas in the Hills. Interaction with the officials reveal that trainings are rare, sometimes once in two years. When this is the condition at the Block and the district one can imagine the scenario at the GP level. Interviews of former GP members point to the absence of training. The GP staff, who works at the grassroots level, too do not enjoy the benefit of training. Training has earned a significant position in rural development activities, especially those concerned with various poverty alleviation programmes. Thus, training of the GP staff can help to mobilize the local people in action.

In this context we can refer to NREGS, for which the GP staff attended training classes at the Block Office (88) before the programme was initiated in the villages. D.K Chettri, Secretary of Seokbir GP; Kalimpong I Block, pointed out “That such kind of training provided enough information for them to make the rural people understand the nature of the programme and its benefits” (89). This is basically an example of Training of Trainers (TOT) in which the officials undergo training at institutes like SIPRD and return to impart the same to the staff working at the village level. The primary objective here is to take the information at the grassroots level. D.D.Bhutia, BDO of Kalimpong I Block, views training as “essential” for easy communication of information, ideas and knowledge amongst all the people” (90). Thus, training extends knowledge level of the concerned stakeholders, which makes it possible for them to present information in a way that the ordinary people understand, accept and adopt it.

Training has been appreciated by the staff of all the official departments described above. They look at it as an important platform for gaining knowledge and experience which goes a long way in sharpening their facilitation and communication skills. But as long as the overwhelming domination of Bengali continues, the zeal to participate will be less. The DGHC too did not show much interest in resolving such an important issue.

Our study finds language barrier that mostly the training is conducted in Bengali, a practice which continues even when the officials pray for interpretation in English. For example, the PDOs of both Kalimpong and Bijanbari underwent training at SIPRD for NREGS. It was conducted in Bengali, which hampered their
understanding. Video conferencing has been welcomed by all. But the fact remains that Bengali is the medium of dialogue in it. This has seriously affected the zeal and the enthusiasm of the participants. They lose interest as the language cannot be understood. In the milieu communication breaks down which eventually affects rural development programmes.

6. Disaster Management: Potential Rallying Point for PRDC

The three Hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling district receive plenty of rainfall from early April till the end of September where as in the Siliguri sub-division comprising the plains, the monsoon starts in the month of June and continues till the end of September. Therefore, in the Hill areas, landslides occur every year. Indiscriminate deforestation makes the top soil weak and barren and continuous rainfall causes the top soil to slip and huge mass of earth and boulders fall down the slope land causing large damages to government and private properties, communication, supply of drinking water etc. The force of the rain water flowing through the hilly rivers and streams also causes erosion of soil on their banks that can lead to a disaster.

Besides landslide, earthquake, accidental fire and storm also take place, which, however, have an infrequent occurrence. The main objective is to tackle the unforeseen disasters in a better and effective manner, to meet any emergent situation arising out of a natural calamity, identification of vulnerable points and provide utmost and immediate response in times of relief and rescue operations with extreme alertness. The earlier process, in times of a natural calamity, included rescue and rehabilitation in terms of temporary shelter, distribution of blankets, tirpal (tarpaulin) (91), clothes, food and compensation. These tasks are undertaken now by the Disaster Management department attached with the Block.

6.1. Handling Natural Calamity: Key Stages

Today the concept of Disaster Management has changed with ‘risk minimization’ as its fundamental element. Human beings are helpless in the face of a natural disaster but at the same time precautionary measures can avert huge losses of life and property. Preparedness, during the disaster and post-disaster has been framed as the key stages to meet any unforeseen situation in case of a natural calamity.
The first stage includes adequate planning for identification of vulnerable areas, recognition of shelter points, preparation and presence of nodal persons at the place of calamity, renovation of road benches, culverts, and bridges of sensitive areas before the onslaught of monsoon, meeting of all parallel departments like Health, Forest, Army, and others, preparation of telephone numbers and address of the concerned departments, meeting with GP and other social organizations, preparation of the Contingency Fund, and last but not the least deliver training and awareness programmes to the people who have to bear the brunt of the disaster.

The second stage involves the necessary action and measures undertaken by the Disaster Management department when the disaster strikes. Prompt delivery mechanism includes relocation of the victims to the recognized shelter points, distribution of food, clothes, tarpaulins, blankets and other necessary articles, presence of paramedics for emergency treatments, presence of the army in case of air-lifting, presence of officials from the GP, Block and DM Office for monitoring the rescue operation, inspection of the extent of damage and interaction with the victims.

The final stage can also be regarded as rehabilitation, where the victims are provided with compensation in case of a death, extent of damage to their property. The aid also depends upon the economic condition of the victim. House building grants are given, conservation and renovation of damaged walls, roads etc to make it a safer place. Besides the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) (92) the central government and the state government also provides relief grants. For example, the Prime Minister's Relief Fund provides Rs.50, 000/- in case of death of an individual at the time of calamity.

6.1.1. Importance of the Quick Response Team (QRT)

Besides the above mentioned stages, the Quick Response Team (QRT) is constituted in every ward of the GP. However, it is also seen that such teams are only organized during the rainy season. The Disaster Management department at the Block conducts meeting with the GP staff who have the responsibility of forming the QRT, taking the rural youths as volunteers. The QRT has a crucial role to play at the time of the disaster. Informing the GP staff at the time of occurrence, participation in rescue operation, provide necessary articles and materials to the victims, shifting the people to a safer place in case the area is sensitive and vulnerable are a few important functions of the team. Basically it acts as a coordinator between the victims and the administration.
Mention needs to be made of the briefings conducted by the Block with the GP which in turn imparts the same to the QRT on disaster management. It includes the identification of accident prone sites, safety measures, rescue methods, tackling the situation at the time of the occurrence of the natural calamity, avoidance of large scale losses and the like.

Thus, the QRT can be regarded as the most important channel of communication, with the ability to reach the most remote and far flung villages and to be with the people when disaster strikes. Since they are locally based, they have all the advantage to create a clear understanding on disaster management, gathering feedback, keeping the people informed of the latest: rescue and measures of avoidance of a calamity. Therefore, the QRT is integral to the role of communication in inducing participation.

However, the reality reveals a different scenario as well-structured and well-designed training are yet to reach the QRT. Their extent of knowledge and experience is only limited to what is conveyed to them by the GP, which sometimes becomes vague and obscure. They can become effective instructors if they get an opportunity for proper and suitable training from expert groups. Their importance in rallying the masses to participate is yet to be understood by the government.

Field visits reveal the slackness in the teams, particularly in the GPs under DP Block. In Nayanore GP, the most vulnerable to landslides, the team has never been strong enough. The same is the case with other GPs. But if we look at the GPs under Kalimpong I Block the situation is relatively better. For instance, in Samtar and Seokbir the government may not have taken the initiative for disaster management but NGOs like Anugalaya (which have been discussed in the following chapter) have raised awareness among the local rural people to some degree.

6.1.2. Local Publicity and Warning Messages

It is the responsibility and duty of the Disaster Management department to provide adequate publicity of heavy rainfalls and landslides in the likely affected areas. Warning messages are also broadcast from the sub station of AIR, based at Kurseong, with effect from June 1, 2002 (93). According to the state government general notification, “At GP level the publicity will be done on foot and by cycle messengers” (94). The irony is that the use of radio is less among the rural people. Poor income and absence of electricity are the inhibiting factors.
Practically the instruction is not applicable for Darjeeling Hills simply because none will be able to cover the hilly and distant remote places on foot. Cycling is even more impossible. In fact, little initiative has been taken for an alternative mode of publicity for the hills. Assistance from NGOs and other voluntary organizations is only occasionally taken for wide promotion and publicity of natural calamity messages.

Awareness creation amongst the people in this case too is most important and vital for which some strategies can be adopted. Mock drills can be conducted at the village level by the defence personnel to demonstrate steps on rescue operations and ways to keep oneself secure as she/he participates in the rescue. Announcement with microphone from village to village is another strategy adopted. Formation of Relief Committee in every GP is also needed, which can impart training to select members. This can be included in the category of TOT where they have to deliver the same to the people at the grassroots level. The new concept includes practical and the technicality in the use of rope, stretcher, spade, shovel and other modern equipment.

Training is vital and absolutely necessary for disseminating messages to the rural people. TOT is applicable here as the training received by the Block staff is repeated by them at the GP level, which finally reaches to the local people. The administration is theoretically aware that training is a powerful tool for facilitating people's participation. The concept is also technically present in the disaster management manual which mentions that training, seminars, workshops are supposed to be conducted with the people. But live demonstrations, transmission of knowledge and regular training vis-à-vis the local villagers themselves are also vital for generating awareness, alertness and consciousness among the people.

6.2. UNICEF Project: Importance

The DM office, was given the United Nation International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF)-funded Community based Disaster Preparedness Project in 2001. A total budget of Rs.18 lakh was allotted for its implementation and the objective was the identification of suitable economic activities and formation of SHGs in thirty landslides prone GPs. Identification of hazard prone areas was the foremost task to be undertaken. Initially, the project began with much enthusiasm and review meeting of the project was also held on April 8, 2002 (95).
The major areas of discussion were increased and active participation of BROs from all the Blocks in creating awareness and the various benefits that people can avail, increase in the number of field visits, regularity in the submission of weekly reports and implementation of Alternative Livelihood Schemes like poultry, diary farming, broomstick production, floriculture etc.

Before the onset of the project the BROs attended three day-residential seminar (96) at district headquarter and another three day-meet at the Block level (97). Documentary Assistant and Block Supervisor were also appointed for the respective Blocks, only for the project. The UNICEF-funded programme was most appropriate for enhancing the participating level of the ordinary people in the development projects. The objective was not only to create awareness on natural calamities but also to give an idea of alternative source of livelihood, in case a disaster strikes. The researcher is of the opinion that the project could have been a viable platform for advanced PRDC which would have helped to elevate the socio-economic condition of the local rural people. It could have been promoted as an important communication channel to reach the most deprived and marginalized, that too with the strategy to render safety and economic security to their life and property.

The project was gradually picking up pace, when suddenly it started to decelerate without any evident reason. The salaries of the Documentary Assistant and the Block Supervisor were discontinued without any proper intimation and no legal and official notice was served for the abrupt closure of the project. At one point of time it was mandatory for the offices to submit the weekly report to the DM office, but gradually the DM office stopped asking for the report. The situation became chaotic, the Block officials were shocked and confused and the anticipation and the aspirations of the people fell apart. The project just disappeared into oblivion. This is despite the fact that the local people had great expectation and many were all geared up to participate in the protection of their environment and sustenance of their economic activities. Visits were made by the district headquarter officials to landslide affected areas, where people were promised with the implementation of the project, but the scheme never reached the poor people who had their hopes pinned on it. Tek Bahadur Subba of Nayanore GP DP Block too was disappointed as he was already a victim, living in a landslide prone area; he said “I had hoped for support and immense help from this scheme but nothing came out of it”.(98).
6.3. Contextualizing Disaster Management Communication

The preceding discussion shows that to mobilize the rural people of Darjeeling Hills, disaster management communication is of vital importance. It can play a major role in involving the local inhabitants in identifying a problem, provide potential solutions and the course of actions. At the same time, it is not free of shortcomings which are listed below.

- **Paucity of fund.** The Contingency Fund is not sufficient to meet all expenses. Thus, it becomes difficult to organize training sessions, workshops, conferences and hiring of experts. In times of unexpected disasters, immediate relief is provided but it is not always sufficient. Fund is minimal and the victims always have to bear the brunt.

- **Lack of proper training.** The BROs alone undergoes training and at times it is not possible to impart the same all by himself. Besides him if other staff like the Executive Assistant, the Secretary of the GP and the local volunteers are imparted training it becomes easier to reach the people at the grassroots level. Communication becomes transparent and people become more flexible and eager to adopt new ideas and practices.

- **Political interference.** It affects the smooth working of the Disaster Management department. The political parties want to gain credit for any help extended to the people and there is always a strong tendency for manipulation. For example, when a natural calamity strikes, the political parties have an inclination to compel the department to distribute relief materials as per their wish.

- **Inappropriate relief material.** The government has listed several articles for distribution as immediate relief. This includes blankets, shawls, tarpaulins, sweaters, sarees, children’s garments, shirts, and trousers. But despite the fact that dhoti and lungi are not used in the Hills, they are widely distributed amongst the victims. This acts as an impediment, as the rural people cannot even avail of the facilities at the time of crisis. There are no separate listed articles, appropriate to the conditions of the Hills.

- **Dual administration as a barrier.** In the plains if disaster strikes and an individual’s house collapses, he/she can avail of the Indira Abhas Yojana (IAY) (99) scheme. But it’s not the same for Darjeeling, where the GP and development schemes are under DGHC. It is an excessively long process,
sometimes taking more than a year before a victim can get his/her compensation.

Drawbacks will be there but one cannot overlook the crucial role the disaster management communication can play in the life of the weaker and vulnerable sections. Preventive measures in the face of a natural calamity and socio-economic independence could have become stronger, had the UNICEF-funded project materialized and sustained. This project was of critical importance to the active participation of the people at the grassroots level. The role of communication as a powerful agent in this project would have made development inherently participatory through advocacy and by transfer of knowledge, skills and techniques to the rural people.

Disaster communication, if seriously taken, is also crucial for facilitating participatory formulation and implementation of development plans, keeping in mind that its main objective is to prevent large scale disaster and destruction. In fact sensitizing the rural people about natural calamities and the aftermath not only helps to bring about requisite alertness and consciousness but also prepares them mentally for any unexpected traumatic situation. The GP functionaries if provided easy access to information on this issue can serve as an effective channel of communication, being the next door representation.

Thus, to repeat, there is an urgent need for strengthening the Disaster Management department, provide sufficient fund for dissemination of information, appropriate local level training and most important formulation of field based programmes that will be able to attract substantial and large scale participation of the people, reaching even the poorest of the poor. Subsequently, the stakeholders can take the opportunity to collect feedback and understand the most suitable communicating pattern, which will effectively work towards the formation of a responsive audience.

Integration of development and communication remains thoroughly incomplete if we do not analyze the role of people in the transfer of information in the process of communication in rural development. But as we have reiterated, it is not only the people at the grassroots level, but other segments like the NGOs, political parties, missionary organizations, mass media that can make a major contribution for mobilizing the rural people towards participation in rural development programmes and policies. Keeping this in mind, a detailed study of their role has been made in the next chapter.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The DM Office is constituted in every district of a state in order to run the administration of the district. The office is situated at Darjeeling as it is the headquarter of the district. There are three sub-divisions in the district; they are Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri. These sub-divisional offices are under the direct control of District Magistrate who sits in Darjeeling.

2. Four Blocks of Siliguri sub-division are under DPRDD, DM office, Darjeeling. The Blocks are Matigara, Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Khoribari.

3. The District Magistrate occupies the highest position in the DM Office. He administers the district. His important functions are maintenance of law and order, various rules and implementation of various government orders. Being the chief administrator of the district he directly orders the Police department whenever required. He is also responsible to maintain peace in the district and the post is occupied by a senior officer from the Indian Administrative Service.

4. The Deputy DPRDO works under the DPRDO. The functions of the DPRDO are undertaken by the Deputy in the absence of the former. The PDO monitors the work of the GP and is in constant touch with the PDOs of each Block for all papers works. They also have to visit GPs for inspection and meetings. The PAAO is responsible for maintenance of accounts of all the GPs.

5. UDC and LDC are appointed in every department. They mainly work under the officers. All files are processed through them. Peons, Chowkidar, Mali are some of the staff who belongs to group-D.

6. The DPRDD handles all the establishment matters of the GP staff as well as of the concern staff of the Block. It mostly includes transfer of staff, promotion, salary and increments, gradation list on seniority basis etc.

7. The BDO is head of the Block Office. He administers the Block along with his Joint BDO. All the Extension officers have to report to the BDO.
Extension officers like the BRO handle all relief matters like monitoring a natural disaster, distribution of relief materials etc. The BRO has been entrusted with the duty to monitor the work of the GP. It also includes several paper works including that of the SHGs.

8. There are several officers who are attached with the Block Office but work under DGHC. For example, the WDO, who works under DRDC but at the Block level. As her work is at the rural level she functions from the Block. The WDO is responsible for women & child Development. Her duty is to ensure that women not only receive their due share in the anti-poverty programmes but are also able to receive benefits of other programmes. She also supervises and monitors the SGSY programme.

9. Lewis Jubilee Complex was previously known as Lewis Jubilee Sanitarium established during the British rule. After independence it was converted into a government tourist lodge. With the formation of DGHC in 1988 it has been taken over by the same as its office. The different departments which functions here are: DRDC, Engineering, Health, Irrigation, Education, Fisheries.

10. The PD occupies the highest position in DRDC. She/he has to be in the rank of an Additional District Magistrate. The PD is in overall charge of the activities of the DRDC and responsible for interaction with DGHC/state administration as well as with the Government of India. The PD should be exclusively concerned with DRDC work.

11. The PD does not work alone. The functions of few officers have been discussed. Deputy- in-charge of Credit coordinates with the banks in all matters relating to credit, including the interface between the bankers and the beneficiaries/ beneficiary groups, loan disbursements as well as loan recovery. The monitoring cell of DRDC is also headed by a deputy, functioning directly under the supervision of the PD. Apart from monitoring the progress of all the programmes, the wing also monitors issues relevant to poverty in the district.

12. The Constitution of India has adopted the principle of Universal Adult Franchise for the people of India as the main method of democratic
representation in the Lok Sabha and in the Legislative Assemblies. It affirms that all people of India who are 18 years of age and above are free and equal to vote, irrespective of caste, creed, race, sex, descent, domicile, education, property, profession and ideology. In the eyes of law the Indian citizens vote as Indians and not as Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs etc.

13. The elected representatives of a GP comprise the Pradhan, Upa-Pradhan and Ward members. The Pradhan is the elected head of the GP, who looks after the financial and administrative department. The Upa-Pradhan is also elected by the members from amongst themselves. In the absence of the Pradhan, he takes charge of the office and responsibility of the Pradhan. The ward members represent their wards in the GP. Primarily their duty is to bring development schemes locally known as Bikash to the people of their respective wards, take information to the people etc.

14. The appointment of the GP staff is made by the state government and draws salary from the same through the Block and then through the DPRDD. They assist the GP body in the administration of the GP. The Secretary has to do official work like maintenance of cash book, make report returns etc. The Job Assistant has a technical hand who undertakes plan and estimates for developmental work. It has a government appointed post but it no longer exists. A new post has been created instead, which is known as Nirman Sahayak. The Executive Assistant provides assistance to the Pradhan, in both financial and administrative matters. The Gram Sahayak’s duty is to assist the Panchayat Secretary in the official works and also undertake clerical duty. For example, preparation of birth and death certificates, PROFLAL, to mention a few. Resolutions are also written by him during the time of Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha. The Karmi works as a peon and his/her job includes distribution of official letters, transaction of office file, letters from the block to GP office and vice versa and cleaning the office.

15. The interview with Deepak Kharka, Secretary of Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block, was taken on November 22, 2007. Age: 37, Gender: Male, Education level: BA.
16. The interview with Ranjit Rai Executive Assistant, Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I Block, was taken on September 02, 2007. Age: 45, Gender: Male, Education level: Class XII.

17. Jas Bahadur Niraula is a local resident of Shiv Mandir, Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block. Age: 32, Gender: Male, Education level: X (Pass), Occupation: Carpenter. Participant in the Gram Sansad, held on May 06, 2007. Jas Bahadur Niraula had collected information on RTI from a local daily Nepali Newspaper – Himalaya Darpan. RTI provides the citizens the right to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority.

18. The Brahmins belong to the priestly class. They are the highest caste in the Hindu-Nepali community. Acharya, Sharma, Adhikary, Ghimerey are some of the caste. People belonging to the Chettri community are not Brahmins but are a branch of this highest caste (third level).

19. Deepak Kharka holds the post of Secretary, Age: 37, Gender: Male, Education level: BA, Bimal Rasaily that of Executive Assistant Age: 39, Gender: Male, Education level: BA and Kiran Archarya that of Gram Sahayak Age: 31, Gender: Male, Education level: Bachelor of Science (BSc). They are the staff of Lower Ecchey GP.

20. To eradicate polio the pulse polio programme has been launched. Children are immunized against the disease for which a systematic pattern is followed. As the people are unaware of the immunization dates, information is spread. This is done both in the rural and in the urban areas.


22. L.M. Lama, Pradhan (ex) of Chongtong GP under DP Block. Age: 42, Gender: Male, Education level: Class XII (Pass) and belongs to the CPR-M
political party. The interview taken on September 07, 2005 at the GP, Chongtong.

23. Jagat Man Rai is Secretary of Relling GP, Bijanbari Block. Age: 36, Gender: Male, Education level: Class XII (Pass). Interview taken at the end of the cluster meeting, Relling GP DP Block on August 12, 2006.

24. Petitions and Prayers are usually written in the local language (Nepali). The people submit the same during the time of the Gram Sansad. The issues are various like house repair, IAY, old age pension, handicap pension, ration card, water scarcity, water tank construction, electricity, to mention a few. The GP staff also read out the list of beneficiaries, who have been included in schemes like old age pension, handicap etc. The total money received by the GP, income and expenditure, the number of assets created from the fund, number of people benefited from the schemes etc are also discussed in the meetings.

25. The Election department under D.M. Office is responsible for the allotment of seats. Before the GP elections a list is prepared. Factors like number of voters, total area, and caste domination are taken into consideration before the seats are allotted. Thus, they can be Scheduled Tribe quota, Scheduled Caste quota, General quota, reservation for women etc. Rotation is done every five years.

26. Pinto Sherpa, Pradhan (ex) of Relling GP, Bijanbari Block. Age: 56, Gender: Male, Education level: Class II. He has been elected from the Scheduled Tribe category backed by GNLF political party.

27. The Gram Sansad was held at Sherpa Goan Primary School, Ward No 6, Sherpa goan Upper Relling, Relling GP DP Block on November 20, 2005.

28. Meena Subba, Pradhan (ex) of Jhepi GP, DP Block. Age: 40, Gender: Female, Education level: Class III. She has been elected from the women quota and she belongs to the CPI-M.

29. The Gram Sansad meet of Kankibong II, Ward No 2 of Jhepi GP, DP Block was held on November 21, 2005.

31. B.L. Subba is a retired junior high school teacher and former Pradhan of Jhepi GP, Bijanbari Block. He still commands great respect and response from the people of his area and is dynamic, active in the political activities and GP administration of his area. He is with the CPM. Age: 65, Gender: Male, Education level: Class: XII (Pass).

32. The Gram Sansad at Thapa Goan was held at Upper Sumbuck, Jhepi GP DP Block on November 30, 2005.

33. The government agencies in this context refer to the Block Office and the GP. They are the representatives of the government to the local rural people for dissemination of information and implementation of rural development policies and programmes for socio-economic development.

34. AAP provides a list of schemes drawn annually and placed before the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha. The schemes are drawn with the approval of the local people during the time of the Gram Sansad. The Gram Sabha, which is held annually, usually in the month of December, is where the final approval of the AAP is made. However, the final decision is always made by the GP body; thereafter it is placed with DGHC.

35. Uday Kumar Pariyar, BRO provided the data of the four GPs. Age: 40, Gender: Male, Education level: BA. Palden Lama, BRO of Kalimpong I Block has provided data of the four GPs. Age: 42, Gender: Male, Education level: BA

36. 33% of seat has been reserved for women. The seat can either be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled tribe, women belonging to the scheduled caste, or from the general community.

37. Open seat is when both male and female candidates can contest for elections irrespective of the community they belong to. However, sometimes this open category can be for both male and female but from the scheduled caste and tribe or should belong to the general community.
38. Interview with Meena Rai, Ward Member of Ward No: 6/8 (Lower Relling/Allay Dara) of Relling GP was taken at Allay Dara on November 29, 2005. Age: 38, Gender: Female, Education level: Class XII (Pass).

39. The RT Set is basically a wireless set in which messages are transmitted by radio waves. It is a one way speaker system. The instrument was provided by the state government where the GPs could stay connected amongst themselves as well as with the Block. However in most GPs it lies in one corner, gathering dust, lacks maintenance or in some it is nowhere to be seen.

40. Fund Transfer Account takes place when the state government directly deposits the allocated fund in the account of the respective GPs. This system is applicable in every district of the state but for the GPs of Daijeeling Hills the system is not practiced. However the account exists for every concern GP.

41. Nirman Sahayak is the engineer for NREGS. He/she carries out the technical functions of the programme and has an important role to play. Preparation of estimates, field measurement, inspection of raw materials, and technical guidance are some of the work undertaken. All money bills require the signature of the Nirman Sahayak before it is placed at the Block for payments.

42. Rajen Mishra, Nirman Sahayak has been sent to DP Block on deputation from Daijeeling II GP to supervise the work under NREGS. This step has been taken due to the absence of Nirman Sahayak at DP Block.

43. The GP issues various certificates to the local residents of their area like migration, character, residential, birth and death, income, marriage, land possession etc. After 2005, the GP Pradhan had his/her signature on these certificates for about two years. However, from 2008 onwards the same certificates are issued by the GP staff but are countersigned by the BDO.

44. Mahesh Tamang represents Ward no 2 (Upper Dara Goan) of Upper Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block as a member (ex). However there is no legality in his functioning. Age: 34, Gender: Male, Education level: Class XII (Pass),
The interview was taken on February 02, 2006 during the researcher’s field survey to the area.

The GP Pradhan was entitled to a monthly allowance of Rs.500/- and the Upa-Pradhan was entitled to Rs. 400/-. It was known as honorarium. However the members received Members Fixed Pay. The payment was made according to the monthly meetings attended at the GP. Initially it was Rs.40/- per meeting but gradually rose to Rs.100/-.

Nayanore is one of the GP under DP Block. Field visit to the area was made by the researcher on December 02, 2007.

Swarna Bahadur Rai is a local resident of Lower Relling goan Ward no IV, Relling GP, DP Block. Age: 32, Gender: Male, Education level: Class V, Occupation: Farmer. The interview was taken at his house, during the field survey conducted on December 06, 2007.

The discharge of the administrative functions of the DGHC is run with the help of the PS. The PS is assisted by Departmental Secretaries and other deputed officers. The PS is officer of the rank not below that of Commissioner/ Secretary of state government. She/he is expected to exercise all powers under the guidance and supervision of DGHC.

The Treasury is an important department of the DM office. Fund is allocated by the state and central government for different departments for execution of their works. The department issues cheques against bills submitted by the concern organization. However, the bills are passed only after an in-depth verification and scrutiny by the Treasury officer. Besides, the salaries of the DM office Block and GP staff are also withdrawn from this department. Maintenance of accounts is an important function.

DRDC has allotted TSC project to two NGOs for implementation. CMD has taken up the project for Kalimpong I Block and the same has been allotted to Panchavati Green Tech Society for DP Block.

Interview with PD, Doma Sherpa taken at DRDC Lewis Jubilee Complex, Darjeeling, on May 21, 2007. Age: 50, Gender: Female, Education level: BA.
52. Introduction of a set of training Manuals covering the basic information of the process of formation of SHGs, skill up-gradation etc has been one of the IEC activities undertaken through various modes of communication during the year 2003-04. www.rural.nic.in/book01-02/ch-14 p-79. Retrieved on February 22, 2008.

53. Gram Sahayikas are state government appointed staff at the Block level. They work under and assist the WDO and their work is entirely related to SHGs.


55. *Ibid*, p.10.

56. Dhari is the traditional men’s garment in Indian subcontinent. It is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually around seven yards long, wrapped around the waist and the legs, and knotted at the waist. The lungi is a similar piece of cloth worn in similar manner, though only on informal occasions. The lungi is not as long and is basically a bigger version of a towel worn to fight the extremely hot weather in India. It is particularly popular in regions where the heat and humidity create an unpleasant climate for trousers. The saree is a traditional garment worn by women in India. A sari is a strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine meters in length that is draped over the body in various styles. The most common style is for the sari to be wrapped around the waist, with one end then draped over the shoulder baring the midriff.

57. Daurau Sural and Gunau Cholo are the traditional dress of the Nepali community. *Daurau sural* is worn by men. It is two piece, the upper portion of which is tied at four points from the neck to the hip side and the lower portion is a loose pant, which has to be tied at the waist and tapers down to the ankle. The *Gunau Cholo* is the dress code for women, which is also two piece. The upper portion looks like a blouse, but it is full sleeve and has to be tied together at four points. The lower piece is a five metre long material worn around the waist in a specific manner, covering the ankles.
58. PD Doma Sherpa Age: 50, Gender: Female, Education level: BA. The interview was taken at DRDC, Darjeeling on May 21, 2007.

59. The policymakers here refers to the higher authorities, that is, DGHC and state government.

60. Indira Mukhia is PDO of DPRDD, located at Darjeeling. Age: 34, Gender: Female, Education level: BA. The interview was taken on July 02, 2007 at DPRDD Darjeeling.

61. West Bengal Panchayat Act XLI of 1973, Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, Section 205, p. 70.

62. The source of this statement has been collected from the interviews taken on August 06, 2007 and August 20, 2007 with the PDO of DP Block and with the PDO of Kalimpong I Block. Both shared the same opinion to the questionnaire placed, that is, how often do you visit the GP areas? (Name withheld on request).

63. The DPRDO conducts monthly meetings with her subordinates like the deputy DPRDO, PDO, FAAO. The PDOs representing each of the twelve Blocks also attend the meeting.


65. PAAO of DPRDD Darjeeling District (name withheld) Age: 45, Gender: Male, Education level: Bachelor of Science (BSc). The interview was taken on July 03, 2007, at DPRDD, Darjeeling.

66. The ROT system is a form of video conferencing. It is a one-way audio video system where the audience can see the person and hear what is being said but the speaker cannot see the audience. This is followed by the question hour where the audience or the participants use the telephone or the cellular phone to place their queries on the concern subject.

67. The Bengali are an ethnic community who are natives of Bengal (now divided between Bangladesh and India) in South Asia. They speak Bengali (*Bangla*), which is an Indo-Aryan language. They are mostly concentrated in the states of West Bengal and Tripura in India and in Bangladesh.
68. Head Clerk of DPRDD, Darjeeling (name withheld on request) Age: 47, Gender: Male, Education level: Class XII. Interview taken on July 03, 2007 at DPRDD, Darjeeling.

69. PROFLAL is a central government funded scheme. According to this project, the rural people who own less than .50 decimal land and are in the age group of 18-50 are eligible to participate. A nominal amount of Rs.10/- is deposited every month by an individual and another Rs.10/- is given from the government. On this total amount of 20, the rural people receive interest and the money deposited matures when the beneficiary reaches the age of 50.

70. The PDO (name withheld on request) attended a training programme at SIPRD, Kalyani West Bengal in April 2007. The training was for guidelines and instructions for implementation of the NREGS programme in their respective Blocks.

71. RHS is a door-to-door survey undertaken jointly by the Block and the GP functionaries at the village level. Information is gathered from every individual household based on a set of predesigned questionnaires, forwarded from the state government. Generation of BPL category of household from every GP has been the objective of this survey.

72. Twelve parameters have been included in the RHS sheet in order to procure specific and correct information about the individual household. They are as follows: (1) Total operational holding of land (2) Type of house (3) Average availability of garments (4) Food Security (5) Ownership of consumer durables (6) Educational status of highest educated adult (7) Household members in the labour force (8) Means of Livelihood (9) Educational Standard of children (9-14 years) (10) Type of indebtedness (11) If any member temporarily migrates, reasons (12) Special Category family/deprivation.

73. Darjeeling district is the only district in West Bengal, which has a Hill station. The plains here refer to Siliguri sub-division as well as other districts of the state that follow the three-tier Panchayat system and are directly under
the state government. The administrative set up for the rural areas of the plains are very much different from that of DGHC.

74. The parameters prescribed in RHS did not suit the conditions of the Hills, which put the poorest of the poor in the APL category. It was a chaotic situation and the matter was placed before the state government who in turn invited for Claims and Objections. Claims specify that an individual can claim in writing that he belongs to the BPL and Objections are when people can object to the concern person from availing the BPL facility. Generally Objections are rare. Hearings were conducted in all the GPs but the final compilation is still pending.

75. The state government also holds power in the DGHC and can inspect the accounts of the Council from time to time and provide necessary advice; transfer any institutions under the Government to the General Council as and when necessary; Annul or suspend such regulations or by laws or resolution made by the general or executive council; supervise and evaluate the works of the General Council; supercede the General Council and order its fresh reconstitution; make rules with respect to the provisions under the DGHCAct,1988. In other words, the General Council or DGHC is bound by the guidance, instructions and directions given to it by the Government from time to time in the discharge of its functions for the proper implementation of the objects of the DGHC Act.

76. The comment is based on the discussion and interaction conducted with the staff of DPRDD, Darjeeling, on July 04, 2007.

77. Madhyamik is class X final examination which is conducted by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. The question papers are too set by them for the entire schools affiliated to it. Higher Secondary Examination is class XII final examination which is also conducted by West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education. The question papers are too set by them for the entire schools affiliated to it.

78. People belonging to the Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Class are provided with certificates. It is a legal document that identifies them according to the category to which they belong. The people
can avail of the benefits and facilities provided by the government provided they have this document.

79. BADP is mainly for the small hamlets, located at the international border areas, for their welfare and development. For example, Mirik, Sukhiapokhari are the small places sharing the border with Nepal. Construction of roads, drinking water, schools, community hall, health issues are the few projects implemented.

80. MPLAD is a centrally funded project that comes directly to the Block Office, through the DM office. Construction of roads, culverts, bridges, water tanks are some of the projects undertaken.

81. The BDO of the Block also functions as the CDO for implementation of NREGS. The CDO monitors the programme and is in charge of the NREGS fund. For instance, the fortnightly payments to the local rural people and the issue of job cards are done by the CDO, through the GP staff. The CDO also makes field visits for supervision and inspects the progress of the work. The job card is a photo identity card where details like number of days worked, total amount received, signature of the supervisor and worker are entered.

82. SCA is a central government funded programme which at one point of time was implemented by the Block Office, through the DM office. The project was meant for developmental work at the village level like drinking water scheme, drainage, culverts, pony roads, jeepable roads etc. However the project made a sudden exit three years back.

83. The official website launched by the state government is www.wbprd.nic.in. The website provides information related to the states Panchayat and rural development programmes. For instance, it provides details of various schemes like NREGS, TSC, Rural Housing, Report, Notifications and Publications, Appointments, District information with maps, Budget, Grievance cell etc.

84. Various issues and subjects are discussed when the ROT is in operation. Guidelines and instructions on NREGS, SGSY, TSC, Double Book Entry System to mention a few. The speakers are mainly the officers from the
concern departments. At times the Principal Secretary of PRDD state government also participates.


87. SIPRD is situated at Kalyani in the state of West Bengal has been working since the sixties for undertaking training and research in the field of Panchayat and Rural Development. The institute’s major aim is to reach the people, so the emphasis is to impart training to the elected representatives of the rural people in the three-tier panchayat system. The Institute also organizes training programmes for the field level government officials including block, sub-divisions and district level development personnel, the NGOs and so many others.

The present priorities of the Institute are:

- Training of the Panchayat functionaries as per the National Plan of Action on PR training and the priorities of the Government of West Bengal;
- Promoting advocacy and an alternative delivery system for rural sanitation;
- Enthusing the community in taking up Community Managed Child Education Programme;
- Promoting comprehensive community initiatives for holistic development in watershed areas of the Districts in the laterite zone;
- Promoting formation of SHGs by the villagers, especially the women below the poverty line;
- Training on Community based preparedness for disaster management

88. Guidelines and instructions for NREGS were conducted at Kalimpong I Block Office taking the GP staff and a few cluster members of SHGs in the month of October 2007 before it set foot in the rural areas in November 2007. The training was conducted in the local language (Nepali) by the BDO
with assistance from PDO, PAAO and BWO. Blackboard was used for illustrating the programme.

89. DK Chettri is Secretary of Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I Block. Age: 42, Gender: Male, Education Level: Class XII (Pass). Interview taken at the GP office on September 02, 2008.

90. Interview with D.D. Bhatia, BDO of Kalimpong I Block was taken at the Block Office on August 20, 2007. Age: 42, Gender: Male, Education level: BA.

91. Tarpaulin or locally called *tirpal* is a waterproofed canvas usually black in colour and provided free of cost by the Relief Department, Government of West Bengal. The number of tarpaulin is supplied as per the indent sent by the Relief Department, District Magistrate Office Darjeeling to the Government of West Bengal. The same is distributed as per requirement to Kalimpong, Kurseong and other areas of Darjeeling by the District Magistrate office and is usually given to the affected people during the occurrence of a natural calamity.

92. Calamity Relief Fund comes from the state government and is a post-disaster fund. The fund is rendered as per requirement after assessment of the extent of damage. It is meant for the mass public, where the roads, walls, culverts of the village have been damaged. The Disaster Management Department at the Block makes the enquiry and the estimated expenditure needed for repair and renovation and sends the same to the DM Office which is forwarded to the state government for release of fund.


95. Meeting on Disaster Management held on April 08, 2002, at the Conference Hall, DM Office, Darjeeling. The officials present in the review meeting were R. Ranjit (Additional District Magistrate, Darjeeling), Sonam W. Bhatia (Officer-in-Charge, Relief, Darjeeling), Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Darjeeling, BROs, supervisors, document assistants, representatives
of Relief Department, Darjeeling and representatives of Expert Committee Cell, Darjeeling.

96. Residential seminar-cum-workshop was held in May, 2002 at Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling for dissemination of information on Disaster Management. BDOs, Joint BDOs, BROs of all the Blocks, NGO resource persons, Staff from the relief section (headquarter) and GP staff took part in the seminar. The programme was organized and funded by UNICEF and the participants were given hotel accommodation as well as travelling and dearness allowance.

97. The workshop conducted at Darjeeling headquarter was again conducted at the Block level taking the village volunteers and the elected members of the GP. Their responsibility was to spread the same message and information to the people at the grassroots level.

98. Tek Bahadur Subba, Age: 40, Gender: Male, Education level: nil. The interview was taken during field visit to the area on April 14, 2007. Lungchakro, Nayanore GP, DP Block.

99. IAY is a central government scheme that was launched in 1985-86. The intention is to provide “Housing for All”, with emphasis on standing benefits to the poor and deprived. The scheme is implemented at the grassroots level by the GP office. The scheme undertakes construction of rural houses with the objective to provide shelter to the homeless families living below the poverty line or to renovate their mud-built houses which are not fit for living.