PART II (A)

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Chapter 3

PANCHAYAT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Panchayat and Community Development in Assam:

According to the Local Self Government Act of 1935, the power of planning for all round development of village was vested on the Local Boards. Before these Local Boards the existence of village organisation in Assam can be traced back to the village 'mel' in ancient time. The Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948 was enacted by the Government of Assam in 1948 with its objective to establish and develop local self government in the rural areas as self sufficient units for rural reconstruction and development. After the independence of India The Assam Panchayat Act, 1959 was enacted by the Government of Assam with a view to bring about a radical change in rural administration and development according to the recommendation of the Balvant Rai Mehta Committee. In the mean time Community Development and National Extension Service blocks were established in different backward areas of the state since 1952 for implementation of C.D.P. according to its schematic pattern.

The co-ordination between C.D.P. and Panchayat was established in 1962 when the necessary arrangement for full
enforcement of 'The Assam Panchayat Act, 1959' had been completed. The B.D.O. (Block Development Officer) was the executive officer-cum-secretary of the A.P. (Anchalik Panchayat). In 1964 high power study team on Panchayati Raj in Assam suggested various measures for improvement of the Block and Panchayat administration. Most of their recommendations were incorporated in the Assam Panchayat Amendment Act, 1964. With a view to reorganise the panchayats and enable them to function more effectively as units of self-government 'The Assam Panchayat Raj Act' of 1972 was brought into force by repealing the Act of 1959.

3.2 Administrative Set-up of P. and C.D. Blocks in Assam:

In order to have co-ordination and supervision of works of different development departments, in the level of subdivision and block, Directorate of Community Development and Panchayat has been established. From the initiation of C.D.P. till now the programme has gone through three different administrative set-ups. The distinction of these three administrative set-ups are understandable from the chart (Table 3.1) of present administration in the state of Assam and the other two charts of old administrative set-ups which are given in the appendix D.4 and D.5.

Under the first set-up the B.D.O. was in-charge of developmental activities at the block level. He was also to co-ordinate the various activities of different development
Table 3.1
Organizational Chart of Development Administration in the State of Assam (1974 to Up to Date, 1979)

Secretariat

\[ \text{Directorates of Development Department} \]

\[ \text{District Heads of Development Departments} \]

\[ \text{Sub-divisional Planning Officer} \]

\[ \text{Block Development Officer} \]

\[ \text{Village Level Functionaries of Development Departments} \]

\[ \text{President, Gram Sevaks/Sevikas} \]

\[ \text{Chief Executive Councilor of Mahkuma Parishad} \]

\[ \text{Director of Community Development and Panchayat} \]

\[ \text{Development Commissioner} \]

Index:

\[ \rightarrow \text{Flow of Administrative Authority} \]

\[ \rightarrow \text{Flow of Technical Authority} \]

\[ \leftarrow \text{Co-ordinating Relationship} \]

Note: Development Departments include Agriculture, Veterinary, Fishery, Medical, Industry, Public Works Department, Co-operative, and Social Education.
departments in the block. He was helped by various subject-matter specialists in the form of E.O.s (Extension Officer) and inspectors to look after specific activities. These E.O.s were under the technical supervision and control of their respective heads at the district level, whereas administratively they had worked under the B.D.O. Various E.O.s and inspectors had also their respective sub-inspectors and supervisors to work at the village level in their respective fields. But the first administrative set-up was characterised by the non-existence of Panchayat.

In the second administrative set-up the presidents of the gaon panchayats which formed the lowest tier of the system, were ex-officio members of the anchalik panchayat and also the executive authorities for the respective G.P. (Gaon Panchayat) level schemes. Similarly, the presidents of the A.P.s were ex-officio members of the M.P. (Mahkuma Parishad). Thus under the system the executive head of one tier automatically became a member of the executive body of the next higher tier. Through this interlocking of the key personnel of the panchayats at the three levels, an organic link was established between the apex and the base. The B.D.O. was the ex-officio secretary of the A.P. and also the executive officer of all development departments in respect of their schemes at the block level. He was entrusted with full financial and administrative powers; and the development funds for village level schemes of the different departments were channelised through him. The
procedure promoted cohesive co-ordination of the various development activities at the level. The B.D.O. played the role of team-leader and co-ordinator. Thus under the three tier system, the A.P. and for that matter the block virtually functioned as a kind of micro-level planning region, though not formally described as such.

Last organizational chart for the improvement of administration was introduced in 1974 under the concerning act of 1972. Since then two tier system of Gaon Panchayat at the lower level and the Mahkuma Parishad at the mahkuma level has been functioning. The most important change is the disappearance of co-ordinating relationship among the development departments. A major change brought about by the restructuring was to divest the B.D.O. who had been the spearhead of development activity in the previous set-up of his financial and executive powers which are now concentrated at the apex level in the Mahkuma Parishad. The Block Development Officer has been reduced to the role of an assisting officer of the Mahkuma Parishad and his pre-occupation is paper work. The Extension Officer who acted under his direction in the previous set-up has been transferred to the respective development department. Eight out of the ten gram sevaks have also been placed under the Bennor plan of Agriculture department. A list of gram sevak centre where they worked is annexed in Appendix I.6. The reorganisation has adversely affected the execution of the plan programmes. Block Development Officer
has been divested of former financial and executive powers and is deprived of his key personnel and as such the block has now practically no effective role in rural development planning. The Act in force has provided for transfer of departmental schemes, programmes and institutions of the different development departments to the Mahkuma Parishad together with funds and personnel at the block level.

Figure no. 3.1 shows the blocks and the gaon panchayats with village boundaries in the region under study in the existing administrative set-up. A list of villages has been annexed in the Appendix B. Location of headquarters of blocks and gaon panchayats and gram sevak centres have been shown in fig. no. 3.2. It is also worth mentioning that with the expansion of Gauhati to Greater Gauhati the area of Dimoria and Rani development block have been receded to the present size as shown in fig. no. 3.1. There are a few villages at the boundary of the blocks with dual benefits. Such villages are enlisted in two contiguous blocks, or as a village of Greater Gauhati as well. The discrepancy was a negligence of the block authorities concerned.

3.3 Participation of People in Panchayati Raj Institution

The Panchayati Raj is a medium through which a gradual socio-economic transformation of the people is intended to be brought about. It aims at maximising the people's participation and involvement in the activities of Community Development Programme. The attainment of this goal is influenced to a
significant degree by the effectiveness of the leadership at the grass-root level. The leaders elected at the gaon panchayat level work as a conveyor in the implementation of the policies and programmes of the Government and the village community. The common people expect an ideal leader to be selfless, honest, impartial with a cool temperament. The villagers meet the leader in groups when a problem concerns the community interests, like digging a tube-well, constructing a culvert, repairing a village road, distribution of developmental inputs or for settlement of disputes. Thus, in all local development activities the leader has a vital role to play. Usually a person of the traditionally well-to-do family, or the vocal type or the political-minded person who has taken an active part in the various activities concerning village welfare and acted as spokesman over the years, becomes the leader. A connection with cultural and community organisations and participation in their programmes enhance his qualifications for the job. Traditionally, it was the privilege of elders to occupy important positions in a panchayat or any other village organisation. The physical achievement in regard to training in Panchayati Raj training centre is insignificant. However, the present trend indicates that educated young men specially voluble ones are also equally eager to take up leadership in such organisations. A young leader will naturally have tremendous enthusiasm for developmental work. His educational background and progressive
attitude towards social and economic problems of rural life further help him to become a popular leader. A leader emerging from a weaker section of the society has been observed to have different views on the execution of rural development programmes than a leader coming from the higher echelons of the rural society. There are several socio-political and economic factors that make a rural leader including, economic status, caste, affiliation, age, education and access to higher authorities.

Though agriculture is the predominant occupation yet the influence of non-agricultural professions like teaching, business, public or private service is also being felt more and more. A good combination of socio-economic and political factors as indicated, is likely to earn votes in panchayat polls. It has been observed from the results of panchayat elections that the influence of caste and traditional authority is getting less importance and a political society is rising. The rural middle class which is roughly identified as such, is more represented than the weaker section like agricultural labourers. So, the decentralisation of power has not yet reached the poorer sections.

A traditional society which keeps superstitions, taboo and irrationality, cannot bring any socio-economic transformation merely by increasing its skills. In bringing about the change, the role of young educated panchayat leaders will be invaluable since they are modern in their outlook. If only
the progressive section of the rural society get elected in the panchayats, the helpless rural masses who look to the Government for help will be benefited.

3.4 **Electoral Behaviour of the People:**

The maximum poll of votes in panchayat and general election is observed in the least developed zones of Dimoria and Rani development blocks. This may indicate that the least developed people are easily mobilized by the contesting persons. The minimum poll in the developed zones may be due to some of the voters in electoral roll are residing out-side the zone of their permanent residence.

Gaonburha, village leader, traditional leader, Government Officer, political leader etc. are working for the development of the villages. They are working from their different position and help the villagers. Some of the leaders mentioned above use to do anti-social work behind the screen of social work. It is observed that 23.6 per cent of the total households have faith in none of them. Village leaders and elected leaders are more popular than others. A few households have no idea about the social workers of their locality. According to them development is a gradual process.

3.5 **Awareness on Panchayat and Community Development Programme:**

Panchayat and Community Development Programme even in the last part of the third decade is not in a stage to make
the people fully aware of it. It is observed that only 63.9, 79.7 and 55.1 per cent of the people in Rampur, Rani and Dimoria development block respectively have full knowledge about the programmes. In Rani Development Block 2.7 per cent and 2.4 per cent of the population in Dimoria Block are still ignorant about the programmes. A significant section of the people possess partial ideas about the P. and C.D.P. (Panchayat and Community Development Programme). Table 3.2 shows the awareness stage of people on P. and C.D.P.

Table 3.2
Awareness on Panchayat and Community Development Programme
(Figures in Per cent of Total Households)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Stage of Awareness</th>
<th>Rampur</th>
<th>Rani</th>
<th>Dimoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Heard about C.D. Programme, Block Development Programme and Panchayati Raj</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Heard about C.D. Programme and Block Development Only</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Heard about C.D. Programme and Panchayati Raj Only</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Heard about Block Development Programme and Panchayati Raj only</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Heard about C.D. Programme Only</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Heard about Block Development Programme Only</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Heard about Panchayati Raj Only</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Never Heard</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Don't Know/No Answer</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responsible officers for the developmental work under Community Development Programme perhaps are lacking in initiative on such work. It is also observed that most of the field officers do not visit all the villages of his operational area. Their visits are generally occasional and selective. Gram sevak/sevika, Doctor's staff, Agriculture E.O. and A.D. (Agriculture Demonstrator) and Panchayat E.O.s are the frequent visitors than the other officers. This is one of the significant lapse on the part of the responsible personnel for which they fail to motivate, even one-fourth of, the people. Some of the interior villages still remain incognito as shown in fig. no. 3.1.

A Community Development Block has to divest three-fourths of responsibility in agriculture which is the main economic activity of the people as discussed in the chapter 2. The Community Development Programme has given a thrust to increase agricultural production and the impact of such has been dealt with in the next chapter.