Chapter 6

Beneficiary Participation and Beneficiary-Administration Interface

(i) Participation: A Brief Conceptual Outline

(ii) Dimensions of Beneficiary-Administration Interface in the Area Under Study

(iii) Suggestions to Improve the Level of Beneficiary Participation
CHAPTER 6

BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION AND
BENEFICIARY-ADMINISTRATION INTERFACE

This chapter consists of three parts. Part I briefly sketches the concept of "participation". Part II portrays select dimensions of beneficiary-administration interface in the area under study. Discussion in this section is based on an extensive field work which the author carried out during the course of her research. Part III makes suggestions to improve the level of beneficiary participation.

(I) PARTICIPATION : A BRIEF CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

The subject of participation has been a major concern for rural development practitioners. Participation is a term which is difficult to define because of its amorphous usage. It is used to cover a variety of forms of action by which citizens take part in the operation of administration. As one source puts it, "the word participation broadly refers to the role of members of general public as distinguished from that of appointed officials, including civil servants, in influencing the activities of government or in providing directly for community needs". ¹ It may occur at any level from the local village level to the level of the country as a whole. In simpler terms, participation means involvement of people in the development process willingly. M.L. Santhanam, in his article "People’s Participation", has said awareness is a precondition of successful participation.² The extent of participation depends on the degree and level of knowledge the people have regarding the programme in question. In the absence of clear, correct and complete information, the beneficiaries are not in a position to meaningfully participate. Rather, it breeds doubts and doubts create fear and they prefer to remain passive spectators of rural development programmes.
Participation is viewed as an important instrument for promotion of rural development because such participation generates commitment on the part of the beneficiaries of rural development programmes. Hence, more participation means more successful rural development. Rural development can not become self-propelling without people's active participation. The more recent emphasis in the on-going debate on people's participation has been to view the phenomenon in terms "of opportunities for the rural poor to participate in political structures to enhance their control over society's resources". In these terms, rural poverty is attributed to structural reason which is to argue that the roots of poverty lie in the economic and social conditions which influence the livelihoods of the rural poor, over which these people have no control. The analysis also argues that the state initiated development process has only served the 'needs of the few, and has bypassed a vast majority of the rural people. This neglected majority has remained an object of development, and it has failed to become its agent. In order to tackle this poverty, it is important to provide the rural people a say in controlling the forces which shape their lives and livelihoods. They should have access to resources and opportunities; this can be achieved if only they have access to power through a vibrant rural local self-government. This will open up the possibility of rural poor exercising a voice in developing, designing, and implementing as well as in monitoring and evaluating the development programmes.

The policy makers, in other words, have to recognise the inadequacies of the traditional capital-centered development, which never empowered the rural oppressed; in fact, it only further fortified the oppressors --- the politician-bureaucracy-contractor combine. In this specific context, the policy makers must accept the new paradigm of people-centred development or participatory development which prominently focuses on the rural poor. The planning system must promote participation through decentralisation; the essence of which lies in the delegation of decision-making prerogatives to the localities.
**Purpose of Participation**

- To bring successful democratic planning.
- To create confidence among the people to improve their standard of life.
- Proper mobilisation of available human resources for a process of development which would make a difference to the quality of their life.
- To accustom the people to the process of change and growth.
- To develop a sense of commitment which is a necessary condition for rural development.
- To generate social awareness.
- To develop decision making skills among the local people.
- To revitalise local governments.
- To improve the quality of citizen-administration interface.
- To secure citizenship development, which implies principally the tasks of educating and organising the citizens, particularly the rural poor, who have been driven to the margins of the society.
- To develop local control over the volume and quality of benefits.

**II) Dimensions of Beneficiary - Administration Interface in the Area Under Study**

In order to assess the level of participation of the IRDP beneficiaries, the researcher took the help of different methods, like informal interviews, observation, and questionnaire for the three villages of Aizawl district where the study was conducted.

The objective of this exercise was to:

- Judge the level of the beneficiary awareness about and belongingness to the programme; and
- To understand the constraints affecting the beneficiaries' participation.
It was found that the level of participation of beneficiaries at the various stages of the IRDP was far from satisfactory.

The factors which influence the level of participation might be thought to be as under:

(i) The factor of age.
(ii) The level of education.
(iii) Poverty.
(iv) The attitude of the grassroots bureaucracy towards beneficiaries.
(v) The quality of interaction between beneficiaries and the village council members.
(vi) The degree of beneficiaries' exposure to the mass media.
(vii) The beneficiaries' attitude towards change.
(viii) The status of communication facilities in the territory.
(ix) The state of infrastructure development.

The field visits revealed that interaction between IRDP beneficiaries and the programme bureaucracy was not satisfactory in the blocks under study. Programme bureaucracy here refers to the district level and block level functionaries who are engaged in the IRDP implementation.

Out of the three villages selected for the study, only in village Seling the beneficiaries had some contact with the block level functionaries in general and with VLWs in particular. Block level functionaries here refers to BDOs, Extension Officers, and VLWs. Beneficiaries of Seling village had a fair degree of interaction with the VLWs and were able to obtain necessary help and guidance from them.
The performance of the VLWs was better in Seling than in the other two villages interalia because of their physical proximity with beneficiaries. They were staying in their own quarters in the block office campus which was nearer to Seling village. The VLWs had no problem of water and electricity. Their children were going to the nearby schools. They had a more satisfying family life, which was an important reason for their better interaction with beneficiaries. They were more readily available for the needs and requirements of beneficiaries (like that for counselling) and for discharging other duties connected with the implementation of the programme.

They were persons of high integrity. They were able to understand the meaning of poverty because once upon a time they had experienced this in their own lives. They more readily understood that poverty cannot be removed by one shot; that persistent effort and continuous follow-up was necessary. They had available to them better guidance from their own superior, viz., the block development officer.

In village Sateek the performance of VLWs was more satisfactory than in the village Siliphir South, although, in quality, it did not match with those in Seling. In the village Siliphir South it was not satisfactory. The VLWs of Siliphir South were staying in Aizawl. They had neither proper block office nor any staff quarters. These VLWs, with their little income, had to stay in rented houses which commanded high rents. Their work-place was far from their houses. It does not mean that they were not visiting the villages, but it was much below the norm stipulated under the IRDP guidelines.
The aspect of leadership has also played an important role here. The block development 
officer in Seling had been able to guide, motivate and inspire his team of functionaries. As a 
result of this, they had discharged their duties with greater measure of sincerity. The moment 
the leader fails to take adequate interest in developing and motivating his subordinates, the 
inspiration fades and the system recoils. This, in the view of the author, has been the plight of 
the other two villages.

It was further revealed during the study that the beneficiaries had very little contact with 
the district level bureaucracy. District level bureaucracy here refers to the DRDA functionaries, 
namely, District Collector/Deputy Commissioner, Project Director and Assistant Project Officers.

Most beneficiaries did not know who the DRDA functionaries were, although IRDP 
guidelines stipulate periodic visits by them to the villages under their jurisdiction. Apparently, 
no such visits were made by the DRDA bureaucracy to the village. Typical attitude of the rural 
folks to the higher level district bureaucracy is captured in the following observation:

"These high officials at the district level only pass the messages/circulars/letters to the 
block level machinery and think that this passing of messages is ‘rural development’. 
They have scarcely any time to make a visit to the village. This apart, “they never show 
any concern for the problems which arise during the course of implementation”.

It is important to mention here that DRDA, which is the implementing agency for IRDP 
at the district level, has interalia two crucial responsibilities to perform. These are :

(i) To give maximum publicity to the programme in order to disseminate information and 
build awareness of the beneficiaries.

(ii) To follow-up and monitor the programme implementation to ensure its effectiveness.
The DRDA Aizawl has not discharged these responsibilities adequately. The high level officials have not visited the block offices as per the requirement of IRDP guidelines. What the researcher felt was that these were the reasons due to which the beneficiaries felt neglected alienated and marginalised.

This general alienation is clearly reflected in the beneficiary responses recorded in Table 6.1.

**TABLE 6.1**

**SHOWING RESPONSE OF THE BENEFICIARIES REGARDING THE KIND OF TREATMENT METED OUT TO THEM BY THE OFFICIALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>District Level</th>
<th>Block Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Helpful</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Beneficiary Schedule

The message from this table reflects the “closed” attitude of the higher officials who are not responsive to the needs and aspirations of the rural poor. They require a total change in their outlook in implementing the programme; right from the stage of identification and selection of schemes till completion of the projects and repayment of loans.
Refusal of the beneficiaries' demands by the programme bureaucracy is a very important reason for poor beneficiary-bureaucracy interface. In order to know the reasons for the refusals, the researcher had met the higher bureaucracy at the district level.

It was found from discussions that, on occasions, there were genuine constraints arising from a variety of factors due to which the bureaucracy could not fulfill the demands of the clients. When the researcher asked an official, he said:

"we do not want the needy to suffer but we are sometimes helpless. Indeed it is necessary to fulfill the demands, but how can we do this. Take the case of infrastructural development. For example, agriculture and dairy development schemes have to be linked with provision of inputs, communication, markets, rural electrification; irrigation and cold storage. Animal husbandry schemes have to be connected with animal health cover, pasture and fodder development. ISB sector has to be linked with modern technology. How can we do all these things? Funds are less, staffs are inadequate, it is not possible to fulfill all demands. Besides, the natural constraints are also there".

The responses of the bureaucracy, in regard to the reasons due to which the beneficiaries' demands have to be refused, are recorded in Table 6.2.

**TABLE 6.2**

SHOWING REASONS GIVEN BY THE OFFICIALS FOR REFUSAL OF BENEFICIARIES' DEMANDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of infrastructure</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of funds</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of staff</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It may be observed from Table 6.2 that the largest number of officials (44%) stated that beneficiaries' demands were not fulfilled due to lack of funds. 33% responded by saying that it was due to lack of infrastructure development. 23% fall in the "Lack of staff" category.

**III) SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LEVEL OF BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION**

A broad range of initiatives would be required to enhance the level of beneficiary participation in IRDP. We identify below some specific as well as more general strategies to enhance the level of beneficiary participation.

(i) **Activating the Village Councils**: Village councils should be developed into a responsible and responsive institution. These should be able to serve as a forum for the protection of the beneficiaries' interest at the village level. It is necessary to improve the volume and quality of local level participation which is crucial for the realisation of the programme objectives. In this connection, the researcher suggests the creation of an organisation under the village council analogous to the gram sabha. This will help in considerably augmenting participation by involving the entire adult populations in the decision making process.

(ii) **Identifying local leaders of high personal integrity, who are respected by people of the locality.** These leaders can help to enhance the level of participation of the beneficiaries.

(iii) **Identifying voluntary organisations, which have roots in the particular locality, which would be ready to work outside the regular institutional frameworks to expand the scope of beneficiaries' participation.**
(iv) Developing training facilities: There should be more training facilities both for programme bureaucracy as well as beneficiaries. This will help to develop their skills, aptitude, confidence, and morale.

(v) Increasing the efficiency of programme bureaucracy, both at the district and block level: District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), the district-level implementing agency for IRDP, should increase the efficiency and commitment of its officials to give concrete direction to the block-level administration. DRDA should ensure that village council meetings and loan application camps are utilised to impart information to the beneficiaries and the local public. Block level administration should remain informed about the channels and agencies the beneficiaries must utilise when required. Special camps should also be held to disseminate information to the beneficiaries. DRDA should ensure that the services of the State Publicity Department, and other Departments, are utilised to provide publicity to the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

(vi) Further development of the infrastructure facilities.

(vii) Strengthening information and monitoring systems.

(viii) Utilising effectively other State-sponsored rural development programmes.

(ix) Developing a healthy relationship between the programme bureaucracy and non-officials to reduce the incidence of corruption.

(x) Developing a strong political will and commitment to serve rural poor.
REFERENCES

