Chapter 9

Findings and Suggestions

(i) Findings of the Study

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CHAPTER 9

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

This micro level research was conducted with the purpose of gaining an understanding of the administration of IRDP in the Aizawl district of Mizoram.

The principal focus of the research was to sketch the various ramifications of the IRDP administration, identify the nature of obstacles which stand in the way of securing its smooth implementation, and suggest ways to overcome the difficulties that arise.

The present chapter notes the ‘findings’ to which this research has led. It also presents the author’s recommendations. The chapter is divided in two parts. Part I states the findings of the study. Part II makes recommendations/suggestions for securing improvements in the working of IRDP in the area under study.

(I) FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are recorded in this section. These findings have been stated under the specific heads.

(a) Programme Implementation

1. Two types of plans are required to be formulated: (i) the perspective plan and (ii) the annual plan. It was found that while the DRDA, Aizawl, regularly drew up the annual plans, they had never formulated the perspective plan. DRDA maintained that it was not
practical to prepare a perspective plan owing to the paucity of technical manpower and financial resources. They also seemed to believe that a perspective plan was a redundant exercise since, in practice, it was the annual plan which guided their schedules as well as provided them access to the relevant data-base.

Village development committee (VDC) - which is a broad-based local level forum consisting of the chairman and members of the Village Council (VC), and nominees of the local party units and those of the local chapters of the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizoram Hmeichhe Insrikawn Pawl (MHIP) - is really the sole legitimate agency for making selection of the IRDP beneficiaries. In practice, however, it was found that a sizeable inclusions (in the lists of beneficiaries) occur through the non-VDC sources. A number of names in the lists arise from intervention of the legislators and the bureaucrats.

Of the schemes in three sectors, i.e., primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, it is the schemes in the primary sector which dominate, with 72% of the sample households opting for the primary sector schemes. And, in the primary sector schemes, it is the piggery units which are most popular (43% of the households have shown preference for piggery units). Banana cultivation and orange cultivation follow next, with 11% each, and thereafter the ginger cultivation, with 7% households opting for it.

The implementing agencies, i.e., DRDA, the block-level set-up, and the banks have not sufficiently succeeded in sensitising the beneficiaries about the import of the loan component of the financial assistance available under the IRDP. Upwards of the 10% of the sample households, it was found, had not availed of the loan facility, and a number
of those who did, learnt about the loan component from the co-villagers, not the bank personnel or the DRDA/block-level functionaries.

4(a) 55\% of the beneficiaries felt that the procedure for getting bank loans was tedious and complicated. This is an adverse reflection on the quality of interface between the beneficiaries and the bank personnel. This, in fact, to a degree, is a reflection, also, on the quality of the beneficiary-bureaucracy interface. Delays in sanction of loans were not an uncommon phenomenon, and this had tended to harden the attitude of the beneficiaries on the question of loans.

4(b) Some of the most basic principles of the administration of funds under IRDP had not been rigorously observed by the beneficiaries, the programme bureaucracy, and the bank personnel. To take some examples, not all beneficiaries possessed the loan passbooks nor had they furnished to the banks the receipts of the assets purchased; field officers of the banks had not always carried out the verification of the assets within the stipulated time period of one month from the purchase of the assets; DRDA and the bank personnel would often exchange accusations in regard to poor recovery of the bank loans rather than initiate concrete steps to improve recovery.

5 The follow-up and monitoring form the weakest link in the implementation process. Stipulations, contained in the guidelines, concerning periodic inspections and visits to ascertain the health of the schemes allotted to beneficiaries are honoured more in their breach than observance. Vikas Patrikas are not updated; in many cases, these have, in fact, been lost with no action at the bureaucracy's end to replace them. Pre-disbursement counselling is an established procedure of the IRDP practice; we, however, found that, more often than not, it was perfunctorily done.
The yardsticks which the DRDA employs for determining the success of the IRDR are mainly two-fold: (i) number of beneficiaries families enrolled (ii) and the amount of financial assistance disbursed. Evidently, these yardsticks do not provide any idea regarding the programme outcomes in terms of the generation of disposable incomes, acquiring of the new skills, access to and utilisation of opportunities in the domains of literacy, schooling of children, health and family planning, housing, and so on. In other words, DRDA has no record which may throw light on the secular changes in the life style of the beneficiaries, which alone will ensure that the beneficiaries maintained the level of well-being achieved by virtue of their enrolment under the IRDP.

Inadequate infrastructure is a glaring feature of the Mizoram scene. Whether it is the raw materials and marketing facilities, or agricultural and veterinary inputs, or storage facilities, the availability was regarded as being highly inadequate, even poor. The state of affairs with regard to transport, power supply, and irrigation was not much different. Remoteness of the region and scattered settlements tended to aggravate the situation further.

Beneficiaries in the area under study expressed unhappiness with the financial assistance under IRDP, more specifically with the subsidy component. They were of the view that, in Mizoram conditions, because of a high cost of living, and because even the most basic essentials of life (wheat, rice, edible oils, salt, sugar, spices) were required to be imported from the neighbouring Assam and other states, a subsidy of Rs.6,000/- was very meagre and that the same needs to undergo an upward revision. General poverty of the available social infrastructure (e.g., in the sphere of health, family planning, housing, etc.) further aggravates the beneficiaries' problems.
In terms of the number of sample households crossing the poverty-line, the rate of success registered was 25 per cent of the IRDP beneficiaries. The remaining 75% of the households had, in fact, disposed off their schemes. The largest number of these beneficiaries (20% each) disposed off their schemes to meet the day-do-day requirements of funds and to clear-off the old debts. An identical number disposed off the schemes owing to addition to liquor, drugs and gambling. In 15% of the cases, the schemes were disposed off due to defective nature of the assets. In another 15% of the cases, disposal occurred due to the lack of infrastructural and technical support (e.g., storage facilities, professional advice). 10% of the respondents reported sale of the existing assets to acquire others.

What one finds from the foregoing is the existence of a definite pattern, i.e., the reasons for disposal of schemes/assets arise largely from lacunae in the management of IRDP in the state. For instance, where disposals occur for meeting the day-to-day requirements of funds or for clearing off the old debts, these cases point to laxity in monitoring and follow-up of the projects (schemes/assets) by the programme bureaucracy; particularly, these reflect failure on the part of the bureaucracy to afford necessary pre-disbursement counselling. Likewise, where assets were sold because these were defective, it is indicative of the leakages and other flaws in the system. Yet again, the disposal of assets arising from lack of technical/infrastructural support or for acquiring other assets is reflective of a variety of other bottlenecks and slippages in the administration of IRDP.

In a more general way, it might be said that the health of the IRDP or, more precisely, its working in Mizoram has been affected by virtue of its exposure to a two-decade-long insurgency which ended in June 1986 upon the signing of the Mizo peace accord.
Primitive agriculture, widespread prevalence of the practice of Jhum cultivation, mountaineous terrain, heavy rainfall, perennial landslides which regularly choke surface communication to block essential supplies from the neighbouring Silchar are among the other features of the Mizoram situation, which would appear to lend a special aroma and flavour to IRDP in the state. These go a long way in explaining the relatively low level of success which the state has achieved in the realm of IRDP. The Seventh Five-Year Plan was, in fact, the first "peace-time" plan of the state; this yet further explains the general dearth of socio-economic infrastructure in Mizoram. This has, directly or indirectly, affected the course of the working of the IRDP in the state.

(ii) Administrative Setup

Structure

1. The administrative setup, for IRDP, in Mizoram does not necessarily conform to the All-India pattern in every detail. This is partly because the Panchayati Raj system does not operate in the state and partly because of the existence of the village councils which have existed in Mizoram since the early 1950s.

2. At the state level, a Commissariat of Rural Development has been set up since 1989. Before this, there existed in Mizoram a Directorate of Rural Development which was created in 1972, when it became a union territory. There is, additionally, at the state level, a State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC), which is headed by the Chief Secretary to Government of Mizoram.

3. There is a three-tier administrative set-up at the district level and below for the administration of IRDP.
At the district level, the State Government has created District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) in keeping with the pattern elsewhere in the country. DRDA, Aizawl, has a governing body of 27 members whose chairman is the Deputy Commissioner.

Three committees have been formed by DRDA, Aizawl. These are: (i) District Consultative Committee, (ii) Bank Loan Recovery Committee, and (iii) District Vigilance and Monitoring Committee. All the three committees are headed by the Deputy Commissioner.

The block level setup (blocks in Mizoram are designated as “rural development blocks”) is headed by the Block Development Officer, who is in the charge of the administration of IRDP at this level. Two committees exist at the block level. These are: (i) Block Development Committee and (ii) Block Vigilance and Monitoring Committee. Both the committees are headed by SDO (Civil), Sadar.

At the village level, there are village councils in the State. They form the bottom rung of the territorial administration, and are, broadly, analogous to the gram panchayats under the three-tier Panchayati Raj system. Village councils have two major limitations as the organs of local democracy. First of these is the absence of the provision for a general assembly similar to the gram sabhas under the Panchayati Raj system which enable participation of the entire adult population of the territory in the decision making process. Secondly, there is a large nominated element in the membership of the village councils which reduces them to truncated democracies.
To compensate for the lack of a gram sabha-type general assembly at the village level, Village Development Committees headed by the respective village council presidents have been established.

Working

The Commissariat of Rural Development was established to ensure a proper supervision of rural development activities in the state. Significantly, however, it was found, that the post of the commissioner was lying vacant for more than one year during the year 1994-95.

One of the important functions of the State Level Coordination Committee is to fix norms for office expenses, equipment, vehicles, hiring of accommodation, and so on. But it was observed that the Mizoram SLCC had not been able to keep the expenditure on these items within the prescribed limits. It had also failed to initiate necessary steps for streamlining and strengthening the administrative set-up for the implementation of IRDP at various levels, particularly in the sphere of capacity building, i.e., training, development and motivation of the programme bureaucracy.

At the district level, the involvement of the committees of the DRDA in the programme implementation was of a routine nature. The Deputy Commissioner, who is the chairman of these committees, had nearly never the time to deliberate on issues central to the IRDP. He was too heavily preoccupied with the general law and order problems of the District to have the time to devote the questions of development per se. Besides, the number of trained personnel, available with the DRDA, was inadequate. Very few Project Directors had undergone training in the IRDP work. The Assistant Project Officers were also not trained in their respective disciplines.
In order to elicit the involvement of the elected representatives, all MPs and MLAs have been made members of the governing body of DRDA. But their involvement in the implementation of the programme was of a superficial nature. Their main interest appeared to centre on securing the inclusion of their supporters in the list of the beneficiaries.

At the block level, the Block Development Committee was mainly active in the selection of beneficiaries. It did not display much interest in the matters of follow-up of its own recommendations. The member of the Block Vigilance and Monitoring Committee conducted site inspections only occasionally. The number of the village level workers and extension officers was, generally, not adequate in the respective blocks.

At the village level, the village councils were ineffective in securing the participation of the beneficiaries. IRDP-related matters appeared to command a low priority in the profile of the village council's activities.

(c) Beneficiary Participation and Beneficiary-Administration Interface

The following emerged as the principal factors influencing the level of participation of the beneficiaries: (i) age of the beneficiary; (ii) the level of education, (iii) the extent of poverty, (iv) the degree of beneficiary's exposure to the mass media, (v) the beneficiary's attitude to change, (vi) the quality of interaction between the beneficiary and the village council, (vii) the attitude of the grassroots bureaucracy, and (viii) the status of communication facilities in the territory.
Out of the three villages selected for the study, village Seling alone the quality of beneficiary-administration interface and the level of beneficiary-participation was of a satisfactory nature. This may be chiefly attributed to two factors: (i) the fact that the village level worker was physically proximate to the villagers since he had hired a residential accommodation in the block headquarters and (ii) the leadership qualities which the block development officer displayed. The situation on both of the above counts was different in the other two villages, Silphir South and Sateek as we had observed in Chapter Six. Consequently, the two villages fared poorly in terms of the quality of the beneficiary-administration interface as well as the level of beneficiary participation.

The higher level officials at the DRDA level emerge largely as file-pushers with an insufficient grasp of the realities on the ground. Tours, visits and inspections, which promote access to live data from the field, appeared to command a low priority in their scheme of things. Our field visits revealed that visits and inspections by these functionaries occurred only sporadically. This had prevented them from effectively discharging their role as the motivators of the grassroots functionaries. As far as the villagers were concerned, the "visibility of the State" was highly inadequate; consequently their faith in the system was fragile.

DRDA had not adequately discharged its responsibility in regard to programme publicity and in beneficiary awareness building. This, in fact, was one of the important reasons for the poor participation of the beneficiaries in the programme.

There were other constraints affecting the beneficiary-administration interface. These included the lack of adequately trained and motivated manpower, a perpetual financial
crunch (the programme bureaucracy maintains that the all-India norms for IRDP allocations are unsuitable for application to the specific situation in Mizoram because of its exceptionally high cost of living), lack of infrastructure, difficult terrain, and so on. These factors project the bureaucracy in an unfavourable light vis-a-vis the beneficiaries, whose demands a fund-starved and infrastructure-starved administration is not always able to meet.

(d) **Beneficiary Organisation and the Role of Voluntary Organisations**

Cast-based conflicts do not exist in Mizoram like those in the plains. All the beneficiaries belong to a single social/legal group: the scheduled tribe. There is, a high degree of social cohesion in the Mizo society; egalitarian sentiment is strong. Social afflictions like the practice of bonded-labour, child marriage, dowary, begging, gender-bias, do not exist in the Mizo society. Literacy-rate is high; Mizoram, in fact, scores very high on the literacy-map of the country. An average Mizo is an avid newspaper reader. The number of Mizo-language "dailies" is incredibly large. This notwithstanding, the level of beneficiary organisation in the three villages was of a low order.

The following emerged as the principal factors influencing the level of organisation of the beneficiaries: (i) lack of vocational orientation and professional vigour in the existing voluntary organisations and their insufficient vertical penetration, (ii) lack of vigorous users' groups (e.g., farmers' groups) and grassroot activism (e.g., social activists), (iii) lack of a vigorous cooperative movement, (iv) inability of the rural-folks for political articulation, (v) lack of strong and independent local institutions for the articulation of the local demands (the existing VCs have a large nominated element; at the same time, they
do not have provision for a gram sabha type local assembly), (vi) lack of support at the bureaucratic and political levels to organise the beneficiaries, and (vii) low level of aspiration of the tribals.

Mizoram has a strong tradition of voluntary action. Two voluntary organisations of the state are worthy of special mention (a) Young Mizo Association (YMA) (b) Mizoram Hmeichhe Insukawn Pawl (MHIP). The two form a powerful rallying point for the Mizo youth and the Mizo women. Their concerns over a period of time have, however, mainly converged on the church and they have tended to regard themselves principally as rejuvenator of the Christian values. Rural development-related activities have tended to remain on the margins of their respective agendas. The two organisations have a dominant religious and socio-cultural thrust, neither has consciously sought a social-mobilisation role.

There is no conscious effort on the part of the state government and DRDA to secure their involvement either in IRDP or in the other rural development programmes operating in the state.

(c) The Grassroots Bureaucracy

DRDA constitutes the agency for the implementation of IRDP at the district level. Actual operationalisation of the IRDP, however, takes place at the block level and below. In this setup, the village level worker, the extension officer and the block development officer emerge as the crucial trio, who determine the success of the programme at the cutting-edge level. The field visits revealed that there was no system of regular, periodic refresher training courses for these grassroots functionaries to suitably orient them to
discharge their responsibilities in the administration of IRDP. Besides, all the block development officers were on deputation from the state government; and they found it difficult to adjust with the work requirements in the field. This has tended to adversely affect the programme supervision and coordination.

Incidence of politically motivated postings and transfers was found to be high. High officials of DRDA and block development officers were transferred at short intervals; this disturbed the process of smooth administration of programme.

The field bureaucracy emphasised the need for an enhanced beneficiary participation, infrastructure development, augmented training facilities and noninterference of the political elites in the administration of the programme so as to enable them to show better performance.

Motivation of the grassroots bureaucracy, particularly the village level workers and the extension officers was low. Many of them were not enthusiastic about their work. Work (performance of duties) was a burden, not joy. Lack of the avenues for promotion, absence of a reward system, poor training, generally poor working conditions (e.g., disabilities of location) low salaries, low professionalism, principally accounted for this situation.

State-Sponsored Rural Development Programmes

Apart from centrally-sponsored rural development programmes, the Government of Mizoram has, over the years, operated a number of (state-level) rural development
programmes. The more important of these are: (i) the Community halls scheme, (ii) the Rural communication programme, (iii) the Rural housing programme, (iv) the scheme for the housing of the project staff, and (v) the New land use policy (NLUP). Of these, the NLUP is the State Government's most ambitious project.

The NLUP was launched in 1990 with the aim of weaning away the jhumia families from shifting cultivation by providing them with alternative means of livelihood.

(i) Wrong and motivated inclusions (in the lists of beneficiaries), (ii) delays in the distribution of instalments, (iii) perfunctory follow-up, (iv) unmotivated bureaucracy, and (v) lack of vertical and horizontal coordination between the government officials, the voluntary organisations and the village councils emerged as the major weaknesses of the NLUP.

(II) SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made by the researcher for securing improvements in the administration of IRDP in the area under study.

(a) Programme Implementation

Reasons stated by DRDA for the non-formulation of the perspective plan betray a complete lack of reason and logic; it is scarcely possible to over emphasise the need, on the part of DRDA, to appreciate the sanctity of this exercise, and perform it with unfailing regularity.
An atmosphere must be consciously built to discourage inclusions (of the individuals in the list of beneficiaries) for extraneous considerations.

There is need for a special drive -- on the part of DRDA, block setup and the bank personnel -- to educate beneficiaries on the loan component of the IRDP assistance and procedure for securing sanction of the loans.

Basic principles involved in the administration of funds should be religiously observed so as to improve recovery of loans and impart sustainability to the schemes.

Beneficiaries should be imparted pre-disbursement and post-disbursement counselling for proper operation and maintenance of their assets. Monitoring of assets needs to improve drastically. Coordination between DRDA and banks needs to be become a continuous exercise to ensure rational selection of schemes, speedy sanction of loans, proper utilisation of funds and assured recovery of loans.

The practice of "camps" should be vigorously pursued to facilitate on the spot resolution of the beneficiaries’ multifarious problems; this will also improve asset management.

The task of infrastructure building -- particularly link-roads, marketing network, agricultural inputs and skill building -- needs to be pursued with greater vigour and tenacity.

As piggery units form the most popular option under the IRDP, there is need to set up a pig-feed plant as well as strengthen the relevant veterinary support at the village level.
There is need to relieve the Deputy Commissioner from rural development functions. Another officer of IAS rank may be appointed to independently look after these functions.

There should be two project directors at the DRDA level. One may hold exclusive charge of IRDP while the other may be made responsible for rural development programmes other than IRDP.

There is need for one officer in the DRDA to exclusively coordinate with the banks because of the prominence of loans in the spectrum of activities under IRDP.

The District Monitoring and Vigilance Committee under DRDA needs to further activated to effectively check leakages in the system.

There should be set up a state-level rural development institute for training of the programme bureaucracy.

The village council should be strengthened in its powers and functions so as to be able to provide a broad based support to IRDP-related activities.

The relationship between the machinery for rural development and the existing institutions of rural local self-government (i.e. the village councils) needs to be further streamlined and strengthened.

(b) Administrative Setup

1. There is need to relieve the Deputy Commissioner from rural development functions. Another officer of IAS rank may be appointed to independently look after these functions.

2. There should be two project directors at the DRDA level. One may hold exclusive charge of IRDP while the other may be made responsible for rural development programmes other than IRDP.

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4. The District Monitoring and Vigilance Committee under DRDA needs to further activated to effectively check leakages in the system.

5. There should be set up a state-level rural development institute for training of the programme bureaucracy.

6. The village council should be strengthened in its powers and functions so as to be able to provide a broad based support to IRDP-related activities.

7. The relationship between the machinery for rural development and the existing institutions of rural local self-government (i.e. the village councils) needs to be further streamlined and strengthened.
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 population of the village in the decision making process.

The block level administration should identify local leaders of high personal integrity, who can help to enhance the level of participation of the beneficiaries.

There is need to identify voluntary organisations, which have roots in the particular locality, which would be ready to work outside the regular institutional framework to expand the scope of beneficiary participation.

There should be augmented training facilities both for programme bureaucracy as well as beneficiaries to develop their skills, aptitude, confidence and morale.

DRDA should ensure that village council meetings and loan application camps are utilised to impart information to the beneficiaries. It should also ensure that the services of the state Publicity Department and other Departments are utilised to provide publicity to the Integrated Rural Development Programme.
6. There should be effective use of mass media and other mass communication techniques to provide relevant information to the beneficiaries.

(d) **Beneficiary Organisation and the Role of Voluntary Organisations**

1. There is need to augment the inter-personal human-relations skills of the programme bureaucracy to secure an enhanced cooperation of the beneficiaries in the process of programme implementation.

2. DRDA should organise group discussions, workshops, meetings, at the village level to provide information and skills to beneficiaries on the various aspects of IRDP.

3. There is need to secure the formation of users’ groups, e.g., farmers’ groups, carpenters’ groups.

4. There is need to improve the field administration to promote optimum delivery of public services. Inter-alia, there is need of build complete transparency and openness in public transactions and insist on the requirement, along the lines of citizens’ charters, of a “response-time” in regard to various public transactions.

5. There is need to secure greater participation of the beneficiaries through village councils, cooperatives, informal groups, voluntary organisations and users’ groups.

6. NGO-government coordination needs to improve to secure an enhanced NGO involvement in IRDP.
The existing NGOs in the state need to broaden the scope of their activities and take steps to build a conscious focus on rural development.

Formation of new NGOs must be encouraged to foster people's participation in local affairs, generally and IRDP-related activities, particularly.

(e) The Grassroots Bureaucracy

1. There is need to ensure the continuity of tenure; three years may be the minimum duration for postings.

2. There is need to build motivation of the personnel at the cutting-edge through a system of continuous appraisal, performance-based rewards, and special allowance for postings in remote areas.

3. After a term of posting in difficult areas, the concerned officials may be given a posting of their choice.

4. There is need to introduce special allowance for children's education, where proper schooling facilities are not available.

5. Government accommodation may be provided at the headquarters on a priority basis to the families of employees posted in remote areas, and construction of residential quarters, in a phased manner, may be encouraged both at the headquarters and in the field.
There is need to build professionalism in the field functionaries through the provision of regular training courses.

There is need for a review of the entire gamut of HRD practices in respect of the field bureaucracy so as to provide for them adequate promotion opportunities and impart to them necessary technical and human skills.

**Other Suggestions**

1. Other rural development programmes should be effectively implemented to support and sustain the impact of IRDP.

2. Evaluation of IRDP should be attempted against more inclusive criteria (e.g., sustained income generation, skill building).

3. IRDP manual should be translated into the Mizo language by the state government to enhance the level of awareness of the beneficiaries regarding the programme objectives.

4. Need for an upward revision of subsidy in Mizoram may be considered.

5. Khadi and Village Industries Board (KVIB) of the state should promote agro-based and forestry-based activities to provide employment opportunities in non-farming sector (bee-keeping, cane-weaving, wood-craft etc.) during lean season. This will help to check migration from rural areas in search of jobs.
Lac and teak cultivation which has a tremendous potential in this state should be encouraged. It can also generate huge revenue for the state. It is also eco-friendly, and will help to preserve the environment of the region.

It is suggested that the seven North-Eastern states may examine the feasibility of furnishing their IRDP progress reports to the North Eastern Council (NEC); the council can take a broader view of the rural development scene of the states and, probably, secure, on behalf of the states of the region, a more effective liaison with the central government.