

ABSTRACT

Rural development is a complex phenomenon covering a wide spectrum of activities meant to ameliorate the condition of people especially the poor people living in rural areas. It is a basis of social justice and economic equality and removal of poverty. As per the rural development Sector Policy Paper (1975) of the World Bank, the term rural development is “a strategy design to improve the economic and social condition of a specific group of people - the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in rural areas – the group includes small scale farmers, tenants and landless”. James H. Copp has defined rural development as “a process through collective efforts, aimed at improving the wellbeing and self realization of people living outside the urbanized areas”. He further extends that the ultimate target of rural development is people and not infrastructure and according to him one of the objectives of rural development should be to ‘widen people’s range of choices’. Thus, rural development can be defined as strategy to improve the socio- economic, cultural and political conditions of the rural people particularly the poor living in rural areas. It also implies involvement of voluntary organizations, rural development functionaries and institutions and strategic interventions to help the rural community. The results, analysis and findings of this study indicate that Rural Development is taking place with slow pace in different districts of Garo Hills.

Although more than six decades have passed since the introduction of Community Development, about 40% of rural population is still living in below

poverty line. It is high time now to make a field survey of rural development activities, evaluation of performance and find out some mechanism to monitor and assess the performance of the rural bureaucracy. In the Rural Development Department, at the Directorate level, all the bureaucratic personnel's have been borrowed from the various development departments. The Block level bureaucrats play a very insignificant role in the development of various sectors like agriculture, small scale industry, horticulture, fishery, education, health etc.

The role of Block Development Officer as central functionary, therefore, needs to be examined and assessed if the problems and prospects of rural development in Meghalaya is to be properly understood. The Government of Meghalaya as well as the Central Government is presently concentrating on accelerated development of rural areas particularly for economic self-sufficiency, improvement of communication, eradication of rural poverty etc. Various programmes were implemented and some are under implementation. The success of these programmes depends upon efficient and dedicated rural bureaucracy led by the Block Development Officers. It is in this context that the present study is considered to be important. The study is carried out by surveying the field reality and the working of the Block Development Officers in the West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The present study is a humble attempt. In the present state of democratic decentralization the non-panchayat areas are also bound to experience certain changes in the rural development strategies and practices.

The perception, practices, functioning and accountability of the rural bureaucracy and the people are bound to be influenced by the activities happening

outside the block, district or the state. It is the responsibility of the social scientists to investigate and find out these processes and emerging trends during the post independent era specially the post 73rd Amendment Act period. The present study is a small step towards this direction. The study besides adding to our knowledge in the field of rural development and the role of rural bureaucracy is expected to provide necessary feedback to the planners and Administrators for better policies, its implementations as well as mechanism for better evaluation. Besides, it may also help scholars and future researchers in their work by serving as a bench mark work for grassroots best practices.

The role of the Rural Development officers, and the staff in rural development schemes are noteworthy to mention. The development blocks are progressing in the areas of development such as electricity, road and transportation, safe drinking water facilities, health sectors such as PHCs and CHCs, literacy in terms of education etc. Still more focus can be stressed in the areas such as concentration for Development of Agriculture, Public Health, Poverty Elevation. The communication, marketing system, agriculture and allied sector still needs to be explored although some achievement has been made with the efforts of the Government of Meghalaya especially after 1972.

The findings on the other hand reveal that the villagers are satisfied with the Government schemes as they have been successful in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. Though the central guidelines on the schemes are followed regarding beneficiary selection before implementing the Government schemes. Kind of training needed according to block functionaries to functions effectively such as Training on

punctuality, Public Relation, Management and maintenance of Record, Creation of Assets and PAY schemes. Various orientation programme, seminar on rural development especially Workshop by CSRD, NIRD, Hyderabad, MGNREGA and IAY are required to undertake before the implementation of the Government schemes by the Block Development Officers in the Blocks to minimize future discrepancies.

The development blocks are progressing in the areas of development such as electricity, road and transportation, safe drinking water facilities, health sectors such as PHCs and CHCs, literacy in terms of education etc. Still more focus can be stressed in the areas such as concentration for Development of Agriculture, Public Health, Poverty Elevation programmes in the village and by raising the standard of life in the various development blocks. More Government schemes can be implemented in the long run through the intervention of Nokmas, village councils and Block Development Officers with basic awareness and training programmes in the remote areas of the blocks in order to minimize the poor living conditions and uplift the downtrodden. Thus, the importance of Role of Block Development Officers can be felt throughout Garo Hills and more especially, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. This will boost up sound development in an integrated manner.