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BARODA'S EXPERIMENT IN
URBAN DECENTRALIZATION: A STUDY OF
SOME ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS

by

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BARODA'S EXPERIMENT IN URBAN DECENTRALIZATION:
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Anil Bhatt

With the rapid growth of the cities it is becoming more and more difficult to manage them within the existing administrative frame work. Recently the city governments which are already decentralized have felt a greater need for further decentralization of at least some public services.

Many cities have, therefore, in recent times embarked upon a programme of "urban decentralization". This decentralization is mostly administrative. The city is divided into circles, zones, or wards and the functions are delegated to the officers of these units.

One simple reason why such a decentralization has become necessary is that it has become increasingly difficult to govern a city from one central office. The other objective is ideological, that is, to make administration client-oriented and to encourage citizen-participation in civic programmes.

But urban decentralization in many cities has created some severe administrative problems. Besides increasing the burden on the city exchequer it has also created problems of administrative coordination. There is sometimes greater inefficiency, strained relationship between the central officers and personnel working in the branches, favouritism, and increasing political pressure on the officers working in decentralized units.

THE STUDY

This is an exploratory study of some of the administrative problems of urban decentralization in the city of Baroda. It is an empirical study based on open and unstructured but indepth interviews with corporation officials, elected councillors, local journalists, and some other leading citizens. This is supplemented by a collection of data from the corporation records.

As indicated above this study is carried out with a view to help locate some significant issues, and provide some clues for further studies.

While this is only a pilot study, the report is formulated in such a way that it can be read and used as a finished and independent study. The report has at the end, a section on over all evaluation.

THE BARODA PROBLEM

Baroda city has expanded rapidly both in area and in population. Its area, is little less than 80 Sq.Km. (which has now gone upto 97 Sq.Km. due to inclusion of new areas) and its population is more than half million.

Before the independence the city was a capital of a highly enlightened and progressive ruler. It was once well-known all over India for its palaces, gardens, lakes and wide roads. Life was peaceful, easy and gay. It was a centre of learning and was never visualized as a centre of industry.

To-day Baroda is known more for its industries than for its university. The city of open spaces and wide roads has become a city of congested residential localities, traffic jams and pollution.

Some of the biggest industries of the country, like Indian Petro Chemicals, Gujarat State Fertilizer, Oil and Natural Gas, Refineries etc., are located in or around Baroda. These industries have added to the problem of city management. Electricity, roads, water supply, housing and pollution have taxed not only the city's resources but also posed a challenge to the city authority's administrative capabilities.

Until the reorganization of city administration in October 1974, the administrative organization of the city was based on the set-up which dated back to 1930s.

THE SYSTEM UNDER GAEKWADS

Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda an enlightened ruler with foresight had introduced some form of urban decentralization through the ward system.

There were six administrative wards (as different from the electoral wards) with five ward offices. The functions carried out were : a) revenue administration under the Ward Officers; b) Sanitation and conservancy under Sanitary Inspector, and c) minor engineering works under Unit Overseer. However, the ward offices were not given enough powers, functions, or resources and equipments. The status of the personnel working at the ward level was very low in the hierarchy of the administration. Few things were left to their discretion and, therefore,

they had to consult their respective heads in the central office for guidance and decision even on small matters.

The biggest problem, however, was that the work of the three functionaries - the Ward Officer, the Sanitary Inspector and the Unit Overseer - at the ward level was not coordinated. Each of the three functionaries was responsible to his parent department in the central office and would report only to them. Thus the Ward Officer would report to the Assistant Commissioner of Revenue at the central office, the Sanitary Inspector to the Health Officer and the Unit Overseer to the Roads and Traffic Engineer. This created acute problems of coordination. In fact, there was no coordination unless the three heads at the central office coordinated informally or the Municipal Commissioner stepped in. Finally, in the last decade the problems of the wards increased to such an extent that the ward administration was unable to cope up.

THE BARODA PROPOSAL

In the early seventies the need for restructuring the city administration was felt by most corporators and commissioners. Shri K.C. Mahapatra, Municipal Commissioner in his proposal to the General Board stated: "From time to time feelings have been expressed in standing Committee and General Board to reorganize the present ward administration with a view to giving best services to the public at the quickest possible time."

It may be noted here that earlier in 1971 a similar proposal was submitted by the then Commissioner. It allotted many functions and powers to the Ward Offices, and also raised the status of the ward officers and the zonal commissioners by giving them a higher grade. This, however, would have involved lot of expenditure. It asked for a budget of about Rs.2 million per year and the city fathers thought that it would be an unbearable burden on the city exchequer. So they referred the proposal back to the Commissioner while accepting the scheme of urban decentralization.

Nothing, however, was done till 1974 when the new commissioner took it up. He submitted a new and modified proposal on August 17 to the Administrator who was appointed by the State Government in place of the elected general board after the Nav Nirman movement in the State.

The proposal contained decentralization of mainly three important functions; 1) the road maintenance, 2) water supply and drainage, 3) sanitation and conservancy. It stated, "the efficiency of the corporations working is judged by the common man on the street in respect of these three fields and not in respect of such important functions such as housing, town planning etc". In order to provide maximum services in respect of these three functions the proposal further suggested that "they should be taken away from the central offices and given over to the ward offices which would be physically nearer to the common men. And adequate powers, personnel, and resources should be delegated to the ward offices."

The proposal was approved in September 1974 and it was decided to try out the new scheme of decentralization on an experimental basis in only two wards. Accordingly, the new scheme was implemented in October 1974 in two wards. Later in August 1975, the scheme was extended to cover the whole city.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

The new decentralization scheme proposes a three tier systems of municipal administration; the central office, two zonal offices, and eight ward offices. The two zones - north and south covers an area of 38 sq.km. and 58 sq.km. respectively. While the North zone is small in area; it covers a population of about 300,000 as against 200,000 covered in the south zone.

Four wards are allotted to each zone* and they cover the population and area as shown in Table-1 below :

Table - 1 : Reorganization of Wards : Area and Population

Ward Number	Area (in sq.km.)	Population
1	0.6472	58950
2	11.6505	62206
3	9.5793	79078
4	20.4208	24420
5	4.9191	64850
6	25.0825	33006
7	21.0647	77404
8	5.4369	78508

* Recently this has been expanded to four zones and each zonal officer has two wards instead of four wards as envisaged earlier.

ZONAL OFFICE PERSONNEL

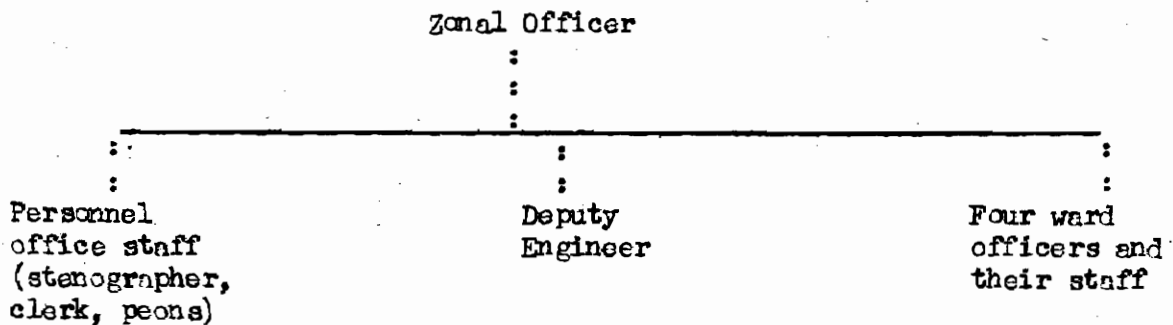
The zonal office is headed by a zonal officer of the rank of Assistant Municipal Commissioner. His designation is that of Assistant Municipal Commissioner, Z.C.A. The position of Assistant Municipal Commissioner is quite high in the Gujarat Municipal Services, he is next only to the Deputy Commissioner who is in IAS cadre. It was decided to select a high ranking officer for the zonal office because it was necessary to raise the status of the decentralized units both in the eyes of the public and the central office.

The Assistant Commissioner Zone is in the salary grade of Rs.500-1100 with all the allowances and privileges of the officers of the corporation.

The earlier proposal of 1971 specified a basic salary of Rs.700/- for the Assistant Commissioner Zone. But this would have meant raising the grade of all the Assistant Municipal Commissioners, and it would not have been acceptable to the general board of the corporation.

It was decided to select the zonal officer by nomination from the existing employees of the corporation with the pay of minimum of Rs. 450/- and above. If such a person was not available the appointment was to be made through open selection.

As the main duty of the zonal officer was of co-ordination and overall supervision it was decided to give him a skeleton administrative staff to assist him. Following chart shows the personnel organization of the zonal office.



THE WARD OFFICE PERSONNEL

The scheme visualizes the ward officer as a real executive and action agent. He and his staff i.e. the functionaries connected with roads, water supply and drainage, sanitation and conservancy, revenue collection, and other miscellaneous works form the real contact point with the public.

As a coordinator the ward officer has to tour his wards regularly and as an administrator he has to see to the needs and complaints of the citizens. In view of this his position is also elevated under the new scheme.

Although those already working in the corporation could be promoted as ward officer there was also an emphasis on selection of young people who would bring fresh outlook to work. The ward officers are in the grade of Rs. 450-925. The organizational chart of the ward office is given below. Only the important functionaries are listed.

Ward Officer

:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:
Junior Engineer	Senior Sanitary Inspector	Revenue Officer	Head Clerk
assisted by a staff of semi-skilled and manual workers	Sanitary Inspector Sub-sanitary inspector Assisted by clerical & other staff of unskilled labourers	Accounts Clerk	Assisted by other lower level cler- ical staff
:	:	Assess- ment clerk	Recovery inspector
:	:	:	Senior clerk
:	:	:	Assisted by other lower level clerical staff

FUNCTIONS (THE ZONAL OFFICE)

As mentioned earlier the zonal officer is supposed to supervise, guide, and coordinate the functions of the wards. He is also expected to tour the sites of his zone everyday. Moreover, not payed the rents of the municipal shops and other properties. He is also incharge of auction as a representative of the Municipal Corporation.

The original proposal provided the zonal officer issue of licences for shops, restaurants, etc., but in the implemented scheme the central office did not want to part with this power, although the work of collecting licence fees, rents, and renewal of licences were handed over to the zonal office. Later on, however, after the representation of the ward offices, this function was deputed to the wards and zones.

The zonal officer also supervises the work of the deputy engineer attached to the zonal office. The appointment of deputy engineer to the zonal office was a later addition. The deputy engineer has to look after the grants for small building construction and repairs such as putting up doors and windows or compound walls in the already existing buildings. He is also empowered to grant permission for new drainage connections.

The zonal officer who is designated as Assistant Commissioner, Zone, forms a link between the Municipal Commissioner and the ward offices. All the powers of the Municipal Commissioner with regard to the ward offices are deputed to him and he reports directly to the Commissioner.

THE WARDS

A ward is headed by the ward officer, who besides supervising, coordinating and guiding authority of three functionaries is also an executive and implementing authority. He has to, as mentioned earlier, keep his fingers on the situation in his ward, by regularly touring the area and contacting the people. He has to report to the zonal officer and has to keep in touch with the relevant departments of the Central Office particularly the Engineering Department, Health Department and the Revenue Department.

In the matters under his charge connected with engineering, the ward officer is delegated the powers equivalent to that of the deputy engineer. In the same way he has the power of the deputy health officer in matters of sanitation and conservancy. He has also to look after the assessment of properties; collection, refund and remissions of revenue, and transfer of properties. He has also been delegated with all the powers of the land and estate officer.

The engineering section of the ward headed by junior engineer deals with water supply, drainage and roads. In the water supply the engineering section looks after the domestic water connections with pipes upto one inch diameter, minor leakages in municipal water supply pipes; reading, repairing, and replacing of water meters; individual domestic complaints about water supply; and providing and repairs of public water standposts.

The engineering section has to look after the cleaning and maintenance of drainage lines. After the pilot scheme was extended to cover the whole city the grant of drainage connections for domestic purposes, execution of free drainage scheme, and free flush latrines were added to this section.

With regard to roads the engineering section has to do patchwork, minor repairs and footpath repairs.

The sanitation and conservancy unit of the ward office has to inspect the sanitation of hotels, restaurants, other eating places, cinema houses, and theatres. Cleaning of roads, gardens, garbage and debris collection, and general maintenance of public health are the functions of sanitation unit.

The functions of the revenue unit include assessment and collection of taxes on houses; rent collection of all municipal properties; recovery of loans given by the corporation for the flush latrines and other constructions; transfer of properties; census, proceeding for eviction of unauthorised occupation of premises; auction of municipal shops and offices, and issuing licences and permits.

WORKING

Baroda Municipal Corporation's decentralization scheme was less than two years' old when this study was undertaken. Enough time has to be given for sending out issues and problems before we can make through evaluation and arrive at definitive conclusions. The theoretical expositions of its rationale through written literature, public meetings, however, elaborate and frank cannot completely enable us to understand its limitation and the problems.

Moreover, it should be noted that Baroda's venture is indeed a very bold experiment. No other city in the country with Baroda's size (Baroda is really a low-middle level city in terms of its population and area; it is one of the smallest towns in the country to be given the status of a corporation) has devolved so many powers, personnel and resources to its subsidiary units. The expectations of everybody therefore are raised. There is a likelihood of even the objective researcher being carried away and expecting miracles. But it should be remembered that the ward reorganization has to function in the same social, political and administrative environment in which the larger corporation is functioning. It has to face the same (perhaps of a greater magnitude) political and administrative constraints that the central office faces. To expect too much from the decentralized units is to invite disillusionment and consequently demoralization.

What follows therefore by way of evaluation is a meere snapshot taken in early childhood and "teething trouble" period of the work reorganization scheme. It is meant to serve as a trend report for future modifications and revisions.

The aspects of the ward administration discussed here are : personnel, public relations, procedures and paperwork, supplies and equipment, ward-ward councillor relationship and central-ward relationship.

PERSONNEL

The present personnel in the ward office is adequate except for low level and manual personnel.

The number of applications for water supply connections has increased considerably since the inception of the ward scheme but the number of fitters in each ward has remained only two. Similarly the number of labourers and sweepers in some wards is inadequate and the percentage of absentism among the labourers and sweepers is generally high. In some wards a proper ratio is not maintained between male and female labourers. In ward number 7 there were more female than male labourers. Female labourers can do only certain types of manual labour and as a result there is often a considerable delay in completing the work.

On the whole, the number of personnel working in the wards is adequate. As reported by the technical staff in the central office some of the best personnel were put in the engineering and sanitary divisions. The personnel were generally enthusiastic about the ward scheme and liked the work. However, there was a certain amount of

tensions among them in their inter-personnel relationship and the superior and sub-ordinated relationship. Some of the higher officers were not aware of the situation and did not attempt to improve the relations.

Some people were not happy about their working condition. They did not like to be in the situation of having to work among the people. They did not like to be away from the main-stream of the corporation life which they considered to be located only in the central office. Naturally one cannot expect these people to have their heart in their work. The question asked to every body in the ward offices was : "Would you prefer to work in the ward office or in the central office given the same position and the same salary?"

Some staff members expressed the opinion that they would like to change over from ward office to the central office. Even one Ward Officer felt the same way. While, it is not possible to assign every one the work of his liking in a big organization like corporation a special care should be taken to select those who

prefer to work in the ward offices because the work requires certain amount of self-motivation. If the people do not like the work of having to interest with the people and solve citizens problems, then they are bound to have bad impression on the citizens. This would not only affect the working of the ward offices, but tarnish the image of the whole corporation. While this problem is not very acute and only very few people said they would prefer to work in the Central Office rather than ward office the problem is there and must be looked into. Because, if a person in an important position like the ward officer feels unhappy and wants to change over there is indeed some cause to worry as it would adversely affect the working of the entire ward office.

There is also some anxiety among some of the personnel that once they are out of the central office they are out of the main-stream and so their career would be affected. It is absolutely necessary that this anxiety is removed. The technical staff should be assured that their affiliation with the parent department would not be entirely severed and that their working in the ward office would not come in the way of their promotion. For example the chances of promotion of Junior Engineer working in the ward office should not be affected either formally or informally because he is away from the main office.

Proper allotment and knowledge of work among the personnel is absolutely essential because in their dealings with the people if they give out the impression that they are uncertain of work or of rules, regulations, and procedures it would damage the image of the ward office. A great care has to be taken in making all the personnel well-versed in their jobs through formal training and day-to-day work experience .

There was a tendency among some personnel to shirk the responsibility of taking decisions. This occurs normally in two situations : 1) when a person who is supposed to take decision and act independently is diffident and has a feeling of inadequacy about his own ability to take decisions and 2) when he feels that the superiors do not like his taking independent decisions or he will be reprimanded if anything goes wrong.

While visiting the ward and zone offices it was observed that the junior staff were going to the ward officers and the Assistant Commissioner even for minor matters. In the North zone office in ward seven all the citizens who came were taken to the zone officer. The zone officer wasted a lot of his time looking into minor matters. I observed him constantly telling the subordinate staff not to run to him for every small matter but they continued to do so. They did so because they felt incompetent to decide and also because they wanted to play safe. If anything would go wrong they could always say that they acted upon the advice of their superior. This inhibits

leadership and initiative among the staff, creates a lack of responsibility and causes delay in execution. Moreover, it nullifies the very purpose of decentralization. This tendency of shirking responsibility has to be consciously discouraged. Those personnel who are supposed to take decisions and act upon them must do so themselves and shoulder the responsibility. The ward officers and the Assistant Commissioner should see that except in the matter of major importance or complication the lower staff take their own decisions. To establish a tradition the senior officer should refrain from giving even oral advice.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The public relations in most government organisations is confined only to publicity. They attempt to create an image through glamorous and spectacular public functions on ceremonial occasions. Press is given more importance than people. The whole public relations functions needs to be defined in a much broader and more concrete terms. Public relations is a day-to-day work and it should be remembered that few good jobs done by the Corporation go a long way in building up a longer and lasting image than any amount of press and publicity.

Ward Office can do an excellent job of building up the image of the city government as a people oriented problem solving body. Any carelessness on its part can easily damage the prestige of the Corporation. The ward office is corporation's real contact

point with people. It is with this purpose that the ward reorganization was done. If this contact point is loose, the whole purpose of ward reorganization will be defeated. Therefore, people working in the ward office should be people oriented, their personalities should be such that they enjoy working among the people. It often happens that people come to them with unreasonable or even incredible demands but they must listen patiently and respond positively as far as possible. People should feel that they can contact any person in the ward office directly without any reservations.

There is a general feeling that in order to get anything done by the government officers they need a "go-between" or what is popularly known as 'influence'. The status gap between the governmental elite and the masses has to be narrowed. The necessity, of a "go-between" or 'influence' needs to be removed.

The ward office on the whole has been doing a good job of public relations. Most of the personnel in the ward office are aware of their public related functions and are consciously doing this job of public relations. I observed that even slum dwellers have at times, contacted ward officers directly. I have also observed that personnel in the ward office including even the highest officer namely the Assistant Commissioner treat people well, listen patiently and respond to them positively as far as possible. I have not seen them getting irritated or talking angrily to a citizen even when he came up with

a highly irregular demand. .

But public relations also depends a great deal on doing a good job. In the ultimate analysis, there is no greater publicity than a job well-done..

Finally, a word about the publicity of the functions of the ward offices. Although, at the time of inauguration information was given to the press about the work of the ward officers, not many people were aware of this ward reorganization and the work done by the ward officers.

Particularly, the low income group people who needed the services most were least aware of the new venture in decentralization. It is therefore, necessary that all are made aware of the functions, locations, and the personnel in the ward offices. In this connection a method was adopted by an ex-mayor of the Corporation. Shri Lalitbhai Patel published handbills describing the functions and objectives of ward reorganization and distributed them among the citizens of his ward. Some such method can be adopted by the corporation for all the wards. The corporation can also put up permanent sign-boards in various localities informing people about the functions and locations of the ward offices. They can advertise about the programme on various bills of the Corporation services like gas or electricity bills.

PROCEDURES AND PAPER WORK

The purpose of a ward office is to provide immediate and on the spot solution to people's problems. The personnel in the ward office are supposed to do considerable amount of touring in their areas. Even when they are in the office they have to spend considerable time meeting people and solving their grievances. All this leaves little time and scope for clerical work. Furthermore, the immediate solution of people's grievances requires minimum procedures. There should be minimum paper work and certain amount of "level jumping" is desirable and necessary in order to speed up the work.

While I did not have the time, to go into details of everybody felt that there was a lot of unnecessary paper work involved. I will give here two examples :

1) A person wanting a transfer of name in his property has to go through a long and circuitious procedure. The paper is signed by the Revenue Clerk, Revenue Officer, Ward Officer and Assistant Commissioner.

2) The sanitary division of the ward office has to submit monthly reports and a consolidated annual report to the health office. Nobody knows what is done with these reports.

In all the cases of decentralization that I had a chance to study I have found that while officers are supposed to do field work, they get bogged down in procedures and paper work. The headquarter offices whenever they need any information about the branch offices

send circulars asking them to compile ~~statistical~~ data and information which are often available in their own files. If the creation of ward office means increase of procedures and duplication of paper work the purpose of urban decentralization will not be served. What I strongly suggest therefore, is that some knowledgeable persons with imagination should go through all the paper work and procedures and suggest ways of reducing them. A lot of paper work is wasted in the correspondence between the ward office, zone office and central office. The papers pass back and forth with remarks, counter remarks, and further counter remarks. At every stage officers want others to commit on the paper. They want copies, duplicate copies, signatures and counter signatures.

Some officers in the central office felt that people in the ward office were fond of writing letters, putting everything on paper: "why can't they phone us? After all we are provided with telephones and they are meant for using! The officers in the ward and zone felt that the officers in the central office did not use the phone because they did not want their inefficiencies recorded on the paper. And often "when things go wrong they do not stand by their word and so we have to put everything on the paper to safeguard our position". This is really an offshoot of a wider, deeper and more serious problem of the tensions between the central and ward officers which I have discussed in detail later on. Nevertheless the consequence is increased paper work, greater delay in solving problems and less efficiency in achieving results.

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLY

It is needless to say that any programme requires adequate and timely equipment. But this is much more true in case of the ward offices. As mentioned before the whole purpose behind ward reorganization is prompt service. Therefore ward office more than any other office must be provided with adequate equipments on time. The position in this regard is not very satisfactory. Numerous incidents were observed where supply of equipment was late, or inadequate, or not in proper order. Sometimes, the equipments were not supplied. This happens not only in the case of office equipments such as furniture but also with the equipment required to do the job on the site. People in charge of stores and supplies often do not respond to the request of the ward office.

It is necessary to stream-line the procedures and certain amount of "level jumping" should be permitted for quick and efficient work. To give one example, a ward office once needed a drilling set. The people incharge of stores said that they did not have a drilling set. There upon people in the ward office went to the overseer of one of the overhead tanks who said that he had a drilling set but he could not give it without permission of the hydraulic department. When the

ward personnel went to the hydraulic department they were again sent back to the stores and the stores which had previously said that they had no drilling set finally come up with one. This sort of running around not only delays the work but demoralises the people working in the wards.

Even the necessary office equipment such as furniture, electric equipment, and stationary are not adequately supplied.

Often the equipment that is supplied to the ward offices are second rate. Some of the meters for measuring water consumption supplied to the ward offices were not in working order. A frequent complain to the ward offices is about the disposal of garbage. But inspite of repeated requests the ward offices are not provided with any vehicles for the disposal of garbage.

The problem of the supply of equipment is so serious that the Assistant Commissioner, Zone had to report to the municipal commissioner: "The success of the ward reorganization scheme also depends on regular and adequate supply of equipments and materials. There is a great difficulty in this regard. Sometimes even higher level officers of the wards have to go to the stores officer personally. Similar situation exists when we go to some central offices for equipments." On the whole the experience of getting equipments and materials for the wards has been frustrating.

It would be helpful to evolve a formal procedure which is rational and systematic so that the ward offices do not have to depend on personal contact or whims of the stores department. It is also necessary that the commissioner should make it clear to the central offices that the needs of the ward offices are important.

ADMINISTRATION - COUNCILLOR RELATIONSHIP

One of the important objective of decentralization is to take administration as near to people as possible. The welfare developmental administration also requires that the administrators should be public oriented. The image of the officers should be projected as "public servants" rather than bureaucrats or administrators. The democratic, participatory and developmental view of administration calls for a continuous close and direct contact with the masses. Decentralization of government both in rural and urban areas is a structural device to realize these objectives. Representatives elected by people in the decentralized local government bodies are to act as two-way links between the people and administration. Their role, therefore, is important both for the development of the area and creating an understanding among people about the problems and difficulties of the administration.

The publicity literature of the ward reorganization scheme views citizens "consumers". This market economy concept borrowed from modern management is good in so far as it helps to view the administration as service giving body but it is inadequate for the concept of a participatory administration where citizens are perceived as not only demanders and

consumers but also partners. The elected councillors have at least to help the administration by understanding and explaining their problems and constraints to the masses.

Unfortunately the councillors relate with the ward administration more as demanders than partners. There is a lack of understanding on the part of councillors about the problem and limitations of the ward offices.

Often the resources of the ward offices, both men and material are looked upon as sources of increasing their political influence. There is often a competition among the ward councillors to get the maximum benefits of the ward services for their areas and groups. While this has some positive consequences in that it keeps the administration well informed about the needs of the people in their area and keeps them on their toes it also has many negative consequences.

1) The councillors tend to insist that their demands must be immediately fulfilled. Some of the very common criticisms made by councillors are, "you are stalling", "your office does not work efficiently", "you give priority to others". Sometimes the personnel in the ward offices have to disturb their on-going work or disrupt the regular schedule in order to satisfy the councillors' demands.

2) Sometimes their demands are irregular or against the general policies yet they insist upon the ward personnel doing it. For instance, the general directive from the Corporation is that creation of new public water post should not be encouraged or new water connections should not be

given in the areas where there is no drainage system. But some councillors come to the ward offices for this kind of work and they do not like being turned down. In such situation the ward personnel are put in a very difficult position. Afraid of telling the councillors that it just cannot be done they try to stall or pass on the blame and the responsibility to others.

3) Councillors often do not like if ward offices attend to any work suggested by their political rivals. They are afraid that their political competitors would get credit and their own popularity and support would decline. There were instances when the councillors found that ward personnel had done some work for their political rivals and they openly criticized them in the standing committee meeting. Unable to defend themselves the personnel feel frustrated and are demoralized. In one case a very senior and powerful city leader criticized a senior officer in the Board meeting because the senior officer had given permission of minor repairs and construction to the political rival of the senior leader. The officer felt very frustrated because he had no opportunity to answer back or defend himself.

4) The opposition members and the dissidents in the ruling party continue to accuse the administrative personnel of favouring the ruling group and neglecting them.

5) The councillors are supposed to act as linkages between the citizens and administration, but in reality they act as brokers. They do not like any direct contacts between the citizens and the administration. They do not like the administration taking the initiative or responding to the needs of their constituents without involving them. The reasons are clear. They want to make themselves indispensable to their constituents and take credit for everything that is done in their area. A ward councillor wants to remain present when any important work such as road repairs or drainage connection is being done in his area. He often assumes the role of an administrative supervisor. When the work is in progress he remains present on site directing, instructing, supervising and even scolding them. The councillors wanting to get involved and wanting to get credit for getting things done is understandable in political context. Normally this helps to keep the administrative personnel on their toes. However, this "go-between" role also blocks any direct communication between the citizens and the administrators. It makes the role of "personal contacts" and "personal influence" so powerful that citizens who do not have any possibility of finding a go-between feel helpless about getting things done.

6) Another important feature of the relationship between councillors and the ward office is the lack of acceptance of certain norms of behaviour on the part of councillors. The councillors tend

to treat the officials as their personal subordinates. They think that they can summon them any time they like or rush into their offices. They expect the officers to pay them immediate attention and fulfill all their demands, even the irregular ones.

On many occasions I observed that the moment a councillor enters the office is a hush. The administrators generally dread any contact with the councillors. The administrators feel that the councillors have no consideration for their dignity and self respect. Even in very minor matters they end to treat the administrative personnel tersely. Many incidents of the councillors making unjust and irregular demands on the ward personnel were reported. I have observed councillors shouting and insulting ward officials publicly or in the presence of their subordinates.

Sometimes the councillors illtreat the officials because they want to feel important and superior, or enjoy their political power or to show off to their constituents.

In general there is a considerable lack of acceptance of certain norms of behaviour and code of conduct.

CENTRAL-WARD RELATIONSHIP

The ward office is an extension of the corporation but it is not a conglomeration of the subordinate offices of engineering, health, and revenue departments. Though a part of the Corporation the ward office is an independent office. This status has not been yet accepted by the people working in the central office. This has caused a serious problem.

of strained relationship between the central office and the ward offices. While most of the problems crop up because of this status conflicts faulty administrative arrangements also cause some problems.

There is a certain amount of confusion in the distribution of work between the central and ward offices. For instance, there was a considerable confusion about the work of water leakages. The ward office believed that all major and main line leakages were to be repaired by the central office and the central office argued that all leakages whether minor or major were to be done by the ward offices. As a result there was a considerable tossing of papers back and forth between the hydraulic department and the ward office. It also created certain amount of ill feeling between the two office. In fact the issue of the waterpipe leakages and who should do it became so acute that people in both ward office and the central office gave contradictory versions. I was specifically warned by the people in each office that the other will try to misguide me on this issue. In spite of my repeated probing it was very difficult for me to ascertain which office was supposed to do the work of the major leakages. It can be easily imagined what impression it would create on the people. If they were to be shuttled back and forth between the ward office and the central office.

A clear distribution of functions between the central and the ward offices is necessary. When a particular function is allotted to the ward office the other related functions should also be allotted to it. For instance when a citizen informs the ward office about a leakage, they go and dig up the area (they are not even provided with a copy of the map of the underground lines). When they find that it is a main line leakage they fill up the trenches and inform the central office who take some time before they reach to the site. Such irrational distribution of work involves delay and waste of time and resources.

Sometimes the ward office has to wait till the central office completes some work. For instance, there is a considerable demand for free water connections but the ward office cannot give new water connections till the drainage line is laid by the central office. The ward office may not be able to show good work in this respect and the people who make the demands for new connections may continue to remain dissatisfied with the ward office. If the ward office persists in demanding from the central office may not like it.

One reason why the relation between the central office and the ward office is strained is that some officers in the central office are not happy about the loss of some of their powers and functions and consequently the loss of their influence. They tend to assign the

least important functions to the ward office. Normally the officers in the central office argue that why should they be against the ward office performing more functions? If ward office takes on more functions it would lessen their burden and their botheration. The officers in the central office also say that ward reorganization is necessary. But when they were asked if they thought more functions from their departments can be handed over to the ward office their reply was firmly negative:

Normally, the tendency of the central office is to pass on additional and residual work to the ward office but sometimes if somebody in the central office is personally interested in doing the work it is performed in the central office even though it is within the jurisdiction of the ward office.

There have been instances of the functions of ward office performed by the central office without even informing the ward office. There are also instances of passing on certain work to the ward office not within its jurisdiction. To take one example, an ex-corporator submitted an application to the PRO's office for the construction of a new urinal in a particular area. The PRO's office forwarded the application to the Health and the Hydraulic departments and they returned the application saying that the application should be sent to the ward office. But the ward office does not even have the power of constructing public urinals

and latrines and so they cannot sanction such a plan. When a central officer for some reason wants to encroach on the jurisdiction of the ward and wants his office to do the work he argues on the ground of administrative efficiency and flexibility ("what is there ? what does it matter if we do the work that they are supposed to do ? The point is to do the work. After all the Corporation is one"). When the people in the central office want the ward office to do the work then the arguments are based on good administration (Why should they shirk their responsibility? What is the purpose of creating the ward office. If they not carry out the work that we send them?)

If this situation continues than the ward reorganization would create more problems for the citizens than it would solve. The poor citizen is likely to get hopelessly lost between his ward office and the main office.

Another problem is the control over the technical personnel in the ward. They feel somewhat ambivalent about working in the ward office. Officially they work under the ward officers and the Assistant Commissioner, and they are supposed to carry out their instructions. But they also receive direct instructions from their parent departments which they may find difficult to ignore. Their future lies with their parent departments and they cannot afford to displease the boss in the parent department. As the same time they cannot afford to ignore the instructions of their

immediate superiors in the ward office. In the case the sanitary staff of the ward received direct instructions from the health department to attend a meeting for a programme of epidemic control. The ward officer did not like his staff receiving direct instructions and did not grant them permission. This created a considerable ill feeling between the ward office and the concerned central office and both claimed their authority over the sanitary staff.

The biggest problem, however, is the status conflict between the officers in the two offices. Equal status of the ward officers and the Assistant Commissioner is not accepted by the people in the central office. On the part of the people in ward offices there is a certain feeling that the central office tends to treat them as subordinates. The people in the ward office also react sharply to this; their ego is hurt and sometimes there is a long exchange of correspondence in nasty language between a central office and a ward office.

Sometimes people come to the ward office for some work which is done by the central office. In such situation the ward office forwards the demands to the central office but often they do not receive any response. So when the citizen returns to the ward office to inquire or the people in the ward office have to criticize the central office or take the blame.

Sometimes a lower level officer from the central office responds and then the feelings of the officers in the ward office are hurt.

Of course, here also the rationalization is based on the criteria of good administration. Everybody in the central office I talked to, criticized the ward office for writing letters. "Why are they writing letters?" "Why can't they telephone?" "Why do they want to increase paper work for themselves?" "Are they writing letters because the central office has given them a steno who was nothing better to do?" "Why do they bring minor matters in the coordination committee?" "Can't they talk it over with us at a personal level?"

Normally, such approach is laudable because the apparent purpose is to increase administrative efficiency but I was surprised to find practically everybody to whom I talked in the central office becoming a sudden exponent of efficient administration. Perhaps, the real reason may be that their ego is hurt when what they think to be a subordinate office or officer writes them letters. Perhaps there is also a fear of being exposed for the short coming of their own offices, if things are put on the paper or brought out in the open in the coordination committee. While reduction of paper work is always to be welcomed some papers are absolutely necessary in the formal government organization. Often things are put on the paper by the personnel in the ward offices because they may want to keep a record so that they can safe-guard their own position.

There is also a status conflict between the senior personnel in the ward and the central offices. When I mentioned to one of the officers in the central office that there is a feeling among the senior officials in the wards that they are being treated as subordinate agency of the Corporation he laughed it off saying that it may be their inferiority complex'. But hardly five minutes later in our discussion, he also expressed the opinion that the people in the ward office act as if 'they are superior to the officers in the central office'. This obvious contradiction indicates the amount of unreasonableness and the lack of empathy that exist between the two offices.

The technical officers in the central office are also not willing to accept the alleviated status of the ward officers and particularly the Assistant Commissioner. It is perhaps because of the Assistant Commissioner's position in the central office. The Assistant Commissioner has many of the Commissioner's power. But his grade and salary is lower than many of the heads of the offices of the technical departments.

His grade is lower than even the executive engineer. His authority, unlike the municipal commissioner's, is not statutory and he does not have the social status of an IAS.

Similar situation exists in case of the Assistant Commissioner (zone). Some of the powers of the commissioner are 'deputed' to him.

The Zonal office is an extension of the corporation. Similarly the Assistant Commissioner (zone) is an extension of the Commissioner. This is not accepted by the officers in the central office.

The strained relation between the central office and ward office is often carried to the extent of criticizing the ward reorganization. As one central officer said, "No improvement is seen in the last six months of ward reorganization". Another officer strongly believed, that the situation had worsened after the ward reorganization and he put the entire blame on the personnel of the ward office. Nobody in the central office was prepared to divolve more functions to the ward offices. One central officer said that Baroda should follow the example of Ahmedabad, abolish the position of ward officers and assign only elementary functions to the ward office.

All the would indicate the degree of hostility existing between the central office and the ward offices. If there was a single factor that should cause real worry in the working of the ward reorganization it is the relationship between the central and ward offices.

OVERALL EVALUATION

It is too early to judge the real impact of ward reorganization. However the ward reorganization has on the whole worked out well particularly with regard to the problems of citizens. Various records prepared by the ward officer show that there has been some noticeable differences in the speed and efficiency with which the citizens grievances are remedied. But more attention to the problems of personnel, publicity, and inter-office relations are needed.

I have talked to some of the citizens and a limited sample-survey has also been carried out. The opinion of the people on the whole was somewhat divided. Those, who knew about ward reorganization, felt it has improved, but there were some, particularly from the lower income group who did not know much about ward reorganization and did not find any change. This was partly because the ward reorganization began only about one and half years ago and it has not been given enough publicity.

The reaction of most people working in the ward office was also quite positive. There were many people who had worked on the site before ward reorganization. Even they felt that after reorganization things had changed for the better. The reaction of the central offices was not very favourable. One officer said, "there has been some minor difference after ward reorganization but it is not worth the time, money, and other resources spent on the project". Another officers said, "ward reorganization has not improved the

situation at all". While still another officer said, "after ward reorganization things have become worse".

An important leader of the city, an ex-mayor felt that ward reorganization was necessary. But he also said that the present working was not entirely upto the mark. He believed that personnel in the ward office should visit their area more frequently.

My own observations is that a noticeable difference is found after reorganization of ward. Complaints are being solved more quickly and more efficiently. There are more personnel visit to the areas and they also meet more people every day. This experiment of Baroda city has on the whole worked well and, it should be further strengthened and more functions, powers, personnel and resources should be allocated to the ward offices. However there is considerable scope for improvement and here are some suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Care should be taken in the recruitment of the personnel in the ward office because they are the real image builders of the corporation.
- 2) Only those people should be assigned the work in the ward office who like the work and who are people oriented.
- 3) The present staff except for the manual staff is adequate for the present work. If functions of the ward office increased they should be given additional personnel.

4) Care should be taken in the selection and training of ward officers. Only people with sufficient knowledge of the work should be appointed. They should have the qualities of leadership to motivate their subordinates to work. They should be given both formal and on the job training. People with experience should be selected. There is no need to put an undue emphasis on youth or freshness in ward officer's recruitment. The emphasis on youth, because supposedly they are more adoptable or bold is, without much justification. My point here is that any general criteria of fresh blood or youth should not be the sole consideration in the appointment of ward officer. On the contrary it is better that those persons whose administrative behaviour in different situations has been observed over a considerable time are appointed as ward officers.

To appoint un-tested people as ward officers should prove disastrous. The emphasis should not be on 'smartness' but soundness and sincerity.

5) The administrative status and the financial status of the ward officers should be improved. It is very necessary to establish their position in the eyes of the citizens, corporators, and particularly the corporation officials.

The operational status of the officers should be established. This depends on the environment that is created, and the financial and administrative status that is attached to the position.

6) A similar revision of administrative and financial status of the Assistant Commissioner (zone) is also necessary. At present the Assistant Commissioner has been given considerable powers. But he also needs the necessary administrative status and salary grade. It has been mentioned earlier that the status of Assistant Commissioner as an officer of importance, heading a big and important office is not legitimized in the eyes of the officers in the central office.*

7) All the employees of the ward office should be trained in public relations. An effort should be made to give more sustained publicity to ward reorganization.

8) The main work of the people in the ward office is field work. Therefore, all procedures and paper work should be reduced and simplified as far as possible. A person should be appointed to go through with all the procedures and simplify and reduce them as far as possible. The tendency to increase paper work, introduce redundant procedures simply to play safe and long and circuitous

* I have learnt that since the writing of this report the suggestion has been taken up and a proposal is made to upgrade the scales of the Assistant Commissioner.

routing of papers to satisfy the ego of the officers is a chronic ailment in government organization. The purpose of many experiments of decentralization have been drowned in procedures and paper work. It is therefore, very necessary that an unorthodox, bold and imaginative approach is taken in this regard.

9) A paper and manageable schedule of tour of the ward area by all personnel concerned should be drawn up and is rigorously followed. The touring programme of the ward personnel should not be disturbed by their superiors unless in case of real and serious urgency.

10) Supply of equipment and materials need to be looked into more seriously. The stores and supplies department of the corporation is generally under frequent criticism. Charges of wastage, inefficiency, irregularity and pilferage are constantly levelled at them. The whole procedure needs to be standardised.

11) A better central-ward relations also need to be established. This issue more than anything else damages and causes problem in the working of this pilot project.

In elevating the status of the ward and zone officers the Commissioner can play an important role. He should see that the ward office is not treated as a subordinate office by the central office. It is the Commissioner who can effectively do this in day

to day working and in coordination meetings; He should see that such an environment is created whereby other officers feel that ward office cannot be treated lightly. There is a tendency today to treat ward office as a residue office. This tendency is to be checked and it is only the Commissioner who can do it. The Commissioner should ask the concerned officers in the central office to visit the ward offices periodically. A proper schedule for such visits should be drawn out and adhered to.

12) A committee of concerned central officers and some outsiders interested in the city welfare should be formed. This committee should meet periodically and take stock of the situation. Its functions should be purely advisory. It should be headed by the commissioner or his deputy in the central office. A care should be taken to see that such a committee does not become a super ward office.

13) In general I feel that the present attempt at urban decentralization is a bold yet half hearted and lukewarm attempt. For the urban decentralization to be really successful it must be strengthened and vitalised by allocating it more functions, better status and adequate powers and personnel.