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STRATEGIES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
AND TRAINING OF DISTRICT LEVEL
PROJECT EXECUTIVES

by

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STRATEGIES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

AND

TRAINING OF DISTRICT LEVEL PROJECT EXECUTIVES*

Ranjit   Gupta

I. Review of Rural Development Strategies

Two distinct schools of thought have influenced the strategies of
rural development in India since the 1950s:

-- one advocated profound structural changes, particularly
   those in land relationship, to realize the ideal enshrined
   in the Indian Constitution, viz., the establishment of a
   non-exploitative society, and

- the other advocated the need for tackling the immediate
  problem of increasing agricultural production through
  technological innovations and supportive measures such as
  extension, provision of credit, and efficient input
  distribution.

The antecedents of the first viewpoint can be traced to the Congress
Agrarian Reforms Committee (1947) and that of the second to the Grow More
Food Campaign days (1946).

In subsequent years both these viewpoints received support from
the policy makers, but one was not given preference over another. The
attention given to each varied from time to time, depending on the food
situation in the country. As the structuralist viewpoint assumed that

the effect of structural changes, though positive, will be felt only
over a period of time, the policy makers veered to the other point of
view -- that which advocated the adoption of improved technology and
supportive measures -- whenever the food situation became acute.
"Similarly, recurrent political difficulties and the need to placate
a large number of rural poor led to a shift from 'grow-more-food' type
programmes to those which were meant to redistributive rights in land.
As the spell of good and bad years alternated with rapid succession and
as the political climate in the country fluctuated between dormancy and
explosiveness, no one measure was given a fair or a long-run trial".[1]

1951-61

During the initial years of planning the structuralist viewpoint
considerably influenced official thinking on rural reconstruction. The
strategy pursued during the First and the Second Five Year Plans (1951-
61, was essentially an outcome of this thinking.   The emphasis of this
strategy, as enunciated in the Second Plan (1956-61), was on:[2]

1   Abolition of exploitative relationship in land and
    development of voluntary cooperative farming.

2   Organization of a "community sector" through community
    development activities.

3   Organization of the National Extension Service for
    increasing agricultural production and developing allied
    activities.

4   Association of village panchayats as the development
    agent at the village level.

5   Development of cooperative credit, marketing, warehousing,
    processing facilities etc.

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[1] VS Vyas, Strategies of Rural Development in Fifties, (typescript),
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, 1975.

[2] VS Vyas, op. cit.

6 Organization of programmes for the development of village indus-
tries, especially for meeting local needs, and for providing
employment opportunity to all persons in the village.

Three major objectives, intimately linked, were pursued, viz., equitable
distribution, production growth, and community development.

The land reform was launched to ensure safer tenure and, through land
ceilings, to suppress the growth of large agricultural estates.[3]

Considerable emphasis was placed on community development. A nation-
wide agricultural extension service with block development officer and
village level worker as the two pillars of this edifice was established.
"Production targets were computed by adding the estimated effects of
extended irrigation, the extension of cultivated land and the intensifi-
cation of production permitted by the diffusion of agricultural progess
(more productive seeds, more fertilizers and manure) promoted by extension
workers".[4] It was widely believed that community development will lead to
the transformation of the social structure in the countryside.[5]

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[3]The structure of land holdings as envisaged at the end of a series of Land
Reform Acts was more or less the same as spelled out in the Congress
Agrarian Reforms Committee Report. Four modes of farms suggested by the
Committee were: (a) family farms restricted to holdings between basic and
optimum sizes, (b) cooperative joint farms for holdings below a basic (or
floor) level, (c) collective farms for the resettlement of landless agri-
cultural labourers on reclaimed lands, and (d) state farms for research
and experimentation. Land management was also given careful attention in
this design of rural development. The emphasis was on collective or
village management. Though the collective orientation was soon forgotten,
a series of legislation was enacted to streamline the relationship in land
while retaining individual holdings as the principal mode of production.
The three principal types of land legislations which more or less
succeeded each other were: (a) abolition of intermediaries and conferring
the rights of proprietorship upon occupancy tenants, (b) protection of
tenants-at-will, and (c) determination of a ceiling on future
acquisition on land by an individual. (See VS Vyas, op. cit.,

[4]M Petit, Agricultural Policy and Growth of Agricultural Production in
India Since Independence, (typescript), Ford Foundation, New Delhi, 1975.

[5]To quote the First Plan (1951-56): "a rigid social structure and unutilised
resources are general characteristics of under-developed economy. To change
the social organization based on the ownership of land and to utilize in
daily practice resources and new technology becomes therefore essential
in the whole process of development".

Unfortunately this did not happen. The CD and the NES expanded
enormously but qualitatively their performance deteriorated and the
institutions they created came to be dominated by vested interests. Many
other administrative weaknesses also surfaced. Barring a few exceptions,
the joint cooperative farming societies and the collective farms remained
either dormant or non-functional.[6] Agricultural production rose but its
progress was uneven. In 1965 and 1966, for example, production was
actually less than the earlier harvests. The economy also came under
severe strains due to two serious confrontations — with China in 1962
and with Pakistan in 1965. Another rude shock came when a sample survey
showed that population had grown at a faster rate than what was anticipated
(2 per cent per annum instead of 1.3 per cent).

1961-66

Towards the close of the 1950s, while preparations for the Third
Plan (1961-66) were afoot, a joint team of Indian and American experts
was set up under the auspices of the Ford Foundation. The team portrayed
a vivid picture of India's Food Crisis and suggested a number of Steps
To Meet It. The following passage from an unpublished paper sums up the
diagnosis put forward by the team:[7]

> The low level of average yields per hectare, their great dis-
> persion between regions, and within regions between categories
> of farmers, show that it would be technically possible to improve
> radically the food situation by simply inciting the least effi-
> cient farmers to adopt practices which they can already observe
> in their own area. The absence of outside capital is not the
> main obstacle to such a rapid expansion of production. There
> are indeed some bottlenecks (chemical fertilizer, steel) but

[6]Rajkrishna, LC Jain, and Gopikrishna, Some Reflections on Cooperative
Farming, Indian Cooperative Union, New Delhi, 1957, and Charan Singh,
Joint Farming X'Rayed, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1959.

[7]M Petit, op. cit.

these can be easily suppressed. The main capital necessary can be produced locally with much labour. The essential problem is one of organization. Success depends upon the ability of public authority to incite millions of farmers to do many things relatively simple and mainly to do them together in a coordinated fashion: Farmers must be able to use at the same time irrigation water, better seeds, more fertilizers, better cultural practices, which imply that they must be provided with better access to credit and to agricultural inputs. The rentability of this set of actions will be much greater than the sum of rentabilities of each one taken isolately.

The diagnosis was accepted and during the first year of the Third Plan an Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) was launched in 15 relatively prosperous districts. The structuralist viewpoint having lost much of its credibility had given way to adoption of the other viewpoint. Three years after IADP was launched, the programme, now renamed Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP), was extended to cover 117 districts. The initial success of the programme when foodgrain production touched an all-time high of 108 million tonnes in 1970-71, gave birth to a new sense of optimism. Public leaders, policy makers, and many others began claiming that the new production-based strategy had ushered in an era of Green Revolution.

Yet successes were uneven. Growth was very fast for wheat but meagre for rice. Areas in the north-west (Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh) witnessed the fastest growth. Growth in dry or drought prone areas and even the eastern Gangetic plains (Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa) on the other hand stagnated. At the farmers' level the benefits of the new strategy were cornered by a few, viz., the big and the middling culti-vators. The bulk of the rural population comprising the small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers remained more or less unaffected. The conditions of agricultural labourers in fact worsened. Prices rose but agricultural wages in real terms fell in most parts of the country. Inequalities in incomes not only sharpened but became apparent even to the poor. There were unmistakable signs that social

tension in the rural areas was continuously growing as a result of this lopsided growth. One did not have to wait long to witness the mani-festations of this tension. Towards the close of the 1960s it erupted into violent confrontations. What surprised many was not the way the tension erupted but the fact that the first eruption came from a remote corner of the country.

1966 Onward

It was against this background that the Fourth Plan (1966-71) was launched. The swift drift of events had forced the production-based strategists to give up their claims. The equity objective was again in the forefront. Official as well as political speeches and writings com-municated through various media made this point amply clear. It was repeatedly stressed that growth alone was not the objective of planning; that planning must aim at growth with social justice. Garibi hatao or "remove poverty" became the slogan of the day.

Unlike in the early years of planning, however, the Fourth Plan did not propose any profound structural changes in land relationship. While emphasis was given to speedier enforcement of Land Reform Acts already enacted, the strategy focused this time on a package of special area programmes directly aimed at the welfare of the deprived sections of the rural community (small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, village artisans, and tribals) and that of areas threatened by droughts.

It was recognized that to achieve the social and economic goals of development, a greater diffusion of growth of activity and employment at local levels was necessary, and this necessitated not only larger efforts but also changes in planning procedures. Some attempts were made to decentralize the planning process to sub-national and sub-state levels.

Another compulsion which lent support to area planning was the great concern at the widening interregional disparities in the country. "For instance, during the decade between 1960 and 1970, the difference in per capita net domestic production among states had increased from 1.9 : 1 to 2.6 : 1".[8] The political repercussions of this growing disparity made it obligatory to give special emphasis to backward areas such as those inhabited by tribals. These considerations including the need to give special assistance to small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers led to the evolution of a definite 'reference group' and 'target area' approach in planning.

The strategy of rural development outlined in the Fifth Plan (1974-79) is an extension of the strategy pursued during the previous plan. Some of the main elements of this strategy are:[9]

1   A minimum needs package to help the disadvantaged areas
    (drought-prone areas) or the deprived groups (small and
    marginal farmers and agricultural labourers) in achieving
    some parity in items of social consumption such as health,
    education, and housing.

2   A sub-plan approach for tribal areas to ensure that invest-
    ments from the state and central sectors flow to such areas
    to undertake programmes designed for their needs.

3   An incentives policy designed to attract investment in
    industrially backward regions and areas.

4   An interregional allocation policy tilted in favour of
    backward states.

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[8]KV Sundaram, "Some Recent Trends in Area Development Planning in India" (mimeographed). Paper prepared for the Seminar on Regional Development And Balanced Growth, Ranikhet, 1976.

[9]KV Sundaram, op. cit.

The focus of the strategy is essentially on removing interregional imbalances and improving the social and economic conditions of the deprived sections of the rural population through special area programmes. Table 1 gives the programmes included in this category, and their coverage in terms of area and population.

Table 1

Special Area Programmes

Programme	No of Districts	Coverage Area (000 sq km)	Population 1971 (million)
Hill Area Development (HAD)*	15	231.2	5.36
Tribal Area Development (TAD)**	83	430.8	21.61
Small Farmers' Development Agency (SFDA)	110	910.1	198.53
Marginal Farmers & Agri Labour (MFAL)	45	NA	NA
Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP)	72	NA	NA

* The hill areas included are: (1) U.P. hill areas comprising the districts of Almora, Chamoli, Dehra Dun, Garhwal, Nainital, Pithoragarh, Teri Garhwal, and Uttar Kashi, (2) Assam hill areas which include Mikir Hills and North Cachar districts, (3) Darjeeling district in West Bengal, and (4) Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu. (Note: HAD excludes the wholly hill states such as Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya as their special interests are protected through their respective state plans).

** The Tribal Development Programme has been conceived as an integrated programme for areas with 50 per cent or more tribal concentration. The emphasis is on the preparation of a sub-plan for such areas whose longterm objectives are (i) to reduce inequalities in the levels of development between tribals and non-tribals and between tribal and other areas, and (ii) to improve the quality of life of the tribal communities. The sub-plan areas have been identified in 16 states and 2 union territories. Extensive areas covered by the programme are in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan. The resources for the tribal sub-plan mainly come from the state plan funds which are disaggregated to the sub-plan area and to this is added a special allocation from the central sector. (See KV Sundaram, op. cit.).

Note: Two more area programmes which are not usually included in the official classification of special area programmes are the Comprehensive Area Development Programme in West Bengal and Command Area Development. The latter is designed to develop the command of a selected group of multi-purpose irrigation projects in the country.

Barring SFDA and MFAL, the objectives of the special area programmes are essentially the same, viz., to exploit the indigenous resource and potentials of specific areas through a package of schemes or activities like agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry, forests, soil conservation, and village industries.[10] The relative importance of these activities varies from area to area or from one programme to another. In programmes such as HAD and TAD the emphasis on the development of forestry, prevention of _jhum_ or shifting cultivation, etc., is much more than in DPAP. In DPAP, the more urgent needs are soil conservation, dry and mixed farming, development of infrastructure, etc. The problems for even the hill and tribal areas are not common. Bonded labour and land alienation are serious problems in most tribal areas, while this is not the case in the hill areas.

There are other differences. In HAD, the unit of planning is the district;[11] in TAD it is usually a block or a group of blocks with 50 per cent or more tribal concentration. In a district there may be one or more such blocks. Sometimes, as in Bastar district in Madhya Pradesh which is predominantly inhabited by tribals, the entire district is the unit of planning. In DPAP also, the unit of planning could be a district or a part of it. The identification is based on the quantum and pattern of annual rainfall and the moisture content or water

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[10] In DPAP, the approach is to promote the development of the "target area". In SFDA and MFAL the approach is to provide promotional and development services to the "reference group". The emphasis of these programmes during the Fifth Plan is on intensive agriculture, multiple cropping, introduction of high yielding varieties, water harvesting measures, and provision of credit.

[11] A district is an administrative unit which includes a number of villages, often ranging from 2000 to 3000 or more. A cluster of about 100 villages constitutes a block. A group of blocks constitutes a tehsil or taluka.

retention capacity of soils.[12]

Excepting TAD, none of the programmes emphasises on multi-level planning. In all these programmes (other than TAD), planning is focused on a "micro area" such as a district or a part of it. For tribal area planning, however, a three-tier development structure — micro, meso, and macro — has been suggested. "A tribal development block has been identified as a 'micro area' for planning, excepting in states which have dispersed tribal population. The 'meso area', which is the basic building block of all new development structure, will comprise a group of tribal development blocks and will generally be co-terminus with a taluka/sub-division/tehsil. The next higher unit of development administration is the 'macro unit' which has been identified as the entire area of tribal concentration in a particular state. In some states like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Bihar, where more than one distinct tribal region comprising a group of meso regions appear to emerge, there can be more than one macro region for tribal development".[13]

The organizational setup is also not the same for all the programmes. While SFDA and MFAL provide for separate agencies for programme implementation, TAD and HAD have made no such provision. The organizational setup for DPAP varies from state to state. A number of states have established separate agencies under the Societies Registration Act.[14] Maharashtra is implementing the programme through the District Planning

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[12]The drought prone areas are divided into three categories:

Arid: Areas which are extremely arid with 375 mm or less annual rainfall. Nine districts located mainly in Western Rajasthan and partly in Haryana, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh are included in this category.

Semi-arid: Includes 18 districts with semi-arid conditions and an annual rainfall ranging from 375-750 mm.

Submoist: Includes 45 districts with an annual rainfall exceeding 750 mm and yet suffering from submoist conditions due to considerable variation in rainfall and a quick runoff because of hilly terrain.

[13]KV Sundaram, op. cit.

[14]The Act provides for the registration and regulation of the functioning of non-profit making bodies. All non-profit making voluntary agencies, educational institutions (other than universities), and charitable societies are registered and founded under this Act. The creation of agencies for administering official programmes like DPAP, SFDA, and MFAL is a recent development.

Board. Karnataka has established an authority for the DPAP districts by a resolution of the State Government with the Divisional Commissioner as Chairman. Tamil Nadu has set up a District Development Corporation for one of its two DPAP districts.

SFDA and MFAL agencies in all the states have, however, been set up only under the Societies Registration Act. These agencies have no independent fund of their own. Their main function is to prepare schemes for the development of small and marginal farmers, and agricultural labourers and to assist them in obtaining the required support from the existing institutional sources (such as banks and cooperatives), including the sectoral allocations made from time to time to different development departments in the district.

According to a conference of the states' Ministers of Rural Development, Community Development and Panchayati Raj held about a year ago, some of the common defects affecting the implementation of the special programmes are:[15]

1   Lack of synchronisation of normal state plan activities and activities of the special projects.

2   Absence of integrated and coordinated planning and execution by dovetailing the state plan resources with agencies' fund.

3   Inadequate acceptance of the role and responsibility by the different state government departments, especially at the district level for the special programmes.

4   Inadequate involvement of the block and the Panchayati Raj institutions in the implementation of the programmes in some areas.

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[15] KV Sundaram, op. cit.

It will be too early to predict what shape the present strategy will
assume in future. After three successive lean years, foodgrain production
(1975-76) has risen sharply; it has surpassed all previous records.
Estimates vary from 115 to 118 million tonnes. Because of a good monsoon
the outlook for the current year (1976-77, is also rated "bright". The
growing optimism has once again revived interest in some of the institutional
aspects of the rural setting, highlighted by the structuralist school of
thought. In the economic programme, popularly known as the 20-Point
Programme, recently launched, land ceilings, distribution of land to the
landless, credit reforms, etc., occupy an important place. However, the
programme does not contain any new component. The emphasis is on
implementing the pledges made earlier.

It seems likely, therefore, that the present strategy will continue
at least till the end of the Fifth Plan. Even if the strategy is
modified due to unexpected developments, area planning will continue to
occupy an important place. In all likelihood the present package may be
further expanded to include a larger variety of area programmes, some
designed to develop the "target area", some to provide benefits to the
"reference group" and some to achieve both these goals simultaneously.
The training of district-level functionaries needs to be examined
keeping this possibility in view.

II. Training of District Level Project Executives

Project executives manning these programmes at the district level
are usually drawn from two categories of services, viz., the Indian
Administrative Service (IAS) and the State Civil Service. Each state
has its own force of civil servants who are recruited and trained by the
state and posted within the state. The IAS officials on the other hand
are recruited and trained by the centre. All of them are required to
spend some part of their career in a district, and they usually head
the district administration. Most project executives heading the
special area programmes whether at the state or the district level, also
belong to this cadre.

IAS officers receive more intensive training than civil servants
recruited by the states. As probationers, they receive training at the
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, and the state
civil servants at the state training institutions. The focus of training
in both cases is on 'general administration', which covers a wide variety
of subjects such as Humanities, Social Sciences, Law and Order, District
Administration, and Planning.

General administration being the focus, there is no significant
relationship between these training programmes and the strategies of rural
development adopted in the country. This does not mean that there has been
no attempt to adapt the training programmes to meet new needs. For
example, following the recent emphasis on district as the unit of area
planning, Phase II of the IAS professional course has been expanded to
include a capsule course on "Management of District Development Programmes".[16]

The scope for modifying the "general administration" oriented
training programmes being limited, short term courses of specialized nature
have become the main instrument of establishing linkages between training
and special programmes of rural development. These courses are offered by
a handful of professional training institutions such as Indian Institute of
Public Administration, the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad,
the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, and the National Institute
of Community Development. Table 2 gives some of the courses they conducted
during 1975-76, their duration, contents, etc.

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[16]The LBS Academy has been conducting this course in collaboration with
the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

Table 2

A Synoptic View of Some Selected Training Programmes for "High Level" Rural Development.

Institute/Programme	Duration (days)	Official Status of Trainees	Programme Contents
1	2	3	4
IIPA			
District Planning	11	State & district planning officers, and officers of district development departments.	Planning, land reforms, agricultural development, and administration.
Tribal Development Administration (TDA)	11	State and district level officers connected with TDA	Strategy, agricultural programmes, credit, marketing, cottage industries, health education, programme administration, etc.
IIMA			
Capsule course on "Management of District Development Programmes" (in collaboration with LBS National Academy of Administration)	20	IAS Probationers (Phase II)	
Management of Rural Development Programmes	14	Central, state, and district officials connected with rural development, district level project executives of special area programmes, district credit officers of nationalized banks, etc.	Strategies of rural development, rural environment, strategic choices, technology, organization, project formulation, management techniques, programme evaluation, development administration, etc.

Table 2 (contd)

1	2	3	4
IIMB			
Management of Rural Develop- ment	NA	NA	NA
Programme for Agri Change	NA	NA	NA
NICD			
Area Development and Rural Growth	30	State and district level planning officers, heads of district development depar- tments, university teachers, bank officials, etc.	Current development programmes, identification of growth cent- res, and planning for agricul- tural development.
Command Area Programme	30	Senior Officers of Command Area Projects	Approach and general aspects, techno-agronomic aspects, and planning and organization.
Rural Development for Weaker Sections	21	State and district level administrators, and MLAs.	NA
Communication for Rural Development	30	Senior and middle level executives	NA

A Critical Appraisal

Useful though these courses are, most of them do not improve significantly the trainee's ability to prepare and asminister area programmes. Area planning or integrated area development is a familiar concept. But very few systematic attempts have been made to test and find out how it should be used to prepare specific plans for specific areas. Very few know the art, and fewer still have applied it to develop a body of field-based knowledge which could be used as training material. Until this gap is filled, rural development personnel, whether at higher or lower levels, will hardly have any credibility in training programmes of the type listed in Table 2.

Research to develop training materials is an important requirement. "Research for training requires special qualities. The researcher must constantly confront the question of how his work can be helpful to the trainer. Can his hypotheses and more importantly his findings be translated into a format which can be grasped and used by the civil servant undergoing training?"[17]

The following excerpts from an unpublished paper highlight some other shortcomings:[18]

1 Theoretical Orientation of Trainers: The teaching faculty is
   often theoretically oriented. It has little exposure to and
   understanding of the realities at the operational level, and the
   constraints under which the trainees function. As such, the
   trainees learn little which is of direct relevance to their
   work situation, and are unable to relate classroom learning
   with the job situation.

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[17] C Richard Parkins, "Training and Development: Pragmatics and Predicaments", Indian Journal of Public Administration, XXI, 4, New Delhi, p 704.

[18] VR Gaikwad, Note on New Training Approach for the Management of the District Development Programme, (typescript), Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, 1974.

2 <u>Ill-planned Courses:</u> Some of the institutions are poorly staffed
   and have no specialist faculty on their rolls. Such institutions
   depend heavily on the visiting faculty or guest speakers. These
   guest speakers have no interaction among themselves and with the
   core faculty at the institute. They are also not fully appraised
   of course objectives, its structure and content, and how their
   contribution fits into the total design. Course content and class
   schedules are often adjusted to suit the convenience of these guest
   speakers at the cost of optimal academic sequencing. As such,
   there is no systematic organization of the course and integration
   of content or various course components.

3 <u>Short Duration:</u> The training programmes are of short duration
   during which too many subjects are covered. The trainees' expos-
   ure to new concepts and techniques is very short. They get little
   time to internalize the new techniques. The result is that most
   of the trainees only pick up a few technical jargons and super-
   ficial knowledge of some management tools and techniques such as
   PERT and CPM, performance budgeting, and social cost-benefit
   analysis. Few develop confidence in applying these in their work
   situation after completion of training.

4 <u>Ad hoc Selection of Trainees:</u> More often than not, only those
   officers who can be spared, or are not immediately 'wanted', are
   sent for training. There is no deliberate manpower planning
   policy and personnel development.

5 <u>Assorted Group:</u> There is no deliberate, purposive selection of
   trainees. Officers from unrelated fields form the group of
   trainees. Programmes having such an assorted group of trainees
   do not have any clear focus.

A word of caution before we conclude. Training constitutes only one input into the administrative process. By itself it can neither alter nor transform or even reform the existing structures and patterns of administration. Training experts can, at best, hope to play a more decisive role in the administrative system not by positing a set of characteristics as the _sin quo non_ of a good development administrator but by gaining more knowledge about how these properties develop in the system itself.