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# Technical Report

MANAGEMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMMES: ORGANIZATIONAL  
DEFICIENCIES AND STRATEGIES FOR  
IMPROVEMENT

By  
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ABSTRACT (within 250 words)

The main burden of managing Rural Development Programmes  
fall on the District Administration which is operating unit  
of the government for specified region. The district Admini-  
stration being an integral part of larger administrative system,  
suffers from the various maladies effecting the larger system.  
While the overall nature of deficiencies in Indian bureaucracy  
is well-known, little is known about how these deficiencies  
affect the implementation process. This paper examines the  
administrative process to bring out whether some structural  
and organisational changes at the district level alone would be  
able to improve the efficiency of the machinery. It highlights  
some of the administrative processes that generally affect the  
performance of various management tasks at the district level  
and examines the different approaches for introducing structural  
changes in the system for improving its efficiency.

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MANAGEMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES:  
ORGANIZATIONAL DEFICIENCIES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

V.R. Gaikwad\*

I

A sizable portion of our national resources is spent on development programmes in rural areas. The main burden of managing these development programmes falls on the district administration which, in a sense, is an operating unit of the government for a specified region. In addition to law and order and revenue administration, it is responsible for the implementation of various development activities at the local management unit level in keeping with the overall state and national level programme goals.

Poor performance in the past on the development front has been attributed mainly to administrative deficiencies.<sup>1</sup> The many critical observations on the working of the executive machinery reveal that the symptoms of administrative deficiencies are many and varied, structural and organizational, and manifest themselves in numerous forms, at different levels during the execution of programmes.<sup>2</sup> There are also other symptoms which draw attention mainly to the 'pathologies and dysfunctions' of bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> The district administration, being an integral part of the larger administrative system, suffers from the same maladies affecting the larger system. Its overall record of execution of development programmes is not an enviable one.

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<sup>1</sup> For references on this topic see, V.R. Gaikwad, "Execution of Agricultural Development Programmes and Administrative Deficiencies," Behavioural Sciences and Community Development, III, 2, (September, 1969), pp.101-113.

<sup>2</sup> These, in general, could be: "Want of clarity or decision at policy-making level; wrong juxtaposition in which power is divorced from responsibility; because rules and regulations changing the officers and men are inapt and ill-conceived; because at appropriate levels of reference a ready machinery for a decisive resolving of differences does not exist." Seminar 85, (September 1966), p.13.

<sup>3</sup> For example, according to Dube, "The major symptoms of the malady are-- failure to take decisions at the appropriate level, passing the buck, roping in others in decision-making, equivocal recommendations, anticipating what the boss wants, rationalization of failures, underplaying the essentials and magnifying the grandiose, covering the failure of smaller utopias with projection of larger utopias, and out-right sycophancy." See, S.C.Dube, "Bureaucracy and Economic Development," Indian Journal of Public Administration, XII, 3, (July-September, 1966), p.349.

While the overall nature of deficiencies in Indian bureaucracy is well-known, little is known about how these deficiencies affect the implementation process; at what level of organization and at what stage of implementation these are most likely to originate, and in what form; under what conditions these could germinate most easily; at what stage or level, and in what form, their effect is likely to be most pronounced; whether the effect of different deficiencies originating at different levels and stages and having different forms is cumulative or otherwise?

An examination of administrative processes on these lines would suggest whether some structural and organizational changes at the district level alone would be able to improve the efficiency of the machinery. This paper is an attempt in this direction. It highlights some of the administrative processes that generally affect the performance of various management tasks at the district level, and examines different approaches for introducing structural changes in the system for improving its efficiency.

## II

In general, the basic management tasks for any activity are planning, organizing, staffing, monitoring, and control and evaluation. These tasks are performed in relation to a specific activity or a combination of activities and in relation to a given environment. I will now discuss how certain processes affect the performance of these tasks at the district level.

### 1. Planning

#### 1.1 Centralized Planning

District administration has always been treated as an operating unit of the government and as such has not been involved in the planning and formulation of development programmes.<sup>4</sup> These two tasks are essentially performed at the central ministry level. Even the state level functionaries contribute little to these tasks. For example, major

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<sup>4</sup>It is only recently that some efforts are being made in some states to have district level planning. Even in these efforts there is no planning at the district level in the real sense of the term.

programmes and schemes such as the Community Development Programme, Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP), Key Village Scheme (KVS), Intensive Cattle Development Programme (ICDP), Applied - Nutrition Programme (ANP), have been planned and formulated at the central government level. Generally, at the time of launching a programme, the central ministry functionaries call a special meeting or a seminar of the state directors of agriculture or animal husbandry, as the case may be, to discuss and approve the already planned and formulated programme. There is a standard, stereotyped recommendation that the programme should be modified "to suit the local conditions" in the state and in different areas in the state. However, more often than not, this recommendation remains on paper. The states do not seem to have any freedom to explore the possible alternative ways of achieving the primary objectives of the programmes. Thus, a programme in its standardized, stereotyped, 'all-India' form is implemented at the state level, without any consideration being given to the special conditions prevailing in the various regions of the state.

#### 1.2 Overdependences on Foreigners for Ideas

An analysis of the genesis of various schemes, will reveal that not many development programmes have originated in the minds of central ministry functionaries. There has been an overdependence on Western experts working with various foreign agencies for ideas on developmental programmes. For example, the Community Development Programme, IADP, ICDP, Growth Centre Projects, ANP, and recent efforts in rural development are all the creation of experts working with foreign foundations and agencies. Often the foreign experts and agencies do the detailed planning and formulation of these programmes which they submit to the central government along with financial support and which are often accepted by the government in toto. Thus, foreign experts have influenced materially the planning and execution of the development programmes. Many of these experts do not have a deep understanding of the traditional culture and institutions of India, orientations of the local people, and limitations of the administrative machinery in India. As such, it is difficult for them to realize the environmental constraints under which the new programmes and techniques would be introduced, and the corresponding pressures on the administrative machinery at the operating level. The foreign experts mainly emphasize the technical virtuosity, while in the course of implementation, central and state level functionaries depend upon rhetoric ignoring the practical, operational issues.

### 1.3 Introduction of Premature Schemes

A technology by itself cannot give results. A new technology because of its sophistication and excellent performance (often under clinical conditions, as in Western countries) is extremely exciting and attractive to technicians, scientists and administrators of developing countries. However, it is often forgotten that in its wake of a new technology brings new technological problems, and that for optimum utilization it requires a new administrative culture and system of working. As such its application has to be selective and operationally tested, at least in the initial stages.

Such an approach has not been generally followed while planning and formulating development programmes. At the state level no questions are raised by the technicians or administrators about the practicability and validity of the line of approach suggested in the model schemes developed by Western experts and accepted by the central government functionaries. The culture of the existing system seems to be such that questions from state level functionaries are either not appreciated or are ignored by the central level functionaries.

The effect of centralized planning and of overdependence on Western experts for ideas is that it discourages any creativity at the state level and below. A scheme originating at the central ministry level becomes a non-plan scheme after the plan period. Every Five Year Plan brings out numerous programmes tailor-made for the states. After a number of plan periods almost all the major programmes operated by the states are those which had their origin in the central ministry. These programmes are implemented year after year by the district administration as recommended by the central officials without any contribution from the state and district level functionaries.

## 2. Organization of Work

### 2.1 Lack of Emphasis on the Primary Task

A number of development programmes require a systematic interlinking of various activities in terms of time and space, especially at the operating level. For example, the Intensive Cattle Development Programme (ICDP) involves the coordination of such activities as breeding, castration, fodder development, raising of calves, and medical facilities. A coordinated, integrated approach does not necessarily mean that all the component and link activities should be taken up simultaneously.

However, in the name of an integrated, intensive, coordinated approach, there is emerging a tendency to take up many activities simultaneously. In the process of implementation, often there is no logical, systematic integration of activities over time and space. There is no correct perception of the linkages among various schemes. In the integrated approach there is a great danger of losing sight of the primary task or core activity which is the soul of the programme. More often than not the primary task becomes of secondary importance because it is difficult to achieve, and 'soft' activities take precedence and are emphasized. Failure on the key activity front is generally obscured by a dense fog of statistics about achievements on secondary, link activities which are routine and simple in nature.

There are three main reasons for the lack of integration of activities. First, the empirical basis of assumptions regarding link activities in an integrated approach is often vague and undefined. Second, there is lack of understanding of the coordinated approach behind a programme on the part of functionaries. Finally, there is a common desire to spread the programme in as many villages as possible. All these reasons taken together result in the implementation of various activities of a programme as ends in themselves rather than as components of a coordinated programme.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 Failure to Prepare Operational Plans

For most of the development programmes there is no operational plan (detailed programme of work) worth the name. Generally, no time is earmarked for the preparation of such a plan and for preparatory work like conducting a benchmark survey and recruitment of staff. Even when a plan of work is prepared, it is completely ignored at the time of implementation. A detailed plan of work provides answers to such questions as who would do what, when, how, where, and at what cost. It works out the stages through which a programme would be implemented. The recommended stages generally give a development sequence to the programme. Unless the first stage is successfully implemented, the success of the second stage cannot be assured. In the absence of such an exercise, operational planning is reduced to a mere annual, expenditure-oriented, budgeting exercise.

The system's indifference to operational planning can be seen from the lack of adequate operational mechanisms for such an exercise at the central and state levels. The system as it exists today does not lend itself to operational planning, identifying gaps and needs, monitoring new developments, and providing a broad framework within which activities could be planned.

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<sup>5</sup>For an understanding of the difficulties faced in the implementation of an integrated programme, see, G.M. Desai, and V.R. Gaikwad, Applied Nutrition Programme: An Evaluation Study, (Ahmedabad, Indian Institute of Management, 1971).



### 2.3 Ad hoc Workload on the Staff

Lack of operational planning results in the inefficient organization of work activities. For example, in the absence of detailed planning, the activities of and the workload on field level functionaries are increased and changed in an ad hoc fashion. Officers at the higher level are aware of the difficulties faced by the field level functionaries for say, accommodation and transportation. However, the system operates in such a way that they have to turn a blind eye to this and not raise questions. In the course of implementation the field staff is often instructed to do work which the officers know the field staff will not be able to do efficiently. But the system demands that instructions must be given from time to time and duly recorded. Hence, the instructions are given and recorded. Here the administrator depends upon rhetoric. Whether the instructions are followed in spirit or not is not important. Often the subordinate staff ignores the instructions, or when too much pressure is given, takes the instructions on their face value, and provides information to satisfy the higher-ups.

## 3. Organization and Personnel

### 3.1 Lack of Manpower Planning

The system does not seem to feel the need for manpower planning. This may be because there is no long term plan of activities. Programmes are accepted and implemented often without regard to availability of qualified and trained personnel. There is also little planning for the programme-oriented development of functionaries. In the absence of long term planning of activities and corresponding manpower planning, the expansion of schemes is generally done on an ad hoc basis. In a system where manpower planning is absent, the functionaries have no clear idea about promotional chances in the organization other than the routine ones. This in turn lowers their motivation for the achievement of results.

### 3.2 Overdependence on Lower Level Functionaries

It has been often pointed out that the field staff does not have a clear understanding of the scope and objectives of the programme. In terms of technical knowledge and skills there is a gulf between the controlling officers and the subordinate field staff, especially those working at the village level. Often it is hoped that through a short training course this gulf will be reduced; that results will be achieved by

depending upon the unqualified, though somewhat trained field staff. This overdependence upon a large number of unqualified field staff who work in remote villages in isolation is mainly responsible for the failure of many programmes. In the hierarchy bound system the 'dirty work' is left to the field staff, while the officers are busy with inspection and administrative work.

### 3.3 Acute Differentiation of Functions

The existing organization is based on a high differentiation of functions both vertically and horizontally. It is not amicable to the coordination of activities. Task-oriented development programmes require team work for achieving results. In the highly stratified differentiated, multi-grade organization, such team work is extremely difficult at the operating level. As it stands today, the organization for the implementation of any programme follows the stereotyped pattern based on compartmentalization of activities and on the strict hierarchy concept. Each activity head is given a set of supporting staff not necessarily according to work load but primarily according to the set norms relating to status of the officer in the culture of the organization. The set of supporting staff thus becomes the overt indicator or symbol of status, and this is jealously guarded. As such, the functions, even when common to all activities, can not be brought together, and the establishment cost increases considerably. There is ample evidence to prove that highly stratified, differentiated structures have not always achieved the expected results. It seems that for task-oriented, development programmes there is need to evolve new organization designs.

### 3.4 High Establishment Cost

In most of the development programmes a major portion of funds is spent on establishment, which covers the pay, dearness allowance, honorarium, and travelling and other allowances of the officers and staff. The ratio of establishment cost to total expenditure varies according to the primary objective of and nature of operations involved in the programme. If the primary objective is production-oriented, the major allocation of funds would be for productive activities. If it is extension-oriented, the major allocation would be for establishment. It is, however, found that even in primarily production-oriented programmes the establishment cost sometimes forms more than 60 per cent of the total expenditure. In integrated, coordinated programmes of development such as ICDP where both extension and production components are present, the tendency is to spend more on extension

activities the impact of which cannot be evaluated easily, and less on production activities which can be easily measured. Such integrated, coordinated programmes are run at a very high establishment cost with little or no production benefits.

In a situation where a major portion of the expenditure is on pay and allowances of the establishment, and only a minor portion is earmarked for primary, productive activities, the energy and time of functionaries is spent in routine administrative work involving meetings, pay bills, leave sanctions, transfers, and so on. In other words, the functionaries spend most of their time in creating work for each other and 'administrating' each other. Their activities have no bearing on the primary tasks for which they were originally employed.

### 3.5 Multiple Roles and Diffused Accountability

In a development programme, functionaries from various levels are involved in the decision making process. From the directorate are involved functionaries operating at various levels such as officer in-charge of the programme at the state level, and the regional directors and deputy directors. At the district level are involved functionaries such as the collector, (district development officer in Maharashtra and chief executive officer in Gujarat) and other district level officers such as the district agricultural officer. At the block level the block development officer is involved. In states where panchayati raj institutions operate, various subject matter committees are involved. In each case the functionaries simultaneously handle a number of activities and play multiple roles. The system operates in such a manner that accountability is confused. Due to the involvement of many levels of personnel and due to the multiple roles of many functionaries, it is not possible to hold a single person responsible in case of failure of the programme.

## 4. Financial Planning and Resource Allocation

### 4.1 Lack of Long Term Planning

At the time of preparation of the model scheme for a major development programme the financial outlay for the entire duration of the programme is worked out. However, at the operational level there is no financial planning for the entire duration of the project. For every financial year, the project officer or the district level officer in-charge of the programme is asked to furnish data relating to the requirement of

funds by way of draft annual budgets. In the light of the funds allocation, for various activities, decided upon earlier, this budget is scrutinized and approved after appropriate modifications to the extent required by financial constraints.

#### 4.2 Lack of Result Orientation

The resource allocation process is essentially related to the objective of expenditure control. There is no linking of physical achievements and expenditure on it. No efforts are made to work out the satisfactory level of economic performance in terms of resource use. In general, there is no cost consciousness. The budget does not spell out the specific time targets for the accomplishment of activities and the planned progress during the programme period. The focus is primarily on expenditure control rather than on achievement reporting of various activities and of the total programme in relation to expenditure. All the financial statements relate to funds sanctioned, essentially with a view to forecast the requirements of funds during the remaining months of the budget period.

Since the financial planning system is essentially expenditure control-oriented, it does not provide data or ask for quantified targets in relation to predetermined objectives to be achieved. Since a periodic measurement of performance in relation to the predetermined objective is not possible in such circumstances, decisions relating to remedial actions to be taken in areas of shortfall and to the expansion of activities are essentially impressionistic in nature. Thus, the planning, measurement of performance, and reporting systems do not provide the required degree of management control.

### 5. Monitoring and Control

#### 5.1 Information Gathering without Focus

Every development programme generates a mass of information through various statements and reports. The information is primarily generated at the lowest level, and the same is consolidated at various levels of administration before being passed on in the form of quarterly, six-monthly, and annual progress reports to the state and central level functionaries.

Generally, the purpose and utility of the information called for is not clear to the functionaries at the lower levels. They collect information mechanically, without understanding its usefulness, and hence, without any sense of involvement. Since little statistical analysis of data is done at any level, they receive little feedback from the higher levels which would help them in understanding the meaning and relevance of the work they do.

The content and form of information collected is such that there is no systematic and logical linking of information with the primary objectives of the programme. The existing reporting system does not give any idea whether the resources are utilized effectively and efficiently for attaining the predetermined objectives. In the reporting system no distinction is made between the activity and the objectives behind the activity.

In the reporting system there is no linking of resources utilization and results achieved. Periodical progress reports cover only technical and physical activities. Financial statements are treated separately and handled independently by the accounts sections at various levels. At no level are the two analysed together.

There is little evidence that the mass of information gathered periodically is ever meaningfully utilized in the decision making processes. The information is collected for the purpose of keeping records and not as an instrument for decision making and control.

### 5.2 No Learning from Past Experiences

The bureaucratic system demands the regular transfer of administrators. The continuation of operations can only be achieved through strict adherence to rules and procedures laid down and directions given in the past. However, rules and procedures help only in the continuation of operations. They do not help in learning from past experience. The system does not learn from old mistakes till it is too late. In this sense the system has no quick memory. Since the system has no in-built memory cells which could retrieve past experience quickly, and give advance signals to guard against possible mistakes, it continues to repeat old mistakes.

### 5.3 Aversion for Hard Decisions

In the government system the evaluation process is ponderous and time-consuming, involving various committees. Often, as in case of planning, the evaluation exercises begin at the central government level.

In general, reports of evaluation committees are ambiguous. There is a clear tendency to avoid making sharp, clear-cut observations or suggesting drastic remedies. Even when sharp, drastic remedies are suggested, these are not appreciated by the system. Such suggestions are either ignored or their importance is reduced by appointing another committee to look into the matter, and by various delay tactics.

It is difficult to take hard decisions in a government system due to many reasons. In evaluation the government system avoids sharp, clear-cut observations because it seems to perceive that when it will be called upon to take decisions, it will have only two alternatives, viz., take a drastic step and close down the activity altogether, or allow the machinery to work in the same old fashion and tolerate the inefficiency.

In general, the evaluation committees depend upon inter-unit comparison of performance; they do not measure performance against any scientifically worked out indices of performance directly related to the primary objective of the scheme. Generally, the evaluation report does not mention what is to be achieved in clear, specific terms. Though evaluation targets are fixed to tighten the machinery, as there are no specific goals, no functionary knows how near or far he is from the goals. Since goals are not clearly defined in concrete terms the scheme goes on year after year, without any end in sight. In such a system, the sense of achievement is absent among functionaries even when short term targets are achieved. It also does not develop a sense of concern when results are not achieved. This ultimately leads to a complete lack of result-orientation.

### III

The above discussion indicates that managerial efficiency is considerably influenced by the overall structure of the organization and by the various administrative processes. As such the district level administration alone cannot be held responsible for all the failures. As it stands today the district administration is an integral part of the national administrative structure. The administrative and financial rules and regulations, procedures and methods of work, the personnel policy, and the reward, punishment, and evaluation system followed by it are not basically different from those followed

by the overall system at other levels, units of administrations, and for other activities of the government. Thus, for all operational purposes the district administration has no distinct identity and ethos of its own.

Deficiencies in the administrative apparatus can be removed by making deliberate structural changes, and by developing the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes among the functionaries handling development programmes. The three possible approaches available for introducing structural changes are discussed below.

1. Compartmentalization Approach: Under this approach, development administration would be compartmentalized, i.e., there would be de-linking of development administration at the district level from the national administrative system by having something like an autonomous corporation for development activities with its own rules and regulations and personnel policy. The assumption here is that district development activities are similar to any other public sector industrial enterprise and could be organized on a similar line. This approach is weak both at the conceptual level and in terms of practical application. A public sector industrial enterprise has, comparatively speaking, a very narrow focus with a single objective. The task before it is simple, namely, production of a particular product, or providing a specific service. On the other hand, rural development is extremely complex. It has multiple objectives, multiple activities, a very large client population having diverse interests and characteristics. There is also the complex interaction of law and order and development which such a corporation cannot handle. This approach is not acceptable for one more reason. Such a corporation would completely disintegrate the historically developed national administrative apparatus which today operates right from the national level to the villages in every corner of the country. Disintegration of the national administrative system would have far-reaching political implications which have to be kept in mind. Autonomous district development corporations would weaken the authority of the central government. The contribution of the national administrative system to national integration cannot be ignored.

2. Organic Approach: This approach considers that the existing administrative system is an organic whole and therefore demands 'whole-scale' therapy. This whole-scale therapy approach is different from the approach followed by various administrative reforms commissions.

The commissions generally look into various activities and functions at different levels separately and give a very large number of suggestions, without making any efforts to link these in any logical fashion. In the organic approach the attempt would be to go to the origin of the disease. This would require first a comprehensive mapping of administrative functioning to isolate the 'key' seats of maladies, and then the suggesting a few key suitable remedial actions. Once the 'key' seats of maladies in the overall national administrative system are isolated and attacked, it would have a snow-ball effect, and in the process would introduce suitable changes at every level of administration including the district level. The main problem in this approach is the identification of 'key' seats of maladies and a thorough understanding of the possible repercussion of key changes on the overall working of the machinery.

**3. Self-induced Change Approach:** This approach is based on three assumptions: a) it is easy to introduce structural changes in an organization when need for change is felt by the functionaries operating the system; in other words, structural changes would evolve out of the felt needs of the functionaries themselves; b) structural changes in a running concern should be in stages over a period of time because the functionaries being the same, they would require time for adjustment of role relations; and c) in an administrative system which is an organic whole, changes at any one level would induce changes in the entire system over a period of time.

Under this approach, first, the awareness of the need for change has to be created, followed by suitable changes in rules and procedures which in turn would lead to be ultimately crystallized in the form of structural changes over a period of time. The awareness of the need for change can be created by introducing administrative and management techniques in the district administration which are different from the existing ones. Once the functionaries try to adopt new techniques, they would become acutely aware of the need for changes in the system, and are likely to exert pressure for suitable changes in the traditional procedures, and ultimately in the structure of the organization. Since initially such pressures would generate slowly and involve small changes in limited areas of operation, the higher level functionaries are likely to react favourably to the demands for change as and when required. Efforts have to be made simultaneously through suitable training programmes, so that the functionaries at the higher levels can appreciate the relevance of new techniques, and react favourably to the demands for change. Structural changes will not bring results



unless new tools and techniques are adopted at all levels of the organization. To be effective these two processes must be synchronized.

This approach is likely to succeed because a) there would be no sudden radical structural changes and hence there would be low resistance to change, b) the existing activities would not be disrupted, c) the organic link with the national administration system would not be disturbed, and d) many of the trained district level functionaries would eventually be posted to the higher tiers of administration and would support changes. This in turn would accelerate changes in the system over a period of time.

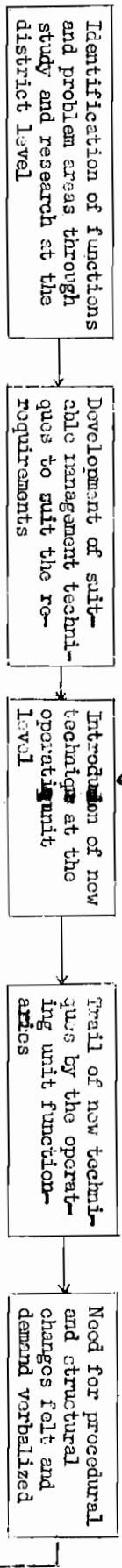
The processes involved in this approach would be as follows:

- Process One: Identification of problem areas and introduction of suitable, new, management techniques.
- Process Two: Trial of new techniques by the functionaries. This in turn would demand corresponding behavioural changes.
- Process Three: Need for changes generated. In the process of trial of new techniques, need for change in the existing procedures and role relationship would be felt, and a demand for change in the organization and structure would be generated from within the operating units.
- Process Four: Response to need for change. Once the need for procedural and structural changes is felt and verbalized, suitable changes can be introduced as and when required on a trial basis.
- Process Five: Internalization of new techniques and skills and adoption of new procedures and role relations on a regular basis.

The broad actions involved in this approach are given in Flow Chart I,

Flow Chart I

Training of functionaries in the use of the new technique



Step 1

Step 2

Step 3 a

Step 4

Step 5

Training to higher-ups in appreciation of new techniques till such time district level trained (step 3a) functionaries reach higher levels in administration

Step 6 a

Review of demand at the higher levels and suitable changes made on trial basis

Evaluation of effectiveness of new techniques and suitable structural changes by higher levels

Sanction for adoption of new techniques & for suitable organizational and structural changes

Extension of new methods & structures to other operating units & other levels of organization

New structures crystallized & new techniques internalized

Step 6 b

Step 7

Step 8

Step 9

Step 10