

Abstract

Title: Tribal Development Administration: A Study of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

Tribal Development Administration

Tribal development administration refers to administration of development project and programs for the all-round development of tribal people and the areas they live in. Since tribal areas present an extremely complex socio-economic situation, it also includes development of administrative machinery in the tribal areas and its capacity to administered development in the face of specific environmental and geographical constraints.

Tribal development administration is not altogether different from development administration in terms of its function. It is the same as that of development administration, in which a system is specially designed to suit to the socio-cultural, economic and political environment of the tribal people. The system has to work under peculiar environmental and geographical conditions and cultural specific areas, catering to the needs and requirement of numerous tribal groups living in different parts of the country. It is only when tribal's interests and rights are protected and respected and they are given the freedom to do whatever they want according to their own genius, some desired change can be brought in the tribal society.

In recent years, tribal development administration has become an important area of research in social science subjects. The subject has acquired immense importance not only at the national but also at the international level. The active support and hectic campaign by a number of national and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), championing the cause of 'indigenous people' has made it a burning issue all over the world. Further, United Nation's declaration of 1993 as the '*International Year for World's Indigenous People*'¹ provides ample evidence of the growing concern of the world's highest body for the development of the indigenous people all over the world.

¹ The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on August 9 each year, to promote and protect the rights of the world's indigenous population. It was first proclaimed by the General Assembly in December 1994.

The Problem

After the independence of India from the colonial rule, the government has adopted various measures for the socio-economic development of tribal. This developmental process is directed towards supporting the underprivileged sections of the society, who for centuries, have suffered humiliation, exploitation and miserable poverty. To achieve this objective, various anti-exploitative and protective measures have been taken. But vulnerable conditions of any community cannot be improved without taking certain positive steps to help them overcome their helplessness caused by their socio-economic backwardness. Keeping this in mind, various legislative and welfare measures have been undertaken by the state to uplift these communities. Since the very beginning of the era of planning, concerted efforts have been made to ameliorates their conditions and raise their levels of social, economic and educational status. The problems of tribal development baffled the policy makers, administrators and social scientists in India, because hunger, starvation, poor shelter and exploitation faced by almost all the tribal groups were crying for immediate, effective solutions.

For the welfare of the tribals, the Constituent Assembly adopted Article 45 of the Constitution of India and assured that ‘the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people in general, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.’² Besides, the ‘Fifth and Sixth Schedules’³ of the Constitution provides special provision for the welfare of tribals.

However, over the years, it has been experienced that the government’s intense efforts to draw these tribes from a subsistence economy into the wider economic frameworks of the country through legislative protection and progressive socio-economic programs have not met with much success. Instead of governmental assistance going to the tribal communities, the old entrenched exploitative elements, have usurped them. The numerous tribal development programs through Five Year Plans and lately the Tribal Sub-

² Constitution of India, Article – ‘46’

³ While the Fifth Schedule is related with the provision as to the administration and control of scheduled areas and schedule tribes in any state other than the State coming under the Sixth Schedule, the Sixth Schedule is related with the provision as to the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. B.L. Hansaria, *Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India*, Vijay Hansaria (ed.), Universal Law Publishing Co., 2010, p. 519

Plan (TSP) have helped the tribes, but marginally. The development process has, in many cases, been instrumental in causing numerous disadvantages; prominent among them being displacement and loss of land – the tribals’ main resource base.⁴ Thousands of tribal families have been evicted by the construction of multi-purpose dams, mining and industrialization.⁵

This brings into question the role of ‘Tribal Development Administration’ established by the Government of India to further improve the socio-economic backwardness of the tribal. The question also arises as to whether there is something wrong with the policy, approach and implementation of development programs related to tribals. Besides, there is also an impression of lack of ‘good governance,’⁶ which refers to the quality of governance that expresses itself through attributes such as accountability, transparency, efficiency, empowerment, participation, sustainability, equity and justice,⁷ in the system of administration and in the institutional structure of tribal development.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on issues related to tribal development administration in Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC). The TTAADC was created under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution to safeguard the constitutional and traditional right of the tribals. Tribal Welfare Department created in the year 1982, is the nodal agency. So, the present study would mainly focus on TTAADC and its impact in promoting the welfare of the tribals, divergence between prescription and practices in the implementation of programs and to find out the nature of relationship between elected local leaders and government officials in executing development works.

⁴ Government of India, *Eight Five Year Plan*, 1992-97, Vol. 2, New Delhi: Planning Commission, p.420

⁵ Achyut Das and Vidhya Das, (1992), *Development of Tribal Women*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 27, No. 27, 4th July.

⁶ ‘Good governance’ enters the lexicon of Public Administration since the nineteen eighties. Third World government are ‘soft’ on policy implementation, there is an absence of proper accounting and budgetary system, widespread corruption, and general lack of popular participation due to public apathy and misinformation. So, informal, non-governmental mechanism, community and voluntary organization are found better for public needs or for solving community problems. Non-Governmental organization working in the developmental sector has opened up the possibility of governance without government.

⁷ Hasnat Abdul Hye, (2001). *Good Governance: A Social Contract for the New Millennium*, in Hye’s (ed.), *Governance: South Asian Perspective*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, p. 7.

With a view to fulfil the aspirations of the tribals to have autonomy and administer themselves, the Tripura Legislative Assembly passed a resolution on 19th March, 1982, and another on 11th February, 1983 urging the Government of India to apply the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the tribal areas of the State of Tripura. Accordingly, the Constitution was amended by the 49th Amendment Act, 1984 and the provisions of the Sixth Schedule were made applicable to the tribal areas of Tripura.⁸

Objectives of the Study

The following are the main objectives of the present study:

- 1) To study the structures and functions of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council;
- 2) To examine the mode of implementation of development programs of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council; and
- 3) To discuss the relationship between government officials and elected representatives.

Research Questions

Based on research objectives, research questions have been framed. The following question is therefore, addressed and analyzed in the present study.

- 1) To what extent Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council has performed the powers and functions entrusted to it?
- 2) What are the different impediments faced by the Council in the implementation of development programs?
- 3) What is the level of cooperation and communication between government officials and elected representatives?

Locale of the Study

The present study area is the entire Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), which is within the State of Tripura. Unlike autonomous district council in other Indian north-eastern State, it is not geographically location specific in case of Tripura. The area of the district council straddles across the entire State of Tripura.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 181

The District Council is divided into four Zones – West Zone, South Zones, North Zone, Dhalai Zone ⁹ each coterminous with revenue districts of Tripura. Each Zone is further sub-divided into 33 (thirty three) Sub-Zones, extending to all 8 (eight) revenue districts of the State – North Tripura, Unakoti, Dhalai, West Tripura, Khowai, Gomati, Sepahijala, and South Tripura. They are, except for a few, coterminous with the boundaries of R. D. Blocks. There are 52 (fifty two) Rural Development Blocks (R.D. Blocks) in the State. 23 (twenty three) R.D. Blocks are entirely within Sixth Schedule areas known as TTAADC Blocks and 23 (twenty three) R.D. Blocks are within the jurisdiction of both Sixth Schedule and Panchayat areas. The remaining 6 (six) R.D. Blocks are entirely outside TTAADC areas.

Methodology of the Study

The study is empirical in nature and both quantitative and qualitative method is used in the present study.

Sampling Procedures:

In the present study, one chapter (implementation of development programs) is basically based on primary data collected through fieldworks, and accordingly, multistage purposive sampling is followed to select the sampling unit. That is, sampling is carried out in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage.

Selection of Zones:

Taking into consideration the population, concentration of different communities, accessibility and the economic conditions, two Zones namely West Zone and North Zone are selected for the purpose of study. West Zone is located within the revenue district of West Tripura and Gomati District and the Headquarters of TTAADC Khwmulwng, is also located within West Zone. North Zone is within the revenue district of North Tripura and Unakoti District, and is the furthest Zone form the TTAADC Headquarters, Khumulwng. In terms of tribal population, West Zone is most populated and North Zone is most thinly populated (Zone-wise distribution of population is given in chapter 3).

⁹ From 2014, one new Zone has been created namely, Khowai Zone, which is bifurcated firm West Zone. But for the purpose of present study earlier record would be used for analysis.

Selection of Sub-Zones:

After selection of Zones, it is followed by the second sampling stage, which is the selection of Sub-Zones. One Sub-zone is selected from each selected Zones, taking into consideration the geographical location, distance from the Zonal Office and their socio-economic standard of living in general. Accordingly, Khumulwng Sub-Zone from West Zone, and Noagang Sub-zone from North Zone were purposively selected, taking into consideration the above mentioned factors. Khumulwng Sub-Zone is located within West Zone and economically most developed as compared to other Sub-Zone.

Whereas, Noagang Sub-Zone is one of the furthest Sub-Zone and economically most backward area comprising the hill ranges of Assam-Tripura border. In terms of population it is the least of all the other Sub-Zones within North Zone. (Name of Sub-Zones that comes under the jurisdiction of North Zone is given chapter 3). While there are only 7 (seven) VCs under Noagang Sub-Zone, Khumulwng Sub-Zone have 28 (twenty eight) VCs under its jurisdiction.

Selection of ADC Village and Respondent:

The third stage in the sampling process consists of the selection of VC and family beneficiaries for collection of primary data. Before selecting VCs and respondents, comprehensive study has been made on different development schemes and projects which are implemented by the Council. Thus, village-wise and programme-wise lists of beneficiaries were obtained from Sub-Zonal Office of the selected Sub-Zone and from Headquarters of TTAADC Khumulwng, Agartala.

Accordingly, a total of six VCs have been selected for the present study, taking three VCs from each Sub-Zone. The three selected VCs from Noagang Sub-Zone are Indurail VC, Noagang VC and Zoitang VC. Similarly, three selected VC from Khumulwng Sub-Zone are Jirania Khola VC, Dupchhera VC and Santi Nagar VC. The selection bases were the same as the selection of Zone and Sub-Zone.

Having selected VCs, family beneficiaries were selected through purposive sampling. Numbers of beneficiaries interviewed, could not be same among different selected VCs. It varies depending on the availability of beneficiaries and programs selected for study. So, a total of 60 (sixty) beneficiaries were selected for the present

study. Question could arise as to why number of beneficiaries is restricted to only 60. Because, unlike state level development programs, beneficiary under TTAADC generated programs are few in numbers and hence, difficult to have physical contact with them. While selecting the family beneficiaries due care has been taken as to whether they are the recipient of family beneficiary. Attempts were made to include diverse section of tribal beneficiary.

In addition, elected VC Chairperson and Members of six selected VCs were also interviewed with structured questionnaire. The pattern of selection is same as that of beneficiary. A total of 26 (twenty six) elected VC Chairperson and Members were interviewed with structured interview schedule comprising of both closed and open ended questions.

Thus, interviews with structured interview schedule were conducted with the following categories of respondents:

1. Representative at VC level; and
2. Beneficiaries of different development programs.

Besides, informal discussions were conducted with government officials and non-beneficiaries. Through the discussion, attempt has been made to find out their views and opinions. They were approach with checklist and open-ended questions to verify the authenticity of answers provided by beneficiary and VC Members. Those officials include Principal Officers (POs), Zonal Development Officers (ZDOs), Sub-Zonal Development Officers (SZDOs), and other officials of Zonal Office and Sub-Zonal Office. Besides, discussions were also made with few Members of District Council (MDCs).

After making a typology of all the development programs the following four such family-oriented income generating programs, which are TTAADC own generated programs and is sustainable in nature were selected for study: (1) Rubber Plantation Scheme; (2) Improved method of Jhum (Shifting) Cultivation; (3) Fish Productivity and Fishery Extension Schemes, and (4) Kuroiler Farming Scheme. Those beneficiaries who got assistance within the year 2011 - 2013, were selected for the present study. In selecting the programs for the study, emphasis is being given on family-oriented income generating

schemes implemented by the Council. Selections have been made keeping in mind the possibility of maximum coverage of rural tribal population.

Sources of Data:

Information is collected both from primary and secondary sources. Personal interview is conducted with the beneficiaries. Besides, discussion with elected representative of Autonomous District Council and departmental officials has been used as sources of primary data in the present research. The published materials available in the form of books, journals, seminar papers have been consulted for secondary information.

In order to understand the legal frameworks of the different policies and schemes adopted by the government of India for tribal development administration, the Act and Rules issued by the government since Independence were consulted. The reports of the various commissions, committees and study teams conducted by the Union and State Government were also consulted for obtaining information about the structural and functional aspect of the Autonomous District Council. The Census data of 2011, conducted by the Government of India, has been taken as reference for figuring population and percentages.

Organization of Chapters

The present study is organized into six chapters which are as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Approaches and Policies of Tribal Development Administration in India
3. Structures and Functions of TTAADC
4. Implementation of Development Programs of TTAADC
5. Relationship between Representative and Official of TTAADC
6. Findings and Recommendations

Major Findings

There is lack of role clarity among different administrative units of TTAADC. Sub-Zonal Development Office, which is a replica of R.D. Block, is found to be a titular body with minimal administrative power and acute financial constraint. It could be either empowered or restructured.

The process of sharing of Member of District Council (MDC) seats within the Council proof to be vague. Twenty five seats are kept reserved for tribals and three seats are kept unreserved. But, both in the jurisdiction of TTAADC and non-TTAADC areas, there is huge cross-settlement of tribals and non-tribal population. In view of this, tribal groups are expressing apprehensions of losing their reserved seats in future in case of delimitation of MDC constituencies are undertaken.

In addition, out of twenty eight MDC seats, female were given only three seats. This indicates the negligence given to women representation within TTAADC. However, one interesting fact is that, at VC level, 50 percent reservation is given to women, which is a clear sign of equal representation. In this regards, TTAADC is well advance to other district council under the Sixth Schedule.

The functioning of Block Advisory Committee (BAC) has not activated and streamlined. The quorum for formation of BAC, in those RD Block having both areas of TTAADC and non-TTAADC areas is 5(five) VCs. However, after delimitation in 2013, 13 (thirteen) new RD Blocks has been created and among the thirteen, 12 (twelve) RD Blocks could not constitute BAC, as the numbers of VC does not reach the quorum. This indicates that, in those VCs where BAC has been dissolved, VC directly comes under the administrative control of Panchayat Samity, which is but against the norms of sixth schedule. If VCs could be administered by Panchayat Samiti, then the role of BAC itself is doubtful.

Governor is inclined of nominating MDCs from only two communities – Lushai and Garo. After interacting with some political leaders it is found that, nomination is done by Governor with extensive influence of CPI(M) political party. Thus, those communities having political bargaining power are found to be continuously nominated.

Customary laws have not been codified by TTAADC. In fact, it is found that system of VC (Village Committee/Village Council) Court is not encouraged in TTAADC. Thus, judicial system is ignored. District Council in Mizoram, Meghalaya have well established system of Village Council and District Council Court.

Powers and functions could be further delegated by addition of more departments at the disposal of TTAADC. For instance, district council like Mara Autonomous District

Council (MADC) and Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) of Mizoram, which are comparatively very small to TTAADC have greater numbers of department at their disposal (28 and 23 department respectively).

The TTAADC's own revenue resources decreased considerably by 53 percent during 2011-2012 financial year, as compared to previous year. This makes the Council very weak in financial matters and accordingly, it fully depends on plan budget of State government.

But, State government in most cases does not release fund to the District Council as per the budget approved by the Council. Transferred fund of State government constituting 40-50 percent (approximately) of TTAADC budget of each year, is basically utilized for salary of deputed staff rather than development purpose.

As per CAG reports, there is rampant corruptions in various levels of TTAADC administrative units. There is no proper mechanism to check corruption. In both TTAADC and State government, CPI(M) is capturing political power. Hence, ruling political party is running the administration without opposition party. There is none to speak a single word against the incumbent party.

From the four selected programs – rubber plantation, jhum cultivation, fish productivity and Kuroiler scheme, it is found that, considerable percentage of beneficiaries got selected without any pre-information. This ensures misidentification and selection of beneficiary. When asked to beneficiary the reasons for their acceptance of a program without being informed of the selection, they report that they have no opportunity to select program of their own choice.

Beneficiaries reported that although selection is done through Village Sansad, it got changed at the time of delivery. Deserved family are often neglected and due importance is given to political party affiliation. As a result, many families who have the capacity in lobbying local political leaders are benefitted consecutively. Powers and functions of Village Sansad/Sabha in TTAADC is weak. The decentralisation process is yet to take final shape in TTAADC.

Huge number of beneficiaries reported their ignorant in implementation of the program in which they are being selected. Out of the unaware beneficiaries many of them reported that they have not undergone any sort of scheme related training. This indicates the indifference of implementing officials towards unaware beneficiaries.

It is also found that few beneficiaries have intentionally skipped program related training organized by concerned department claiming that it is not helpful as the training is organized for formality. They further reported that going to training is merely to give attendance and therefore, does not make much sense of attending such training. However, officials reported the negligence and uncooperative nature of tribal beneficiaries with the officials.

Delivery of cash to beneficiaries shows an act of misappropriations. In few cases, disbursement of fund to beneficiaries is made through bearer cheque. Besides, beneficiaries reported of untimely receiving of program related materials like plant nurseries, which creates unnecessary problems in taking care of those materials. The reason for untimely delivery is because of the negligence of implementing officials and irresponsibility of elected VC Members.

Beneficiaries and elected VC Members reported of insufficiency of unit cost of programs. Excluding jhum cultivation, insufficiency of fund could not be attributed to failure of programs. So, their claim of insufficiency of fund is far-fetched. Beneficiaries reported to have continued with the inadequate fund received or added and extended from own sources. In addition, maximum beneficiaries, with few exceptions, reported of not giving any kinds of commission or bribe in implementation.

Both officials and local VCs seldom visit the worksite and inquire the actual progress of works. In few cases local elected VC Members sometime do the supervisory works and rest works were left to beneficiaries.

The single most important factor for failure of programs is due to beneficiary's lack of awareness. Lack of awareness has bearings in all other aspect like malpractice, misappropriation, etc, by local elected VC Members/implementing officials. Another important factor for failure of programs is untimely delivery of fund and materials. Lastly,

poor supervision of works by officials and VC Members is another cause of program failure.

From the analysis, it is found that the demands of governance – accountability, transparency, efficiency etc, is still lacking at grassroot level of democracy in TTAADC. Decentralisation of powers is being to some extent practiced in TTAADC, but tribals still lack general awareness in regards to schemes and programs. Few local elected VC Members would take an opportunity and monopolized the local administration.

The role of CPI(M) party leader in regards to implementation of programs at grassroot level democracy is also perceptible. Decision in regards to ‘who would get what’ is extensively taken by local party leaders through elected VC Members. Local citizens lack interest to attend and participate in village sansad and village sabha. There is general assumption among the masses that nothing would come out from the meeting.

An important mechanism to check malpractices at village level is the introduction of ‘social audit’ mechanism. But this is absent in TTAADC. In respect to general areas (areas outside TTAADC), State government has a mechanism of ‘social audit’ unit, namely, Society for Social Services Madhya Bharat Chapter (SOSSMBC), a reputed NGO in India. This system is being practiced at grassroot level institute in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. The objective of social audit is to ensure public accountability in the implementation of projects, laws and policies.

It is found that the basic causes of poor relationship of Village Secretary with local elected leaders is because of VC Secretary’s personal disinterest in the affairs of local developmental activities. More interesting fact is that, as the entire areas of TTAADC are comparatively backward and remote than non-TTAADC areas, it is regarded as a place of punishment. Hence, VC Secretaries deem it condescending to get posted to TTAADC areas and consider such postings and transfers as punishment.

In contrast, VC Secretaries reported the poor relationship with VC Chairpersons because of ‘uncooperative nature of tribal elected VC Chairperson.’ This particular reason asserted by VC Secretaries is found to be convincing. In many cases tribals are not at all interested in cooperating government officials. It thereby affects their relationship pattern and poor relationship leads to unsatisfactory cooperation between both parties.

Elected VC Members also reported of poor commitment of VC Secretaries in VC works. One cause of poor commitment is that gram panchayat/VC Secretaries are filled through short term strategies like regularization of staff that has been recruited in an ad hoc manner. These people lack clear knowledge about the way accounts should be maintained and the details regarding the administration of Panchayat/VC. As they lack proper knowledge, they also lose commitment in their daily duties.

Elected VC Members again reported their poor relationship with Sub-Zonal Staff. This is because of absenteeism of officials working in doing their daily duties. Thus, elected VC Chairpersons would not visit Sub-Zonal Office, because officials are not available during office hour. When asked whether they complained to higher authorities against the absence of SZDO staff, they revealed that they had protested against the absence and their complaints did not yield any results.

Similarly, Sub-Zonal Development staffs also reported that they are a ceremonial office in terms of powers and functions. To authenticate their statement, the actual function of Sub-Zonal Office is further analyzed and found that for formality, official staffs were assigned with works but no responsibilities were given.

There is one answer in common both from elected VC Members and Sub-Zonal staff. Neither Sub-Zonal staff regularly make visit nor do VC Chairpersons and Members visit Sub-Zonal Office. Because of such gap of communication between them, all sorts of malfunctions in administration like inadequate cooperation and information to elected VC Members, unaware about various development schemes among VC Chairpersons, problems of coordination in implementation, etc, crop up.

The following suggestions could be made for better functioning of district council in Tripura:

- 1) Power and function of different committees and administrative units of TTAADC should be further clarified. The role clarity would provide better efficiency among government officials and thereby leads to better coordination among the functionaries.

- 2) One problem of tribals in India and for that matter Tripura tribals is related to land alienation. So, TTAADC could be further empowered to make laws for allotment, occupation and use of lands.
- 3) Power could be further delegated in regards to town administration including police, public health, sanitation, social customs and marriage and divorce. Customary laws could be codified and all kinds of trials and suits related to their matters could be left to them.
- 4) Empowerment of women should be further encouraged within TTAADC. They should be given opportunity in different political platform. In addition, women oriented development program could be more implemented at village level.
- 5) TTAADC could also be empowered by raising budget. It would ultimately fulfill the hopes and aspiration of the tribals and avoid further anti-government movement that crippled the process of development.
- 6) Initiatives could be taken by TTAADC to mobilize its own resources for fund raising. In this regards, the state government could lower its share of taxes as against Council, in those resources that are within the jurisdiction of TTAADC.
- 7) Jhum cultivation among the tribals should be discouraged. Jhumia resettlement project, as already started, could be taken up in a rigorous manner. They could be further engaged in settled cultivation like rubber plantation and other agriculture allied activities.
- 8) Awareness level of the tribals should be augmented in connection to development programs available at their disposal. This would mobilize them to participate in the entire process of implementation and thereby leads to better output.
- 9) Development programs implemented within TTAADC should be viable to the needs of tribal peoples. Program related to agriculture and horticulture is expected to be helpful for tribals as the nature of works is more or less similar to

jhum cultivation. Program related to entrepreneurship should be implemented with comprehensive training of selected beneficiaries.

10) Elected VC Members should be made aware of their duties and responsibilities including their powers and functions. Further, it is desirable that political party nominates literate peoples for the post of VC members.

11) Functionaries of TTAADC should be made sensitized with the tribal's way of life including their basic socio-economic problems. More training and orientation program could be organized in this aspect. Preference could be given to tribal staff in carrying the developmental works within the district council, as they are expected to be accustomed with tribal way of life.

12) Finally, the government could think of re-framing the Sixth Schedule, which is the custodian of autonomous district council. The present Acts and Amendments in the Sixth Schedule are found only to be a consolatory alternative for the tribals, who are in constant demands of protection from assimilation. It minimally helps in the uplift of tribals.

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