Information Transfer Process for Rural Development in West Bengal through Panchayati Raj Institutions

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Abstract

Information is the basic need of human race-a key to decision making process. Main facets of Rural Development (RD) have been discussed and also different categories of users identified in this paper. This paper also emphasized about RD and West Bengal panchayet system. Flow chart about information transfer process through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for RD drawn in this article. Sources of information of beneficiaries as well as agents discussed also. Role of the panchayet and role of rural libraries are highlighted in this regard. Study emphasized the Information Technology (IT) based system regarding RD.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj Institutions, Rural Development, Information Transfer, Information Technology, Rural Library. Beneficiaries, Elected Members, Extension Officers.

Introduction

All societies ancient, medieval or modern have functioned and proposed on the basis of information and knowledge in their various stages of developments. In the past, the creation of new knowledge, innovations and inventions have been the efforts of a small number of individuals with a passion for and dedication to such activities and therefore growth of new knowledge has largely been sporadic and incidental. We know that 'knowledge' is the first weapon by which human civilization is developing. 'Knowledge' means power which is generated from different source of information. The present world is dominated and enrolled by so many information. Each and every step of our life is regulated and guided by different type of information. "Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world and enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people still live in the darkness of poverty unnecessarily." (The state of World Bank knowledge services: knowledge for development 2011). Majority of rural population in India are suffering because of 'knowledge gap' and 'information problems'. This papers explores relationship between Panchayati Raj Intitutions (PRIs) and Rural Development (RD) in West Bengal. PRIs acts as an agency of RD. We know that India is predominantly a rural country with more than 70% of the population living in rural areas. Development of India is mostly depend on the RD and most of the people in rural area depend on panchayet and other organizations.

Aim of the Study

The Aim of this article are as follows

1. To identify the facets of RD through PRIs.
2. To know the users through PRIs of RD.
3. To identify the sources of information of the Beneficiaries and Agents.
4. To identify the role of Panchayet for RD
5. To identify the role of rural library regarding information transfer for RD.
6. To identify information transfer problems of RD.

Rural Development

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The term 'Rural Development' is a subject of the broader term 'Development'. RD is of focal interest and is widely acclaimed in both the developed and the developing countries of the world. There is however no universally acceptable definition of RD and the term is used in different ways and in vastly divergent contexts. As a concept, it can't be overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multidimensional concept

and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities – village and cottage industries and crafts, socio- economic infrastructure, community services and facilities.

RD as a process of developing and utilising natural and human sources, technologies, infrastructure facilities, institutions and organisations and government policies and programmes to encourage and speed up economic growth in rural areas to provide jobs and to improve the quality of rural life towards self sustenance. (Singh, 1999)

Major Facets of RD

The major facets of RD are mentioned below-

1. Education
2. Health
3. Women's Development
4. Agriculture
5. Irrigation
6. Animal husbandry
7. Fishery
8. Cottage and small industry and trade
9. Infrastructure and so on. (Das and Khan, 2003)

Users of RD Information

In rural India, there are different categories of people, functionaries and various institutions are directly or indirectly involved in RD activities. They may be categorised as the following-
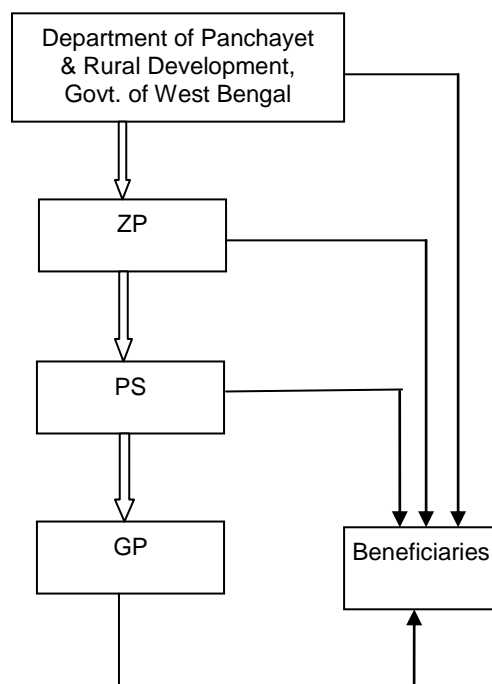
1. Beneficiaries of RD Programmes.
   (Rural poor, farmers, rural youth, old men, women, children, labourers, small business entrepreneurs etc.)
2. People's representatives.
   [Member of Gram Panchayats (GP), Panchayat Samities (PS), Zilla Parishad (ZP), MLAs & MPs]
3. Government employees of Panchayat and Block Development office (BDO office).
   (Government employees and People's representatives treated as 'Agent' in the article.)
4. Non Government Organizations (NGOs).
5. Financial Institutions.
6. Others (Seal, Raihanuzzaman and Nath, 2003)

West Bengal Panchayat

Panchayat system in the state of West Bengal is very successful. Panchayat is the local self-government institutions. Rural people collect various information from panchayat using different sources. There are three types of panchayat in West Bengal.

   i. GP (For village level)
   ii. PS (For block level)
   iii. ZP (For district level) (Seal, Raihanuzzaman and Nath, 2003)

Information Transfer Process through PRIs for RD
Fig.1Information Transfer Process

Sources of information of the Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries collect information from following sources-

1. Panchayat Members
2. Gram Samsad Meeting
3. Family Members
4. Political Activist
5. Neighbour
6. Extension Officers (EOs) from Block Development Offices (BDOs)
7. Office Notice Board
8. Leaflet / Poster
9. Miking
10. NGOs
11. Club
12. Others

Sources of information of the Agents

Here, we consider agents mainly Elected Members (EMs) of panchayat and EOs. of BDOs. They collect information for RD using following sources-

1. Official circular
2. Attending meeting
3. Workshop / Training
4. Internet
5. Others

Role of the Panchayet for RD

The role of the Panchayat in this context, should be :

1. To supply information to the library regarding new welfare schemes introduced by the Central and State Government.
2. Detailed information on various welfare schemes of both Central and State Government is to be displayed at the notice board of the GP office and also at different public places.

3. Information may also be made available in easily accessible language and format in order to inform the public on various schemes and projects.
4. People's representatives should be well informed about the nature, terms and conditions of various welfare schemes.
5. To supervise the activities of the beneficiaries, i.e. those who have received money so far from any of the welfare schemes, for proper utilization of the entire grant.
6. People's representatives should also play an active role in setting up different self help groups through whom different welfare schemes can be implemented. The activities of such groups should be cooperative in nature.
7. Information may also be supplied by the GP as to how many beneficiaries are there in the area, what types of scheme assistance people may receive, and what are the schemes available presently for the people in the locality.
8. People's representative should also analyze and identify, which schemes are beneficial for whom and profitable in present rural set-up. . (Jana & Sahoo, 2003)

Information Technology (IT) Based System for RD

Few IT based information system for RD are mentioned below-

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation

The M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) was established in 1988 as a not-for-profit trust. M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai is conducting series of experiments in electronic communication of need base information since 1997. The concept of "Information Village" developed and implemented by M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Pondichery village is a path breaking experiments to demonstrate the potentials of information revolutions in this sector**.** (Chatterjee and Rahaman, 2003)

Warana Wired Village Projects

The Warana Wired Village Project was launched as an attempt to modernize farmers' co-operatives in Warana Nagar, Maharashtra, India. Existing co-operatives have been ICT-enabled to increase farmers' capacities for information exchange in a government-driven experiment to discover the potential of rural ICT. (Warana Wired Village Project)

Gyandoot

Trying to Improve Government Services for Rural Citizens in India. In 2000, the State Government in Madhya Pradesh, India, set up a chain of computer kiosks to help provide better access to government information and services in one of its districts - Dhar District. (Gyandoot)

Kissan Call Centre

The depth of Agriculture and co-operation (DAC) ministry of agriculture Govt. of India launched Kisan call centres of Jan 21, 2004, across the country to deliver extension services. All the queries related to agriculture and allied sectors are being addressed through these call centres by making a single call the farmers reaches an agriculture graduate or expert who would be able to respond to his queries and problems instantly. (Kissan Call Centre)

Role of Rural Library for RD

Due to lack of awareness, the rural people ignore to come to the library, to take information support for their day to day activities. So, rural libraries have to take necessary steps to disseminate information to them.

1. To prepare an elaborate list of various welfare schemes introduced by both Central and State Governments like schemes for women, schemes for farmers, schemes for youth, schemes for backward classes, schemes for fishermen, schemes for ex-servicemen and schemes for others.
2. To organize the rural people for discussion and exchange of opinion among themselves to enjoy maximum opportunity from the welfare schemes.
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4. To organize the rural youth in different interest groups to formulate various plans of action for overall development of the community. The main objectives for setting up of these groups will be to influence the people in the locality to take part in the following activities-
   i. To transform the pattern of cultivation from paddy to other profitable agricultural products like oil seeds, spices, vegetable, fruits etc.
   ii. To motivate the people towards animal husbandry and related activities. Necessary information in this regard is to be collected and supplied giving due emphasis on hybrid varieties of domestic animals.
   iii. To use the unproductive and unused land for fodder production.
   iv. To organize seminar, workshop etc. with the help of the Gram Sevaks and Agricultural Scientists for proper utilization of fertilizer, pesticide etc. in agriculture.
   v. Social plantation programme is to be taken by the villagers to protect the environment and also to earn money. Necessary communication is to be made with District Forest Officer for this purpose.
5. Farmers Cooperative Credit Society should be established by the villagers to confirm their easy access towards capital with nominal rate of interest. (Jana & Sahoo, 2003)

Community Library-cum-Information Centre (CLIC)

This is a new scheme approved by the State Government in the Mass Education Extension Department. Through this scheme it has been provided to open at least one CLIC at the GP level which is the basic unit of administration at the grass-root level in the Panchayet system of administrations. The CLIC are to provide along with books relevant and useful information to the people living in the GP areas. (Das and Khan, 2003)

Problems of Rural Information Transfer

1. Insufficient awareness programme create a problem for the beneficiaries to know the RD schemes properly.
2. Lack of proper planning.
3. Lack of proper education is the main obstacles of the rural people for RD.
4. Lack of clear objective and policy of rural library regarding RD related information for RD.
5. Information transfer barrier among the beneficiaries, EMs and EOs are another problem.
6. Lack of formal training creates a problem to collect and disseminate RD related information properly.

Conclusion

The success of RD related schemes or information depends not only on accuracy of its structure but also needs the integration and active participation of all concerned groups. Gathering, organisation and management of knowledge and information generated within the PRIs activities as well as developing appropriate support information system for the functionaries and beneficiaries are very crucial in the sector of RD process today. We should narrow down the knowledge gaps ensuring universal basic education, developing basic communication infrastructure; we must address the information problems relating to RD activities and its starting from processing of information and its proper dissemination. Rural libraries also should collect various types of information from the grass-root functionaries engaged in RD and provide that information to the rural people to meet their needs.

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