

Constraints in Role Performance of Gram Panchayat in Agriculture and Dairy Farming

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in Hooghly district of West Bengal to find out and prioritize the constraints in role performance of Gram Panchayats in agriculture and dairy farming. The total number of respondents (Gram Panchayat members including the Pradhans) selected for the study was 80. An open ended schedule was devised to identify and Garrett ranking technique (1981) was used to prioritize the constraints. The results of the study show that lack of maintenance of resource inventory, provision of funds mostly by the end of the financial year, non-availability of committed cash and kind in matching amount at the appropriate time, sub-standard quality of production inputs, inadequate availability of technical and non technical man-power, inadequate and lack of timely availability of production inputs, lack of technical know-how, lack of viable and need oriented projects, insufficient computer facilities etc. were among the most important perceived constraints.

Key words : Identification; Prioritization; Constraint; Gram Panchayat;

The term 'Panchayat' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Pancha' that means five. In the traditional system it implied 'council of five' members who were engaged in settling the disputes in a rural setup. After the inception of *Panchayati Raj* in 1959, the overall concept of *Gram Panchayat* has changed. It is the grass root level organization in a three tier system of democratic decentralization, meant for serving the rural masses for their overall development. The *Gram Panchayat* faces a number of problems in performing their roles. *Ashok Mehta Committee report (1978)* pointed out that *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs) were dominated by economically or socially privileged sections of the society. The performance of PRIs had also been vitiated by political factionalism, corruption, inefficiency, political interference in day to day administration, parochial loyalties, motivated actions, power concentration instead of service consciousness, etc. *Nayak (2004)* reported that among the factors which hinder the performance of *Gram Panchayat*, lack of arrangement of proper training facilities for the *Panchayat* representatives was significant. The present study aimed at identifying and prioritizing the constraints

that the *Gram Panchayat* faced in carrying out their activities in the field of agriculture and dairy farming.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted taking eight *Gram Panchayats* in Hooghly district of West Bengal. Seventy two *Gram Panchayat* members (excluding the *Gram Panchayat Pradhans*) were selected at random, and the *Gram Panchayat Pradhans* of each of the eight *Gram Panchayats* were selected purposively as respondents of the study. Thus the total number of respondents of the study was eighty. An open ended interview schedule was devised to list out the constraints faced by the *Gram Panchayat* members (excluding the *Pradhans*) in performing their role. The highest frequently found twelve constraints were screened out and the *Pradhans* were asked to rank these twelve constraints according to the degree of importance as they perceived. Since all the constraints were not ranked by all the *Gram Panchayat Pradhans*, the ranking technique of *Garrett (1981)* was used for final prioritization of the constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of constraints: Following were the constraints hindering the performance of the *Gram Panchayat* as perceived and identified by the *Gram Panchayat* members

- i. Inadequate availability of technical and non technical man-power in comparison to heavy workload.
- ii. Lack of motivation among beneficiaries for mobilization of resources.
- iii. Inadequate and lack of timely availability of production inputs.
- iv. Sub-standard quality of production inputs.
- v. Lack of technical know-how for scientific planning and implementation of programmes and projects.
- vi. Lack of maintenance of resource inventory of *Gram Panchayat*.
- vii. Inadequate co-ordination with the financial institutions.
- viii. Non-availability of committed cash and kind in matching amount at the appointed time.
- ix. Lack of proper transport facilities.
- x. Lack of viable and need oriented projects, resulting in poor participation of the general masses in decision making.

- xi. Lack of computer facilities.
- xii. Provision of funds to the *Gram Panchayat* mostly by the end of the financial year and demanding for utilization certificate before completion of work.

Most of the *Gram Panchayats* under the study had very limited record regarding physical as well as human resources in their offices. In absence of complete records they found it difficult to prepare plans and programmes properly.

Provision of funds mostly by the end of the financial year led to delay in getting funds and for that, less time was available for the completion of projects and it was difficult to consult the local people and form appropriate committees. Asking for utilization certificate by the upper tier structures within a stipulated date created lots of problem as in most of the cases the work actually was not completed.

At the beginning of the financial year the *Gram Panchayats* were asked to prepare their annual plan and submit the same to the *Panchayat Samiti*. On the basis of that, commitment was made on the part of the Government for a specific amount of fund, both in cash and kind, to be sanctioned for the financial year to each *Gram Panchayat*. However, during the financial year, Government could not provide their committed amount

Table 1. Final ranking of the constraints

S. No.	Constraint	Mean score (Score*/Freq.)	Rank
1.	Lack of maintenance of resource inventory of <i>Gram Panchayat</i>	72.33	I
2.	Provision of funds mostly by the end of the financial year and demanding for utilization certificate before completion of work.	63.42	II
3.	Non-availability of committed cash and kind in matching amount at the appointed time.	62.63	III
4.	Sub-standard quality of production inputs.	59.50	IV
5.	Inadequate availability of technical and non technical man-power in comparison to heavy workload.	56.25	V
6.	Lack of motivation among beneficiaries for mobilization of resources	53.00	VI
7.	Inadequate and lack of timely availability of production inputs	52.63	VII
8.	Lack of technical know-how for scientific planning and implementation of programmes and projects.	44.00	VIII
9.	Lack of viable and need oriented projects, resulting in poor participation of general masses in decision making	35.83	IX
10.	Inadequate cooperation from the financial institutions	34.50	X
11.	Lack of proper transport facilities	34.38	XI
12.	Lack of computer facilities	26.40	XII

* Sum of scores obtained in transmutation of orders of merit

of fund to the *Gram Panchayats*, disabling them to meet their commitments made already to the beneficiaries, the final outcome being losing of mutual trust and confidence.

Sub-standard quality of the production inputs, supplied to the *Gram Panchayats* from the Government was also an important roadblock in carrying out the development activities with respect to agriculture and dairy farming. The members were disappointed with the fact that the inputs, supplied to them were neither timely nor in sufficient quantity to satisfy the needs of the farmers. Many a times, the production inputs were supplied to them in the rainy season. As most of the *Gram Panchayats* did not have adequate storage facilities, the inputs got either damped or spoiled.

Inadequate availability of technical and non technical man-power in comparison to heavy workload and delay in filling up of the vacancies at proper time further aggravated the problem. Due to lack of computer facilities the *Gram Panchayats* were not able to meet the heavy workload by compensating the inadequacy of manpower.

The *Gram Panchayat Pradhans* reported that people had been reluctant in paying *Panchayat* taxes timely and it was also difficult to convince the people to pay taxes for development of their locality. Job assistants and field oriented staff with a little or no technical expertise were unable to prepare the development schemes for their effective implementation.

As most of the development programmes were neither need based nor demand driven, majority of the *Gram Panchayats* were suffering from lack of peoples' participation in decision making. Problem of coordination between the *Gram Panchayats* and banks was resulting in delay in recovery of loans from the farmers. Due to poor arrangement for transport facilities, sometimes, it became very difficult for the members to maintain contact with the other development agencies and organizations.

CONCLUSION

As *Gram Panchayats* operate at the grass root level of the society to promote overall development of the rural masses, ensuring peoples' participation should be the prime goal of this organisation. In the context of the present study, it can be stated that among the number of factors contributing to the under achievement of the objectives, lack of resource inventory and lack of viable and need oriented projects were important. If these constraints were overcome, other factors such as participation of the masses and interest of financial agencies could be secured. Therefore, a judicious combination of efforts is needed to be paid by all the three tiers to overcome the perceived constraints and thereby make the *Gram Panchayat* a trust worthy organisation to the rural people. The upper tier structures will remain like a weak tower until and unless they are built on a strong foundation of a smoothly working *Gram panchayat*.

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