

# ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIPS INFLUENCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION IN INDIA\*

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## INTRODUCTION

The community development organisation can play an important role in increasing food production in India. The key persons in this process are the village level workers, who are in day to day contact with the cultivators. They will play this important role only if they are sincerely interested in the problems the farmers face, are technically competent to give correct advice to the farmers and are motivated to work hard. Some observers believe that these conditions are not being fulfilled at present, not necessarily because of the quality of the VLWs but because of the situation in which they have to work.

The educational level of the VLW in India compares favourably with that of the VLWs in the Netherlands, one of the countries with the most productive agriculture in the world. The Dutch farmers have on the average seven years more education than their Indian counterparts, but in general they are satisfied with the present level of their local extension officers.

In India, one often hears serious criticism of the work of the VLWs<sup>1</sup>. Also, in a discus-

sion with a group of 30 experienced VLWs, who were selected by their superiors as some of the best in their districts, S.K. Reddy and the senior author noticed that they were no longer very enthusiastic about their work, because of:

1. Their low pay in comparison to other government employees with a similar education level
2. Their very limited possibilities for promotion
3. Lack of competence of the BDO in technical agriculture and lack of interest of these officials in the problems of the VLWs<sup>2</sup>
4. Frequent transfers before they were able to gain the confidence of the villagers
5. The Panchayati Raj system which gives less educated non-officials much influence in the C.D. program and makes it an instrument of local politics
6. The inadequate supplies of fertilisers and other resources, the delay in the distribution of these resources and the low quality of some of the resources used in the demonstrations.

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\* This article is based on data obtained in a study on the "Diffusion of Innovations in Rural Societies" directed by Everett M. Rogers of which the Indian part was done jointly by the National Institute of Community Development and the Department of Communication, Michigan State University under the direction of F.C. Fliegel and P. Roy. We are indebted to them for the opportunity to use these data.

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Other observers have come to similar conclusions.

Taylor, Ensminger *et al.*, state that one of the main reasons for this situation is the hierarchical administrative relationships within the Indian bureaucracy including the Community Development Organisation.<sup>2</sup> Such relationships were quite appropriate in previous times when the aim of the bureaucracy was to collect revenue and maintain law and order, but not at present. Now the aim has changed to stimulating local economic and social development. Undoubtedly, a hierarchical structure of the bureaucracy in which most decisions are made at the top and handed down to the subordinates always has advantages, especially, because it increases the probability that decisions are made by the most capable persons. However, there are also disadvantages such as:

1. It decreases the initiative taken at the local level, whereas for development it is usually necessary that many problems are solved locally.
2. Correct decisions can only be made on the basis of a very good knowledge of the local situation, but in a highly hierarchical structure usually the communication between those people who work at the local level and know the situation there well and those at the top leaves much to be desired.<sup>3</sup>
3. If decisions are made in which the people at the local level have not been involved and especially if they doubt whether these decisions were wise, they will not be highly motivated to work hard for the execution of these decisions.
4. If the local extension officers receive orders from their superiors, they will be inclined to boss over the cultivators rather than to educate them to make

their own decisions. This might decrease the confidence the cultivators have in their VLWs.

Not much empirical research has been done on the administrative relationships in the Indian Community Development Organisation. Therefore, not much evidence is available in respect of whether these observations are generally true and are not based on exceptional situations. In a study on the diffusion of innovations by the National Institute of Community Development and Michigan State University, some data were gathered on these problems in order to explain the differences in the adoption levels of new practices between 108 villages. A report on the results and research methods used in this study have been published elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In this article the data from this study will be used to throw some light on the above problems. For comparison, some data from a study done with mailed questionnaires by an Indian student among local extension officers in the Netherlands will be used.<sup>5</sup>

In the Indian study, data were gathered by personal interviews from village leaders, Village Level Workers, Agricultural Extension Officers and Block Development Officers working in 108 villages in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra. One third of these villages were in districts where Intensive Agricultural District Programme was in operation and in all the villages the VLW was working for a period of at least two preceding years. It is likely that in these villages, cultivators have somewhat more confidence in their VLW than in an average Indian village.

## 2. Relationships within the CD organisation

Some questions have been asked to test the hypothesis that the relationships within the Indian CD organisation are rather authorita-

rian. The CD officials were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with some opinion statements\* as mentioned below:

	VLW %	AEO %	BDO %
1. Most decisions regarding the granting of loans for seeds, fertilisers and pesticides should be delegated by the BDO to the VLWs after the general policy has been formulated.	..	66	48
2. Without frequent and detailed inspection of his work, one cannot expect that a VLW will do his work properly	..	92	100
3. If forced to choose between keeping their Collector satisfied and keeping their cultivators satisfied, most BDOs would choose to keep their collector satisfied**	57	44	64
4. If a VLW is quite active, he can easily get in trouble, but if he is friendly and obedient to higher authority without taking any initiative he will not have any difficulty	56	..	..
5. Even with the present salary and possibilities for promotion, most VLWs will work very hard and long hours	62	..	..

Apparently, the BDOs have a somewhat more bureaucratic attitude than the AEOs. Most AEOs would like to delegate some decision making, but whether this is actually done is another question. Statements 2 and 4 show that the VLWs do not have much freedom to do their work in their own way. For all the three groups of officials, there is some tendency more to satisfy their superiors even if this may not be beneficial for the work they are supposed to accomplish. The tensions between AEO and BDO in the present system might be the reason that a little less than half of the AEOs respond indicating that they are inclined to keep their BDO satisfied. If one takes into account the possibility of a courtesy bias with statement 5, one does not get the impression that all VLWs work very hard. This is not only a result of the administrative relationships in their work, but also of the well-known fact

that their salaries are low and their possibilities for promotion are very limited.

The rather authoritarian relationships within the CD organisation influence also the extent to which the CD officials take initiative. These officers were asked as to how frequently there is a possibility for an official in their own position to solve a problem by his own action without being instructed to do anything about it. About the other officials the question was: "Some officials do only what their superiors tell them to do. Others try to solve problems on their own and try to find new ways to do their work better. In which way do your AEOs (BDOs, VLWs) do their jobs?" Unfortunately, this question was not asked to the AEO about the VLW. The analysis of replies of these questions indicated that the VLW, AEO and BDO do not take much initiative.

\* Statements 1 and 2 were not given to the VLWs, who got instead statements 4 and 5.

\*\* For the AEOs and VLWs the statement was "keeping their BDO satisfied".

### 3. *Comparison with the administrative relationships in the extension service in the Netherlands*

It is not necessary that the administrative relationships within an extension organisation should be as hierarchical as they are in India. For comparison, we will give some data from the Netherlands which present quite different picture. This does not prove that the effectiveness of the Indian CD organisation would increase, if one would adopt the Dutch administrative relationships, but it can stimulate one to think about the possible advantages and disadvantages of the Dutch and Indian systems.

The Dutch local extension officers were asked how free they feel about making certain decisions on their own. The proportion saying very free was 70 per cent for the kind of advice they give, 64 per cent on the extension methods they use, 49 per cent on the number of hours they work and 51 per cent on the quantity of work they accomplish and the speed with which they work. On all topics, less than 8 per cent said "not very free" or "not at all free". On the question who decides what activities the local extension officers will take up in his area and to which he will give most of his time, 1 per cent answered that the BDO and his staff made this decision for the local extension officer, which he was not able to change, 14 per cent said the activities were decided this way, but the local extension officer was able to adjust their decisions to his situation, according to 15 per cent this was decided in a group discussion, 10 per cent said they made this decision alone, and 66 per cent of these local extension officers said they made this decision in consultation with their superiors. Also, on an open ended question about what they liked most in their work, 60 per cent mentioned the amount of freedom they have.

On the question how the local extension officers consider a visit of their extension specialist\* to their area 5 per cent said they view it as an official inspection for checking to see whether their orders have been executed, 80 per cent view it as an occasion in which the extension specialist gets acquainted with the job problems of the local extension officers in order to be able to help them to solve these problems, and 13 per cent as an occasion to give only technical assistance. Also, when asked what their superiors would do if they discover that a local extension officer has given a wrong advice, 10 per cent said that they would be very critical and punitive, 37 per cent said that they would take part actively to correct the mistake, 38 per cent reported that they would discuss it with the local extension officer and held him to realize his mistake and to correct it and 9 per cent said they would just make a remark about it.

That this picture of the Dutch agricultural extension service is quite different from the Indian CD organisation is partly a result of differences in culture. The whole Dutch society is much less hierarchical. In the family, a Dutch child is much less taught to subordinate to the wishes of his parents and more to take initiative than an Indian child. Another reason is that there is more intensive communication within the Dutch extension service. All local extension officers have a telephone, nearly all live within one hour drive by car from the block office and they meet the block staff twice a week on the average. During these frequent discussions, there usually develops a general agreement on the goals of the extension program and therefore, with a staff which is personally committed to reach these goals one can be given considerable freedom about how to do this. In India, it is

\* The position of the extension specialist in a Dutch extension block is more or less comparable to the AEO in India. He is the direct supervisor of the local extension officers.

not possible to develop such an intensive communication system, for the present at least.

For these reasons, there have to be differences in the administrative relationships in the extension organisations in India and the Netherlands, but perhaps these differences are too large at present.

#### 4. Attitude of CD officials towards cultivators

It was hypothesized that as a result of the authoritarian relationships within the CD

organisation there would be an authoritarian relationship between the VLWs and the cultivators. The VLWs might be inclined to pass the orders they receive on to the cultivators rather than to rely on the ability of the cultivators to make the decisions themselves which best serve their own interest on the basis of information about modern developments in agricultural technology. To test this hypothesis, the CD officials were again given a number of opinion statements which are summarised as follows :

	VLW	AEO	BDO
	%	%	%
1. Our cultivators will not be able to understand modern farm practices so long as they cannot read and write	67	53	40
2. In order to increase agricultural production one cannot rely on the cultivator's efforts, but rather one has to push or goad the cultivator	92	81	68
3. Most Indian cultivators can work harder than they normally do	82	89	92
4. An extension worker introduced a high yielding variety of a local crop also had an unpleasant taste. His talks emphasized both the high yield and the unpleasant taste, instead of stressing only the high yield. Do you strongly agree... with what he did ?	70	69	60
5. An extension officer should not always listen to a cultivator before giving him advice on a problem	23	17	16
6. In order to work effectively, we extension workers have to learn a lot from the cultivators about growing crops	94	86	92

It is apparent from the above statements that in general these reactions of the CD officials confirm the hypothesis that they try to help the cultivators in a rather authoritarian way.

#### 5. Opinion of village leaders about their CD officials

It was hypothesized that the authoritarian relationship within the CD organisation would

make it difficult for VLWs to listen to the cultivators and to gain their confidence. In this study, it was not possible to test this hypothesis by asking questions to a random sample of the cultivators. But some questions have been asked to 856 formal and informal leaders from the 108 villages studied and the results are summarised in Table 1.

TABLE I

How Helpful are the CD Officials to The People in this Village According to Village Leaders (in percentages)\*

Opinion of the village leaders	VLW	AEO	BDO
Very helpful	35	15	18
Helpful	45	35	44
Not so helpful	12	16	17
Not at all helpful	5	8	7
Do not know and no answer	4	26	14
Total	100	100	100

\*Because of rounding up the totals do not add up to exactly 100.

The general picture one gets from the above table is that the village leaders are rather satisfied with their CD officers and especially with their VLWs. Naturally, not all leaders have full confidence in them, but the general picture is more satisfactory than was hypothesized.

#### 6. Relationships between the authoritarianism of CD officials and the confidence village leaders have in them

The authoritarian attitude of CD officials is expected to have an adverse influence on the confidence the villagers have in them. Therefore, one should expect that in villages with more authoritarian officials, leaders have less confidence in these officials than in villages with more democratic officials. In order to test this hypothesis, an authoritarian-democratic index was constructed. This index has been related to the average opinion of the village leaders in a village about the helpfulness of the VLW and their willingness to listen to the cultivators.

Contrary to the hypothesis, it was found that the more authoritarian a BDO is, the probability that village leaders will say that the VLW is very helpful to the people of their village is somewhat higher and the probability of their saying that the VLW is willing to listen a lot to the big as well as the small cultivators

is considerably higher. The authoritarian-democratic indices for the AEO and the VLW were not associated with the responses of the village leaders to these questions.

### DISCUSSION

This study shows that the administrative relationships within the Indian CD organisation are rather authoritarian, at least considerably more authoritarian than in the agricultural extension service in the Netherlands. Also, the attitude of Indian CD officials toward their cultivators is rather authoritarian. No indications could be found, however, that this situation has an adverse effect on the confidence village leaders have in CD officials. On the contrary, there are some indications that in villages with an authoritarian BDO, the leaders consider their VLW as more helpful and more inclined to listen to the cultivators than the leaders in villages with a democratic BDO. There are several explanations possible for these (unexpected) findings.

1. It is possible that in the Indian cultural and economic situation CD officials will be motivated to work hard when they receive clear orders about what to do than when they have more freedom in their work. Perhaps, they feel insecure when they are expected to solve a pro-

blem without being instructed about how to do this. It appears that this is a legacy of the administrative procedures established during the British days. Under that system, a subordinate was expected more to carry out orders than exercise his initiative. Also, if a subordinate did want to initiate anything he was generally expected to get it approved from the superiors before the idea or plan was implemented. Deviance from this general practice was frowned upon and if a subordinate made mistakes as a result of his initiative, he was punished. This has resulted into an unwritten dictum for government officials that "a wise government servant faithfully obeys orders and does not take too much initiative". As a result, the whole government machinery functions cautiously resulting in productive work which is far less than what it has potentialities for. It is hard to explain, however, that under authoritarian leadership the VLWs are also more willing to listen to the cultivators.

2. Perhaps, under authoritarian leadership the VLWs concentrate their attention more on the village leaders, whereas under democratic leadership they would try to help all cultivators. In other words, it is possible that if these questions had not been asked to the village leaders, but to a random sample of the cultivators different results would have been found.
3. Another possibility is that the village leaders have given the answers they thought the interviewers would have liked

to hear and therefore have said that they are much more satisfied with their VLWs than is actually the case. An indication in this direction is that the leaders in another part of this study on sacred-secular scale gave unbelievable secular answers, especially in West-Bengal. A difficulty with this explanation is that we would have to assume that this is more true in villages with a more authoritarian BDO. It is hard to believe that a BDO has so much influence in an area with a population of about 60,000, especially if one takes into account that these BDOs were working on the average for only one year and three months in the same block.

4. The wrong questions have been asked to measure the extent to which there are authoritarian administrative relationships in the Indian CD organisation. An indication in this direction is that the authoritarian-democratic indices did not form Guttman scales.<sup>6</sup>

An interesting question is also regarding what will be the long range effects of the present pattern of administrative relationships in the Indian CD organisation. Personally, we cannot see how India can reach a high level of economic development as long as one does not make good use of the intelligence of all of its people. One gets the impression that a good deal more use could be made of the intelligence of lower level CD officials than is done at present. Undoubtedly, some of them are quite intelligent, but they did not reach a higher position, because they never got the opportunity to receive an university education.

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