Managing Development Projects :
A Focus on Internal
Dynamics of Field Bureaucracy

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Introduction

Among the hazy and confounding issues of the third world development strategies, management of development programmes and projects is often regarded as one of the most difficult, uncertain and intractable concerns of all. Most national development plans and policy pronouncements have attributed it as one of the major stumbling-blocks in encountering the problems in socio-economic advancement or in eradicating acute mass poverty even **after designing the best** planning and policy devices for their intended achievement. Among those development disfunctions identified either in the structural impediments of the national bureaucracy or in the area of the politico-administrative environment, failure in managing development programmes and projects is often singled out as the gravest barrier both by students of development strategies and development planners.

Recognising the significance of effective management of development planning for attaining sustained agricultural productivity, the Second Five year Plan (1980-85) of Bangladesh, for instance, notes, "In the

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past, planning had not been very effective because of inadequate programming, implementation and monitoring capability". It further stresses that "If this plan has to be meaningful, we have not only to do an enormous amount of work in building appropriate institutions but we must also improve our programming and implementing capacity"[1]. While launching national development plans, the policy makers and planners of many developing countries have also arrived at a similar conclusion. Echoing the same sentiment of many of its borrowers, the World Bank[2] strongly argues that the main function which has evolved for the Bank over the years is to assist the borrowers (mainly the developing countries) in identifying, helping to prevent, and solving the problems that pop up during the implementation process. Hence the thrust towards a more action-oriented implementation strategy has been strongly felt to develop the capability of administering agencies.

In spite of this widespread plea for strengthening the managerial competence of implementing institutions, policy execution process still proceeds more slowly and ineffectively than is expected. Development of a 'meaningful' enforcing mechanism in removing the pervasive obstacles to implementation and in particular the attainment of an efficient administering bureaucracy still appears, in many cases, to be a distant dream. Consequently, little change, if any takes place.

Bureaucratic Implications of Project Management

Bureaucratic Implications, as we all know, vary from country to country as well as from one policy or project to another. They may also vary from region to region even within the same geographical entity. Hence any generalisation in this respect is necessarily subject to some obvious limitations.

In such a context, it seems useful to classify bureaucracy into three

different categories : central, regional and field levels. This has been attempted to specify the implications and also to discern the factors that constrain the implementors in performing their tasks. While the exact distinction between the three categories seems to vary from organisation to organisation depending upon the size, operational complexities, administrative discretion and some other institutional factors, the major focus is 'ideally' weighted here in relation to roles and responsibilities each category performs and the hindrances they face in carrying out their responsibilities, specially in the process of implementation. Field researchers in development administration also agree to such classification3 and argue that the normal practice of putting the whole bureaucracy as a single institution is misleading.

Central level bureaucracy usually comprises of those key career officials and political appointees who play vital roles in almost all governmental activities including the formulation of allocation of resources and to a greater extent, the overall direction and supervision of implementation. The bureaucrats at the regional level are those officials who perform the liaison making tasks of policy application. Interpretation of defined policies and their reformulation, application of regional and sub-regional rationality in programme execution, coordination of inter and intra-departmental programmes, the review of ongoing projects - all these responsibilities are normally disposed of by this category of officials. From the perspective of managing the development programmes and projects, the role of field level bureaucracy is crucially important. The delivery of services from agency to client, demonstration of institutional innovations, public persuasion and collection of information are some of the major functions performed by them. While the role of these three categories as a single set of actors is important, the following analysis confines its jurisdictions mainly to the administrative implications of field bureaucrats in the domain of project management.

A Focus on Internal Dynamics of Field Bureaucracy

Studies suggest that internal operating variables which affect the performance of implementation bureaucracy tends to cluster in four main areas. These are : (i) organisational structure and management procedures, (ii) authority and responsibility, (iii) coordination and communication and (iv) competence and commitment. Many of these studies conclude that for the successful realisation of stated policy objectives, an effective administrative mechanism should be developed. They argue that the process of implementation can be facilitated only when implementing organisations have adequate authority and responsibility, appropriate managerial capability to man and run things, sustained will and commitment of the implementors toward organisational goals, and effective coordination and communication feedback. Hsieh and Lee[4] have asserted that the main secret of Taiwan's development was its capability to meet the administrative requirements of implementation. Recently, this view has been reconfirmed by Uphoff and Esman[5]. In their review of the rural development experiences of sixteen Asian countries, they conclude that one of the pre-requisites for successful implementation of rural development project is a strong system of field level implementing organisations together with effective links to compatible central agencies which can support them. Others[6] add that policy execution can proceed smoothly when the programme ends and means are continuously modified to fit them with administrative reality.

Unfortunately, although bureaucratic institutions in many developing countries have increasingly becoming dominant at the central level, most of their field organisations seldom possess the characteristics which are considered essential for carrying out the policy adequately. Experience with the implementation of development programmes shows that the operational constraints faced by bureaucracy are numerous and that they range from the structural deficiencies of organisations to the problems of functional management. An attempt has been made

here to explicate how various components of internal administration, particularly the organisation structure and management procedures, authority and responsibility, coordination mechanisms, and administrative competence of implementors help or hinder the policy execution process. In this article it is argued that the prevailing internal operating characteristics of bureaucracy are by and large anti-developmental in nature.

I. Organisation and Management Structure.

Classical studies of management conceived organisation as a rational instrument which is mainly created to achieve some desired goals. Recent scholarship, however, considers it more than this. Selznick[7], for example, argues that though organisations may be established as devices for getting things done, they soon begin to acquire and maintain an infused set of values, a unique operating character and a sustained commitment to survival and growth quite apart from the purpose for which they originally emerged. This process is generally known as 'institutionalisation'. The capacity of institutional development is crucial to the successful operation of the organisation. For many people, the nerve-centre of administration is organisation, and one of the keys of organisatiosn's success is institutionalisation. According to them[8], in developing a policy requiring new programmes, the policy makers should always assure themselves that there is suitable institutional capacity of the organisation(s) concerned available to run the programme adequately, or that it can be developed within a reasonable period of time. This means that policy proposals must be designed in accordance with organisational capacity of the implementing agency.

At this point, institutionalisation may be perceived as the planning, structuring and guiding capacity of the organisation "which (a) embody changes in values, functions, physical and/or social technologies, (b) establish, foster and protect new normative relationships and action

patterns ; and (c) obtain support and complementary action from the environment"[9]. Siffin[10] argues that institutional capacity is not just the institutional structure but a set of continuing patterns of actions that encompass both in organisation and its transactional relations with its environment. The aim of institutional building strategy is therefore, to create, retain and promote various organisational elements capable of delivering services efficiently, incorporating the innovative ideas and internalising social values within the organisation. It is said that to achieve these objcetives the 'viable' or 'reconstituted organisation should develop, among others, an unified and integrated administrative structure, flexible operational procedures and a participatory approach to management[11].

Experiences of many developing countries reveal that bureaucratic organisations at the field level very often lack the required institutional capacity in executing policies particularly those which are pursued by the **government** in **rural development or in community** welfare. Many of them are currently not geared to generate their own ideas or to process indigenous ideas as the basis for new projects with day to day work or owing to their development disorientation. Due to the top-down approach of developmental programmes most of these have limited scope in flexibility and on adjusting to the client's needs. The pressure of appointing and retaining consultants, specially expatriate consultants, in heavily foreign aid depended projects also affect flexibility in their operation. Moreover, there are also charges labeled against these organisations that their structures and processes are dehumanised or inhuman in character, inefficient in operation, and inaccessible in dealing with clients[12]. Inhumanity refers to uncaring and impersonal relationships between officials and clients, and between superiors and subordinates. Inefficiency points to procedures which consume more time, energy and resources than are necessary to accomplish tasks, and to rigidity in the face of needs for change. Inaccessibility is a way of saying that clients lack power, that clients cannot easily obtain services and benefits and that clients have little

say in policy decisions, in resource allocation, and in pocedural design.

Although central agencies in some countries e.g. in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India have tried to remedy the situation by undertaking the tasks of initiation, preparation and approval of projects and also by supervising the overall coordination of implementation business, these do not always produce satisfactory solutions. Rather such centralisation of project formulation and management has mostly proved detrimental to the effective accomplishment of policy goals. Because of such deficiencies, it is argued that the institution building efforts of developing countries have never been organised up to the mark.

Moreover, the cultural milieu of developing societies posed serious constraints on the way of institutionalisation. Riggs[13] uses a 'sala model' to characterise the administrative norms of public organisations in developing countries. He has chosen the term 'sala' to symbolise **the lack of differentiation between formal organisations and other** types of social organisations. To Riggs formalism is "the degree of discrepancy or congruence between the formally prescribed and the effectively practiced, between norms and realities... What permits formalism is the lack of pressure towards programme objectives, the weakness of social power as a guide of bureaucratic performance, and hence great permissiveness for arbitrary administration". Milne[14] reviewed several aspects of public administration in these countries and concludes that "the obstacles to effective administration in developing countries are mainly cultural. The cultures neither permit effective control and coordination from above, as in the mechanistic model, nor do they permit lateral or mutual control or coordination as in the organic model". Heady[15] notes that the administrative cultures of transitional societies exhibit unequal distribution of services, institutionalised corruption, complexities in rules, nepotism in recruitment, dominance of self protection motive, and pronounced

gaps between formal expectations and actual behaviours. Consequently, these authors and several others frequently stress the development of alternatives to bureaucratic organisations as coping mechanisms for institutionalisation. They argue that the bureaucratic model is only one of many possible modes of organising. For example, Sidel and Sidel[16] show that that health-care organisations in People's Republic of China, although geared to the needs of an enormous population, is not a bureaucratic one. It features high degree of decentralisation, extreme flexibility in operation, heavy use of paraprofessionals and a major effort to persuade masses to assume responsibility for their well-being.

Similarly Japan's commercial success in conquering world market is all the more remarkable considering that Japanese organisations have not accepted all the norms of bureaucratic role relations in her administration[17]. Employment relations in Japanese organisations are mostly diffuse, not specific, organisational membership is not effectively neutral, members join organisations for life, and organisations cultivate intense loyalties among their members[18].

Although it is difficult to determine which principles or what lessons the developing countries should adopt for creating and retaining adaptive type ot organisation and management, one of the main conclusions is that proposed institution building reforms must be conformed largely in terms of their respective cultural conditions. In addition, some interdependent administrative elements like an innovative atmosphere, operational and shared planning goals, the combination of planning and action, the diffusion of influence, the tolerance of interdependence and the avoidance of bureaupathology should be included in the structural arrangements for effective manipulation of institutionalization.

II. Authority and responsibility

Policy is not an automatically executing device. It requires the

support of some action-oriented enforcing mechanisms in order to attain the desired objectives. Summing it succinctly, Schultze says :

actions cannot be commanded... The careful specification of plans and objectives by a public agency will not suffice to guarantee effective programmes and performance[19].

Successful implenentation generally requires, among others, that the implementors have sufficient authority to carry out their assigned tasks. Various writers argue that adequate authority and well-defined careful allocation of roles and responsibilities among different actors concerned with implementation. Some also stress that, the more complex the tasks of implementaton, the greater the need for redefinition of authority and responsibility[20]. In the absence of it, subordinate bureaucrats may simply act as passive administrators of policies laid down for them by their superordinates from the above. But in many developing countries, there is **a** noticeable gap between authority and responsibility. That is, field officials are not given suficient authority and discretion, which in turn are likely to affect their performance. The administration framework between field agencies and units at headquarters. This means that all major initiatives in the area of development are taken centrally and then passed down the hierarchy for inplementation. Such lack of discretion in the field thus inevitably leads to delayed implementation of development programmes. As a remedy, there has been a persistent demand over the years for decentralisation of authority. Hence, decentralisation is considered in many developing countries a way of achieving policy goals.

Although decentralisation has several meanings, it is perceived here as the hierarchical levels of authority on which decisions are made and actions are administered. A typical definition of it runs as follows :

An administrative organisation is centralized to the extent that decisions are made at relatively high levels in the organization,

decentralized to the extent that descretion and authority to make important decisions are delegated by top management to lower levels of executive authority[21].

In general, decentralisation (more specifically deconcentration) is upheld for the following reasons : it can increase the efficiency and responsiveness of the administrative system by reducing delays, improving coordination and making decisions more relevant to local needs, and it allows wider popular participation in government actions[22]. It can also facilitate the process of holding implementors accountable for their actions. The call for decentralisation, therefore, has been a reaction against centralised structure of bureaucratic decision making and administavtive action. It has been argued that excessive centralisation stifles local initiatives, that this has led to the formulation of a local area are ; that it has been responsible for hindering speedy implementation as **the** centre insisted on compliance of every decisions. The advocates of decentralisation, therefore, tend to see it as one of the main solutions to the problem of implementation.

However, some writers23 argue that decentralisation is not a panacea, as it can increase corruption, exacerbate factionalism, cause delays and misunderstanding and even lead to mismanagement. As Grindle[24] maintains that decentralisation of authority undoubtedly decreases the likelihood of achieving expected outcome specially in situation where local political conflicts intense, where individuals and groups who do not share national development priorities, where administrative control at the field level has traditionally proved difficult to attain and finally where programme evaluation cannot be assessed adequately.

Although the hazards of decentralisation are real, it is also true that the present degree of centralisation in most developing countries enhances neither efficiency nor participation. Studies carried out in different context find that decentralisation is likely to promote implementation. For example, Montogomery's[25] study of the

implementation of land reform programmes in twenty five developing countries reveals that decentralisation is a major factor in achieving intended results. A number of other studies26 also corroborate Montgomery's findings.

Notwithstanding the fact that, decentralisation can promote some important values, governments in many third world countries are yet to take any major initiative in this direction. Even tn those countries where an attempt has been made, the policy makers and top bureaucrats still retain both formal and functional authority over field agencies. Such tendency to concentrate authority at the head-quarter level stems either from their concern to provide services equally and to ensure uniformity throughout the whole country against the background of scarcity of resources or they may lack confidence upon the capabilities of their subordinate at the field level. These are usually the explicit reasons that central authorities frequently advance in support of their contention to retain authority.

Besides these administrative factors, some also contend that the decision to concentrate authority at the centre is primarily governed by political consideration. According to them, decentralisation is inevitably a political device because it is about the distribution of power27 and touches on questions of control. As it generally implies the loss of power, influence and status, central authorities may look upon it as a *zero-sum game.* Although there is increasing evidence that it can be a *plus-sum game* by providing benefits to all concerned, higher bureaucrats and politicians are generally reluctant to delegate. As s result of such feeling, field officials in charge of execution do not have the required authority to carry out their institutional mandate effectively. Pointing out the adverse impact of such centrist attitude, Siddiqui in the context of Bangladesh, writes :

excessive control and tight centralisation in matters of plan formulation and implementation, has resulted in slow growth of the

economy as well as what has been described as low rate of absorption of development funds by the economy... In reality, the low capacity [in the context of absorbing development funds and of implementing development programme] is not of the economy, but of the public administration system and is due mainly to the close supervision of the national headquarters over the field officers...[28].

Moreover, in many cases it may be observed that the line of authority at the operational level is not made clear. There are also instances where it may be found that field officials who are given inadequate authority are asked to shoulder greater responsibilities. Such ambiguous demarcation and definition of authority often leads to inter-personal and inter-organisational conflict. Thus, it becomes difficult to achieve coordination of activities of individuals and agencies responsible for implementing a policy.

III. Coordination of Programmes and Projects

Coordination, in a broader sense, is defined as the process through which the synchronisation of actions of various individuals and agencies can be made possible coherently for the purpose of attaining a common goal. Some point it out as the means whereby different entities may achieve concerted actions without losing their organisational entity. Some also described it as a composite of many organisational elements such as leadership interest, clearly stated and agreed objectives, sound grouping of functions, good communication, and effective planning, budgeting and staff services for the cause of accomplishing organisational goals. According to them, even the best organisational relations will not work effectively, unless the individuals and agencies concerned maintain cordial relations.

Coordination, thus, denotes adjustment of several things which operate autonomously and hence, it is essential to have cooperation of different points and discourage contradictions and antagonisms among

them. Its importance also stems from the fact that it can promote understanding among different individuals and organisations, and make them responsive to what their clients demand, facilitate the channel of communication and more importantly, help reduce interpersonal and interorganisational conflict and rivalry.

But in the absence of clearly defined authority and responsibility, coordinated functions and integrated activities of programme implementation are often hampered in many developing countries. Certain other factors e.g. lack of uniformity in action, conficting programme contents owing to administrative indecisiveness, divided responsibilities and perennial competition among the participants, and functional overlap in the process of implementing the policy also tends to work against obtaining meaningful coordination in the course of execution. As a case example, the experience of policy implementation process of rural development in Bangladesh can be described here briefly.

As in many other developing countries, rural development in **Bangladesh consists of a varety of multi-sectoral development** programmes and projects - agriculture, irrigation, education, employment, health and family planning, infrastructural facilities and off - farm activities, within the prevailing institutional set-up, a large number of agencies are involved in the execution of each one of these programmes and projects. In the employment sub-sector alone, for example, in addition to the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) - which is largely responsible for organising the landless and assetless rural poor and providing them credit through different cooperative groups, there are several other agencies involved which are functioning under the supervision and co-ordination of their respective ministries/divisions. In their efforts to generate employment in rural areas, the Youth Development and Social Services Departments, the Directorates of Agriculture, Women Affairs, Fisheries, Livestock and most of the Banks in the public sector including the Bangladesh

Krishi Bank (BKB) deal with individuals while the BRDB, the Co-operative Directorate, the Grameen Bank and a host of non-government organisations deal with cooperatives and/or target groups. Apart from this, the programmes of Relief and Rehabilitation and Land Ministries, and those of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, Bangladesh Sericulture Board and Bangladesh Handloom Board also deal with individuals as well as cooperatives/target groups. The end result of all these is nothing but gross duplication of efforts and overlapping of functions which would not have been the case of uniform policies and coordinated actions were planned and administered.

Moreover, horizontal coordination between various inter-related officials at each successive level is also difficult since each official regards his department superior and tends to demonstrate an indifferent attitude to the programmes of other departments. At the local level of Bangladesh, for instance, although substantial responsibility is being delegated for the implementation of development programmes at the field level, it remains to be seen how coordination can effectively be attained since functional responsibility rests largely with the ministries/departments as in the past.

Almost similar administrative complexity and poor coordinated structure may be discernible in many other countries. In an agricultural development programme in Mexico, Grindle[29] notes that at least 14 agencies, each with different goals and priorities, and each with an independent base of power, were involved. Referring to rural development projects in India, one observer notes that an alarming number of different departments involved and they are frequently following different sectoral approaches. "It would be near miracle", according to this observer, "if so many functionaries are able to meet the needs in a fairly coordinated way"[30]. In such a complex situation, where project management are zealously guarded by various independent agencies and where different interacting officials are frequently pitted against one another in their quest for acquiring

greater authority and more responsibility for controlling resources, coordination is likely to face innumerable difficulties when efforts are made to obtain it.

Moreover, in many developing countries one can notice that adequate arrangement is not available especially at the field level, by which effective sanctions can be imposed against non-cooperation or non-coordination. In the absence of it, coordination most often turns as a zero-sum game, since other implementing agencies may reluctant to invest their resources into the project where the achievements of it go to the credit of the 'major' implementing agency and where the return of their investment from their point of view seems as a loss of resources. This type of non-coordinating attitude may even exist among different divisions within a particular agency because of their separate functional responsibility.

To improve such **a** situation of non-existent or poor coordination in implementation, writers and experts suggest various measures. These include : the establishment of coordination committees at central, intermediate and local levels, the instruction of all agencies as to the goals, objectives, priorities and future plans of the programmes by means of seminars, workshops, orientation training and the like, the free flow of information to all concerned agencies, the provision of adequate incentives to personnel responsible for implementing the policy and so on. But in most cases these steps have failed to produce any desired outcome. Among others, the administrative competence of the concerned officials is one of the factors responsible for it. Field administration in many post-colonial countries is relatively weak in terms of manpower planning, development and innovation. Thus, either in the introduction of any new techniques in obtaining meaningful coordination or in the effort of promoting any new values in the process of implementation, the quality of field officials has to be taken into consideration.

IV. Competence of Officials

Whatever ends are perceived and means designed in the implementation of a policy, it is unlikely to be successful, if it is not supported by the improved performance of those who operate it. The capacity, initiative and creativity of implementors not only play an important role in accomplishing the policy, but help the policy-makers in ascertaining whether or not the policy will achieve its expected outcomes. Some writers argue that the success of development depends not so much on material resources as on the personnel charged with the task. The necessity of superior administrative competence and managerial practices are strongly felt in every phase of implementation, in formulating and reformulating policy decisions, in maintaining effective communication feedback, in obtaining continued coordination, in dealing with clientele, in revising and simplifying management procedures and in assessing alternative **task** of programme effectiveness.

Although administrative skills virtually always fall below the "ideal" all over the world and at all levels of administration, the problem is nowhere so acute as it is in field administration of the developing world. In this context, Esman and Montogomery note.

The weakest links of almost every public administration system are the field staff that work deirectly with the publics for which human development and similar services are designed. Frequently these employees are poorly trained, poorly motivated, poorly supervised and poorly served with logistical supply system[31].

The reasons for their poor performance are numerous. There is considerable evidence that the civil service systems of many post colonies are still following those archaic rules and regulations whch seem inconsistent and counteractive in relation to changing politico-administrative situations. Although governmental priority has shifted

from the traditional administration to technical and development administration, greater reliance is still placed on literary educated administrative skills in matters of recruitment and selection of public servants including the field officials. A distinct demarcation is always maintained between technical and non-technical services. The technical personnel are frequently considered as having distinctively interior role in the affairs of coordination and control of development programmes. The isolation or even exclusion, of the relevant professionals not only tends to produce bureaucratic conflict, but impedes implementation function significantly[32].

Promotion within the service mostly becomes automatic and usually ruled by seniority rather than by achievement. Placement at the field level is generally perceived as 'non-preferable' jobs[33]. Reward and encouragement for creative and risk taking efforts may often be seen as an exception rather than a rule. Moreover, occasional and frequent transfer of field level officials leads to their frustration and hampers implementation of programmes. Although the training facilities for central officials have reasonably improved in many developing countries, no appreciable effort has been initiated to impart appropriate training to field officials in these countries. Such personnel deficiencies stifle initiative and problem solving capacity of field bureaucrats.

Moreover, in the absence of a reasonably attractive incentive structure, many field staff may find the need to supplement their income either by doing 'private business [34] or by other means. The inevitable outcome of all these seem to be dangerous for accomplishing policy goals.

Conclusion

The factors discussed above are not exhaustive. Other organisational and managerial factors such as lack of commitment on the part of implementors toward policy objectives, ineffective mechanisms of

accountability enforcement and performance evaluation, bureaucratic politics and conflict, inadequate logistical support by the centre merit considerations while **analysing** the administrative problems of implementation.

However, an analysis of internal constraints cannot sufficiently explain the associated issues in detail. Implementation bureaucracy is not a self-contained system. It has to interact with other forces and performs its administrative responsibilities within the defined framework which is set forth for it by the policy makers at the national level. The inadequacies that are inherent in the policy itself and the demands and expectations of extra-bureaucratic forces from the context pose constraints or provide contingencies to the task of it.

Because of occupying the most critical position between government and clients, between notional politicians and their local representatives, the bureaucrats at the field level are also increasingly become the focus of frequent conflicting demands and expectation of these various forces. Consequently, their working conditions are seldom conducive to the adequate performance of their jobs. Quite often, they find themselves in situations where they lack the adminisrtrative resources to carry out their tasks effectively. Within the bureaucracy, they are obliged to perform their functions in accordance with established rules and **regulations** on the one hand and also have to satisfy the broad and long-term expectations of their superiors and subordinates on the other. Outside the administration, they are supposed to fulfill a variety of demands that emanate from various social forces on the basis of their specific interests and expectations. Each of the social forces has control over the behaviour of implementors and generally expect to gain a favourable response from them. In such a stressful situation, they are exposed regularly to contextual threats and find enormous difficulties in handling their day to day programme or project management tasks.

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