

Abstract:

India is a land of villages. More than half of India's total population live in rural areas. Indian rural has suffered enduring destitute since ages. The development of villages in India has been a challenging task since the problems is not only multi-faceted in nature; its degree also varies from place to place having very vast areas to be covered with very large in quantities. Development in India has been a complex phenomenon having its implication over various aspect of socio-economic and political life of the people. Of late the urge for rapid development in the third world countries, the development especially of rural areas has occupied the top priorities in the planning at the levels- national, state and local.

The subject "Rural Development" gained widespread appeal in recent years. This is largely a result of the way issues regarding development themselves began to be perceived. The growing of new paradigm in development theory, during post World War era had subsided the traditional concept of development. The development theorists were dissatisfied with the way traditional concept of development emphases growth and ignored the issues of distributive justice and other dimension of development. The interest in rural development is partly an offshoot of such disenchantment and also on account of growing realisation of importance of rural development in facilitating the process of overall development.

The notion of rural development has been conceived in diverse ways, by the researchers. Whatever, may be the differences is in conceptualising the notion of rural development, the essence remain largely identical and concern primarily with the poverty alleviation and distributive justice oriented to economic transformation in rural areas. Its main objectives are-

- i. To improve the living standards of rural population by providing basic needs like food, shelter, clothing, employment and education,
- ii. To increase productivity in rural areas and reduce poverty,
- iii. To involve rural people in development process through their participation in decision making at local government bodies and
- iv. To ensure distributive justice, equalisation of opportunities in the societies.

The Indian background of rural development gives an integral account of development. Rural development in India has been looked through broad sense as “Integrated development”. It encompasses the concept of all round development of rural area and the people living there, through the optimum utilisation of local resources- physical and human resources. It encompasses the improvement in all domains of human life i.e. social, economic, political, and cultural. The field of Rural Development is vast since it is concern with attaining the objective of all round development. Rural Development in India has been a prime concern since Independence. From, it’s first five years plan and throughout the planning years it has been holding the top priority in all level of planning.

Considering, the demand for rural development the utility of local self government capable of transforming the rural areas were desirably setup. Since, Local self government is the key institution which can play a transforming role in the rural areas; in this direction this dissertation is the outcome of the research work conducted under Kokrajhar Development Block, Titaguri to study the role of VCDC in Rural Development.

VCDC is a local government body arranged in BTAD at base. It is a grassroots government in BTAD an alternative arrangement in lieu of Village Panchayat. It is entrusted with great responsibilities to uplift socio-economy as well as promotion of political empowerment among rural population through their involvement in the governance.

It is a known fact that VCDC Chairman and other members are not elected through electoral process. They are nominated by the Council government from within the supporter of ruling political party. The Chairman and other members are for five years term and can remain in the office as long as they enjoy the mercy of the BTC authority unless terminated on the ground of serious public allegations.

VCDCs are ideally form consisting of 14 nominated members including a Chairperson (One); 2 (two) women members; 1 (One) SC member (1 reserved where SC population is least) however, as per condition member from SC community may be increased; 3 (three) farmer members; 1 (One) BPL member; 1 (One) Social Worker and 5 (five) general members. These nominated members are assisted by Junior Engineer (JE) at

Block level. The Junior Engineer assist them in preparation of plans and policies, project estimate relating to government schemes that are means for the development of rural areas. Again, it doesn't have the prescribed criterion regarding the number of population it requires to constitute a VCDC, but ideally majority number of VCDC have a population of around 3000 to 7000, with few VCDC covering large areas exceeding more than ten to fourteen thousand population. There are also VCDC with a few number of villages with either less than or just over thousand population.

VCDC as decentralised institution at local level governance is authorised with many public responsibility including planning, organising, selecting and monitoring the development schemes and implementing it at grass root level. In contrast VCDC and its members meet often allegation of abusing their powers, responsibilities and duties. In this context, the objectives of the study were set to find out the position of VCDC taking three main aspects – i) Role of VCDC in Socio-Economic development of rural areas under Kokrajhar Development Block, Titaguri ii) Participation of the rural people in the working of VCDC in the process of rural development and iii) Assessment on the achievements and failure of VCDC in implementing various Government Schemes.

Based on the set objectives of the present study the researcher has applied mainly three methods-

- v. Document reviews method
- vi. Questionnaire method: It is mainly consist of both close ended and open ended questions for the respondents.

- vii. Focus/Targeted Group Discussion: It was mainly carried out with the VCDC members and other resource persons and activists.

The study unfurled both positive and negative aspects of VCDC. The researcher has measured several Socio-Economic indicators to examine the role of VCDC under the study areas. Some of the Socio-Economic indicators taken into consideration are- monthly income, landholding, education and occupation, type of houses, Nos. of BPL and APL households and beneficiaries under it, affording a means of descent and luxurious living standard and so on. These indicators were cross examined to evaluate the role of VCDC in rural development under the study areas. It has been found that the role of VCDC in this field is critically marginal.

Political empowerment at grassroots depends on local government institution at large. In this respect the popular opinion among larger sections of people hints that VCDC at bottom is playing a vital role in promoting political empowerment. The participation of rural people in working of the VCDC in rural development shows quite impressive. However, the political representation of women in VCDC is undermined. Besides, the level of transparency and accountability of VCDC is quite low. Despite of being an instrumental in empowering the rural people politically the intention of VCDC is often questioned by various public domains due to its non-transparency and unaccountable nature.

In matters of achievement and failure of VCDC in implementing the government schemes it has a modest performance. It has achieved a fair convergence rate in various

government schemes like housing, sanitation, other construction works and in organising the work force under MGNREGA. It has seen both success and failures in some of the core areas assigned to it. The study revealed that VCDC has achieved modest success in maintaining the rural infrastructure like road, culvert, school infrastructure, community assets etc. However, time and again, it has been charged with corruption, nepotism, favouritism and bias. This nature of VCDC has raised the eyeballs of many conscious public over their intentions. As a matter of fact, although, VCDC over the decade has been exercising the developmental planning, implementing and executing various development schemes under MGNREGA, IAY, PMGSY and other poverty alleviation schemes at village level yet, the efforts of VCDC are often debated, doubted, and many a time discredited due to mismanagement of resources.

The study revealed least convincing achievement of VCDC. The study also unfolded several underlying factors behind it. Therefore, without considering both pros and cons of VCDC it may be unfair to leap into conclusion just on the basis of deficit figures of VCDC in rural development. Moreover, it has completed just a decade of its existence. The problems like weak autonomy, financial non viable, less incentives to members, non-electoral process, corruption, inefficacy of members, unaccountable, non-transparent etc. came as a major findings which altogether hinder the effective working of VCDC in rural development.

Nevertheless, VCDC as a local government institution can contribute to the development of rural areas if the problems like weak autonomy, financial non-viable,

corruption and nepotism are wiped out. It can transform the poor villages into model village. It can be an instrumental in changing the fate of poverty stricken rural populations.

Keywords: VCDC (Village Council Development Committee), BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts) MGNREGA, IAY, PMGSY, rural development, socio-economic, political empowerment, transparency, accountability etc.