

Executive Summary

Recognising the importance accorded by the Planning Commission, Government of India, for a district-centric approach to devolution of finances for an integrated local area development, a district centric audit of West Tripura district was carried out to assess the status and impact on the quality of life of people on implementation of various socio-economic developmental activities in the district during 2004-09.

The review covered key Social sector programmes pertaining to Education, Urban Development and Health, Economic sector programmes relating to Employment generation and creation of Roads and general services like facilitation of information through usage of Information Technology (IT) and Sanitation issues like management and handling of Municipal Solid Wastes to provide better public services.

While the review brought out significant achievements relating to Education and Health, there were areas where the State/District administration needs to focus its attention and take urgent corrective action.

Planning

Perspective Plan and Consolidated Annual Plan was not formulated for the district during the period 2004-09. Also, no shelf of projects was prepared by the District Magistrate and Collector on an annual basis.

The District Planning Committee (DPC) for West Tripura District was constituted only in September 2008 although the 74th Amendment to the Constitution, 1992 mandated the establishment of such Committee for consolidating the plans of each district. The members of the DPC were to meet at least twice a year to review the developmental activities in the district. Till May 2010, the DPC had not held any meeting i.e. even after more than one and a half year of its constitution and therefore, in the absence of any meeting, the DPC failed to discharge its duties.

The planning process was thus, inadequate and ill equipped to cope with the challenges to provide basic amenities. It lacked the most important characteristics viz. Community participation for want of effective decentralization of the process. In absence of any District Plan during 2004-09, the planning process became the responsibility of the Implementing Departments/Agencies. Plans were formulated by them in isolated manner i.e. not being correlated with other developmental schemes taken up in the district and no measurable goals were set to improve the living standards of the people of the district. The gaps in various developmental schemes/programmes remained unidentified with the result that the felt needs of the weaker sections of the society and the disparities between various regions and communities within the district could not be addressed.

Recommendation:

District Planning Committee should forthwith commence preparation of holistic perspective and annual plans for the district, based on inputs from Blocks and GPs as well as other stakeholders. Periodical monitoring and review of the actual implementation vis-à-vis plans also needs to be carried out.

Financial Management

The total quantum of funds received by the district during 2004-09 and the expenditure thereagainst was not available with the district authorities. Neither the district administration nor any other authority was vested with the responsibility to maintain consolidated accounts of the funds inflow to the district and expenditure incurred. Release of funds for the district was not centrally channelised. Funds were routed both through the district administration and by placement directly to the Line Departments/Implementing Agencies.

The receipt, utilisation and accountal of developmental funds is done on mere release of funds to implementing agencies rather than after their actual utilization. As such, the reported progress and achievement of these schemes depicting the outcomes do not reflect the true picture.

Recommendation:

A uniform accounting system should be put in place for receipt, utilization and accountal of funds showing actual utilization of funds and a mechanism needs to be evolved for showing actual utilization of funds as distinct from mere release of funds.

Social Services

Education

The target of bringing all children within age group of 6-14 years to school by 2003 has not been achieved. Consequently, the next target of ensuring all children to complete 5 years of primary schooling by 2007 had remained unachieved and the target of ensuring 8 years of elementary schooling by 2010 remains doubtful.

The deployment of teachers in the schools was uneven and effective steps were not taken to train the teachers properly to ensure quality education. Supportive measures viz. development of child-friendly infrastructure, ensuring proper implementation of mid-day-meal programme amongst all the children of the eligible age group/classes, keener attention for the special focus-group viz. SC/ST/Girls/Weaker section/Disabled children etc. were not adequately strengthened.

A number of schools in the district were lacking in basic infrastructure/facilities like common toilet, girls' toilet, special ramp for disabled children and drinking water facility. No effective steps were taken to train the teachers properly to ensure quality education.

Recommendation:

Elementary education facilities should be provided to all those habitations presently devoid of such facilities. The basic infrastructure/facilities like water, toilet etc. should be provided in all the schools, especially at the elementary level, to ensure an appropriate environment for teaching and learning. Effective steps should be taken to train the teachers and deploy them evenly in the schools to ensure quality education.

Urban Development

In order to cope with the various problems that have emerged as a result of rapid urbanization, GOI felt the need to draw up a coherent urbanisation policy to implement projects in select cities on mission mode, which has been named 'Jawaharlal Nehru National

Urban Renewal Mission.’ GOI approved three schemes for the West Tripura District. It was noticed that there was no initiative for Capacity Building and there were delay in release/short release of funds to the executing agency leading to delay in implementation. Selection of beneficiaries for Basic Services for Urban Poor lacked transparency and did not match with the number of slum families identified in the location as per survey report. For Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme, relaxation in payment of beneficiary contribution was allowed at the cost of curtailment in specification contained in the approved plan leaving scope for further demand.

A project to revamp the existing water supply system in the northern zone of Agartala city through total replacement of the old pipe lines was planned to be completed by the year 2010. However, the project had not yet started despite release of funds by GOI in October 2008 due to non-availability of land.

Thus, both in the planning and execution stage, the Mission suffered from lack of adequate monitoring to ensure adherence to the provisions of the guidelines, which had an adverse impact on the benefits for the targeted group.

Recommendation:

The economic and other status of the beneficiaries under ‘Basic Services for Urban Poor’ should be ascertained on a priority basis and benefits extended to the genuine and needy persons only in a transparent manner. The beneficiary contribution under ‘Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme’ should be realized forthwith and approved items provided to the beneficiaries in order to negate further demand in near future. The Central and State’s matching share should be released to the Implementing Agencies on time to reduce delay in implementation of the schemes.

Health

The planning of the lone scheme covered in audit, which was a computer-based initiative for providing Preventive and Primary Eye care services through establishment of Vision centres was merely based on an offer from a vendor and not pre-planned against specific demand, which ought to have been identified beforehand. Total number of Centres to be established was not initially clear, while work had started prior to formal approval. This was followed by defective funding arrangement causing delay in implementation. Sustainability of the programme in future was uncertain in the absence of specific planning and funding arrangement for recruitment of adequate and skilled manpower on a regular basis after completion of their contract.

Recommendation:

To ensure full coverage of the district, the remaining centres on which work is in progress should be established on priority basis. Adequate and skilled manpower on a regular basis should be recruited and financial arrangements for the same arranged at the earliest to ensure smooth functioning of the centres in future.

Economic Services

Employment Generation

The scheme Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana was implemented in the State without specific target and adequate planning. This coupled with failure in utilizing the funds in time has resulted in implementation of the scheme in an unsatisfactory manner and also culminating in a number of financial irregularities besides taking up of works prohibited under the scheme guidelines. The scheme though dis-continued from 1 April 2008 was continuing in the District till date due to lack of effective monitoring.

Under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the shortfall in providing legally guaranteed 100 days wage employment to card holders ranged between 36.71 and 78.40 days during the period from 2007-09. This was basically due to non-adherence to the general guidelines issued for the purpose, lack of active Community participation, works taken up beyond the work plan approved by the concerned Gram Sabhas, works not permissible under the NREGA 2005 taken up, implementing works involving mechanical machinery and execution of works having wage component lesser than the minimum requirement of 60 per cent. Besides, there were also cases of diversion of scheme funds.

Recommendation:

In view of discontinuation of SGRY, time bound action plan for (i) completion of incomplete works (ii) adjustment of advances lying with Implementing Officers and (iii) transfer/utilisation of funds lying unspent should be immediately undertaken. Besides, reasons for instances of violation of financial and scheme guidelines and also cases of doubtful implementation of works should be investigated and appropriate responsibilities fixed.

For Programme under NREGA (renamed as MGNREGP), preparation of Perspective Plan at the District, Block and Gram Panchayat level and formation of Vigilance and Monitoring Committee for works to be undertaken should be given priority ensuring Community participation in planning, execution and monitoring process. The prescribed minimum mandays may be provided to every registered job-card holder during a year and more mandays may be generated through timely and proper utilization of funds.

Road connectivity

The State Government neither distributed its allocation of PMGSY among the Districts despite it being provided in the guidelines nor did it keep the district-wise accounts of the coverage of Habitations separately. Execution was very slow and only 38 per cent of works taken up since 2004-05 had been completed. The Progress Reports revealed that non-availability of land was a problem towards smooth progress of the works.

New connectivity provided under this scheme was only 32 per cent of the targeted habitations on overall basis even after more than six years from the targeted time schedule (by 2003). In addition, habitations not permissible for coverage under PMGSY guidelines were also covered. There was no Monitoring and Supervision Committee overseeing the Programme.

Recommendation:

Road connectivity to the 41 uncovered habitations in the district with 1000 and more people should be taken up and completed at the earliest. The Monitoring and Supervision Committee should be set up immediately to oversee the programme. To ensure timely road connectivity to the rural masses, mechanism to resolve the land disputes needs to be set up on priority basis.

General Services**E-Governance**

There was very little progress in the district towards the objectives of NeGP despite establishment of 57 POPs under State Wide Area Network. The other essential and correlated sub-schemes viz. State Data Centres for data storage and Common Service Centres for setting up service delivery front-ends along with Capacity Building under National e-Governance Plan were not yet implemented despite lapse of almost five years since GOI release, thus, depriving the district population of the e-services.

Recommendation:

The State Data Centre and the Common Service Centres should be set up immediately to provide the intended e-services for the district population.

Management of Municipal Solid Waste (MMSW)

Despite enhancing the Capacity of Agartala Municipal Council (AMC) for better handling and management of Municipal Solid Wastes (MSW) in comparison to the pre-2007 period, the objectives of the CPCB sponsored scheme for Management of MSW within the AMC area could not be fully achieved nor the intended benefits made available to the public by the AMC, within the time schedule. Delay in preparing an Action Plan in a phased manner, and absence of non-initiating a well monitored implementation system through a separate wing set up exclusively for this purpose coupled with the casual approach in the project implementation deprived the people of their right to live in a hygienic condition.

Recommendation:

A separate dedicated cell should be set up, without further delay, for effective accomplishment of all the six stages of MSW management.

A 24x7 hour helpline may be set up in the AMC and given adequate publicity to help citizens in communicating the emergency requirements and also to ensure more community participation in the waste management of the city.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and supervision of implementation of various schemes at all tiers of local administration in the district was perfunctory which adversely impacted the progress of developmental works/projects undertaken by various departments/implementing agencies. This in turn led to delays/non-completion of a number of works in the social, economic and general sectors thereby depriving the public of the benefits of the schemes undertaken for development of the district.

There was no separate grievance redressal cell/unit created under the district administration for ameliorating complaints against deprivation of any sort of benefits from the developmental programmes/schemes. Hence, there was no mechanism to follow up on the grievances.

Recommendation:

The DPC and the other prescribed forums should be utilised effectively to ensure monitoring and supervision of the implementation of all development schemes taken up in the district to ensure that the programmes are executed on time and within cost. Records of all meetings/inspection/review etc. should be properly documented for ensuring effective follow-up. Grievance redressal mechanism should be systematized and institutionalised.

Conclusion

There were multiplicity of programmes and schemes and large number of implementing agencies, making it difficult for the district administration to effectively monitor and supervise all the developmental activities.

The role of the DM&C in the district was restricted following entrustment of a large number of responsibilities to the Local Bodies. However, as the Member Secretary of the District Planning Committee (DPC), he could have contributed in chalking out a well assessed, need based and development oriented implementation of a District Plan with effective monitoring. Unfortunately, the DPC is yet to convene even a single meeting and the District remains devoid of its own consolidated Annual District Plan for effective Community participation. DRDA Administration also had inadequate manpower with a lack of properly trained personnel/experts as per the needs of its various wings. It was only partially successful in discharging its role to establish proper coordination among all concerned especially for implementation of SGRY which suffered from lack of planning leading to discretionary decisions and violation of guidelines, culminating in doubtful implementation, non-accountal of receipts, non-completion of works, non-utilisation of funds and non-adjustment of advances even after two years of its discontinuation. Also, there were cases of investing schematic funds in Fixed Deposits and diversion of funds. The guaranteed 100 days of wage employment on demand under NREGP were not achieved in the district. The objectives of the schemes having impact on the living condition of people, like PMGSY at rural sector and Management of MSW at urban sector are yet to be achieved although the targeted time schedule expired long back.

Monitoring, inspection and supervision needs to be strengthened through Community participation at all tiers of local administration and also through better utilization of the various implementing and monitoring committees formed at the district level.

The State Government needs to put in place a robust district centric planning process by mapping the gaps in infrastructure under various sectors like health, education, employment generation, drinking water, sanitation etc. through inputs from all tiers of local administration and public at large. A clear roadmap to achieve the targets set through such plans for the development of the district should be drawn up so that the benefits of the schemes reach the intended beneficiaries in time.