

[02]

Role of Human Resource Management in Local Self Government: Towards Effective Rural Development in West Bengal, India

Roy Tirtha

Abstract

Present condition of rural development which required immediate attention to the Human Resource Management (HRM) system at local self-government institutions for effective and desired rural development in West Bengal. Due to absence of forward planning, lack of responsibility, lack of morality, lack of decision making at all levels, practice of old methods, ineffective leadership, faulty staffing procedure and lack of motivation and co-ordination parallel and desired development had not been fulfilled. And here arose the need to train, to update and motivate the local government functionaries through human resource management for better results. A questionnaire was developed to collect data on operational part of HRM and staff development. One district and eight local self government institutions were selected for this study. The research study took a look at HRM, a vital tool for institutional effectiveness. More over, the result of the study revealed that the HRM practices had a great impact and significant effect on institutional effectiveness and employee's performance. Therefore, the study recommended and concluded that the HRM practices were a vital tool to achieve expected rural development in West Bengal.

Keywords: *Human Resource Management, Performance Appraisal, Human Resource Planning, Training and Development*

Introduction

Development is a broader concept than economic growth. Rural development was an important issue in India as well as in the state of West Bengal. After independence Panchayati Raj Institutions had been involved and expected to play an important role in rural development in India. Special attention and importance were given to these institutions for rural development by planning commission and committees constituted by the government of India.

Rural development in West Bengal was an emerging factor in the challenging global scenario. As because what we mean by proper rural development, had not been yet possible in our state. During the time of my field visit it had been seen that, most of the people live in villages and so many people live in Below the Poverty Line (BPL). They were suffering from malnutrition. There was lacuna of food, clothing, and shelter. Ignorance and illiteracy wrapped up their life. Proper infrastructure, drinking water, road, and communication facilities were one of the major issues in this regard.

In India, the 73rd constitutional amendment of 1992 decentralized agriculture, irrigation, health, education along with 23 other items to the Panchayats - the local level self-government body. It was envisaged that the three-tier Panchayat system at the District, Block and the Village level would fulfilled the aim of rural development through decentralization of planning, various schemes and their implementation (Chakrabarti, Chattopadhyay, Nath 2011). In West Bengal, a state in eastern India, where the Panchayats were revitalized before the constitutional amendment, and took a great initiative in implementation of three tier

Panchayat system – as a part of local level self government body. Rural development is the main pillar of Nation's Development (Gupta 2004). The local self government body in India known as Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Though, West Bengal was a pioneer in implementation of there tier Panchayti Raj system for socio-economic development and transformation of rural society. But, what we mean by proper, and desired rural development yet had not been achieved. In West Bengal uniform rural development yet had not been fulfilled due to lack of accountability, responsibility, proper and accurate planning, faulty staffing procedure, ineffective leadership, practice of old methods and motivation and co-ordination at local self government institutions.

In many other parts of India, the Panchayat remains a weak body with limited powers, and, very often, is dominated by the socially and economically powerful. The Panchayat structure in West Bengal, though not free of all weaknesses, presented a different picture. Like the path of development itself, the performance of Panchayat institutions across the State was unequal, of course, as not all of them were equally equipped to handle their responsibilities. However, well-functioning Panchayats were often able to make a substantial difference to planning and implementation of development programmes, and, more importantly, to the lives of the poor. The recent developments in West Bengal undermine this achievement, and may well herald a shift in class alliances and power relations in the State (Bakshi 2011).

Human resources are institution's/organizations greatest assets because without them, functions of Panchayat Institutions such as managing, monitoring, implementation of programmes/projects, communication and dealing with stakeholders could not be completed. Human resources and the potentials they possess are the key drivers for an institutional success. With globalization and technological advances, today's institutions (PRIs) are continuously changing. In order to maximize institutional effectiveness, human potentials, individuals' capabilities, time, and talents must be managed and developed. Hence, the practice of human resource management (HRM) in Panchayati Raj Institutions met the goals of rural development in West Bengal.

Human resources of an organization can be a source of competitive advantage, provided that the policies for managing people are integrated with strategic business planning and organizational culture (Beer, et al. 1985). Human resources or human capital of a firm that constitute the resource leading to competitive advantage (Wright, McMahan & McWilliams 1994). However, employees are a greater asset than physical or financial resources, for the talent of employees is what determines an organization's success (Ann, et al. 2009). Development of people, their competencies, and the process development of the total organization are the main concerns of human resource management (Pareek & Rao 1992).

Here the study concentrated its attention to how human resource management practices contributed to the performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions for effective rural development. This study examined the study of Human Resource Management (HRM) from the perspective of rural development in West Bengal. Thus, the paper identified the need of human resource management and its impact on rural development.

Problem of the Study

West Bengal is a small state with vast population. There are so many villages spread all over West Bengal. Agriculture is the one of the pillar and determinant of state economy. Rural villages are the heart and soul of the state's progress. If, it could be possible to develop each

and every village in the state properly then the progress and prosperity of village people as well as state's economy would be developed simultaneously. But how it was possible? It was possible only through proper rural development.

According to census of 2011 the total population of West Bengal is about 9.13 crore and about more than 68% population live in villages and a majority of our total population prolong to linger deprived from basic necessities of life. Rural development in West Bengal had failed to produce the expected out come. It had been seen that, there was scarcity of food, rural infrastructure, roads facilities, drinking water, health and sanitation facilities due to lack of effectiveness of local self government institutions and their functionaries towards rural development.

After the through assessment of Panchayat level work few distinct short comings could be detected. These short comings were mainly negligence, lack of proper supervision, lack of accountability and responsibility and Lacuna of Capacity Building etc. Other few shortcomings like leadership quality, practice of old methods, ineffectiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions, lacuna of Resource Mobilization etc. were also found. Moreover, emphasis should be given to Transparency, implementation of proper training and management system.

Proper idea and encouraging responsibility were also partly or totally absent. In some cases gravity of proper aim of work had been ignored. Proper training of workers and supervisors had not been given. Projects choosing were also not correct .Urgent and essential works had not been selected after spot verification. In many cases work period had not been followed. Some times works had been done beyond the project period. In many cases much attention to work were not found. Therefore, villagers and stakeholders were not getting proper and accurate information and service all the time. Sometimes, it caused as barrier in the way of smooth and expected rural development in West Bengal.

All these short comings and defects had made most projects and works neglected and incomplete. Above all human accountability, responsibility and moralities were absent and these were the main obstacles towards attainment of rural development goal in West Bengal.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was concentrated its attention, to study the human resource management practices at Panchayat Raj Institutions and its contribution to the performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions towards effective rural development in West Bengal.

1. To determine relationship between HRM and effectiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions for rural development in West Bengal.
2. To determine the role of staff/member of Panchayat institution would become more competent, efficient, accountable and responsible through huuman resource management towards attainment of institutional effectiveness and rural development.

Method

I undertook a research study to examine the implication of human resource management in Panchayati Raj Institutions for desired rural development in West Bengal. The study was conducted in West Bengal a state of eastern India. One district and eight Panchayats were selected for this purpose. This study adopted a descriptive research design. It involved a field visit to talk to the functionaries of Panchayat institutions. Data were collected using questionnaire method. The questionnaire had both open ended and closed questions. A bit of interview was also considered especially as regards the head of the Pnachayat institutions.

Data collected from the published documents, government orders and reports, discussions and interviews with staff, elected representatives and beneficiaries through discussion method. Primary data collected from the officials and non-official functionaries of Panchayat through pre-designed questionnaires. Secondary data collected from official records at various levels like district, blocks and villages through discussions, gathering views and opinions from the officials of Panchayat Raj Institutions and stakeholders.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which included frequency distribution tables, percentages, pie charts and related diagrams. The collected data were analysed by made use of computer packages and Microsoft Excel to interpret the research findings.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

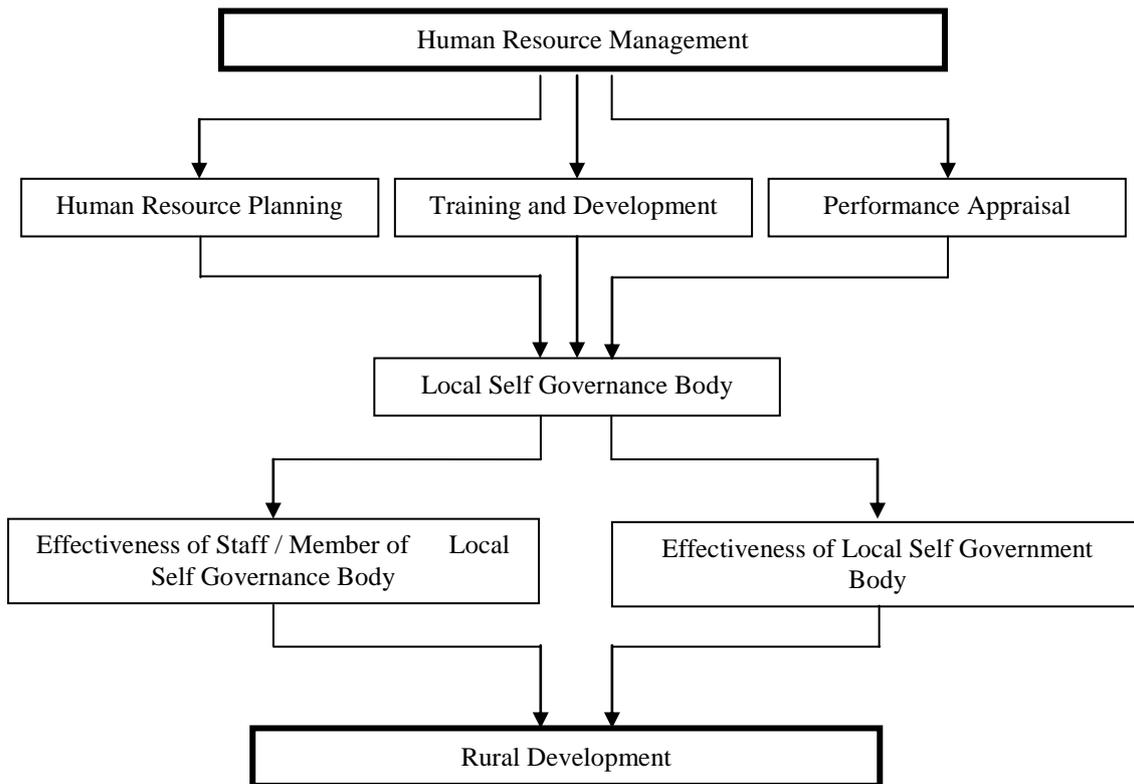
Here the study described the knowledge acquired from literature reviews to the scope of research. These reviews includes what is Human Resources (HR), what is Management and what is the meaning of HRM and how it functions in organizational settings, why people are important and essential as organizational resources and how this resources can be effectively, efficiently and properly utilized for individual as well as institutional success.

The literature on the subjects of rural development is fairly large, while it is not so in the subject of rural development through human resource management which is a growing area of research. A few seminal contributions on the subject of study had been reviewed to identify the major trends and to venture into a new area of research. Government of India and Governments of West Bengal's Panchayat and Rural Development Programmes have been evaluated by various Government organisations viz. Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission, Concurrent Evaluations carried out by the Ministry of Rural Development with the help of reputed institutions located at the regional level, RBI, NABARD, IFMR, NIUA, NIRD, DFID, UNICEF and other national and international organisations like Universities, Research Institutes, NGOs, and Individuals. Their approaches, conceptualization and methodology laid their focus on the success and shortfalls in terms of performance, as measured by resource mobilization, poverty alleviation or assets creation. But they have hardly attempted to strengthen the Capacity, accountability, responsibility and effectiveness of local government functionaries through human resource management.

Proposed Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The study aimed to study the interrelationship between the independent variables and employee performance, efficiency, competency, effectiveness by conducting research on how these 3 variables affect the performance of the functionaries of local self government institutions. Here the study illustrated and tried to give a clear picture how human resource planning, training and development, performance and potential appraisal helped and assisted the workforce to upgrade and update their performance, skills, efficiency, competency and also institutional effectiveness towards attainment of rural development in West Bengal. In short, the proposed framework suggested how planning, training and development, performance and potential appraisal as a part of human resource management facilitated the local self government institution in reaching the goal of rural development through effective utilization of workforce.

Figure 1: Proposed Framework Model



Findings of the Study

During field visits and at the time of data analysis, it was found that in the planning system at Panchayat level planning maximum efforts and importance had been given on infrastructure, agriculture, poverty alleviation, sanitation, health, education etc. but there was lack of interest and initiatives for the up-gradation and management of Panchayat level functionaries. There was hardly found planning on human resource. It was also found that, there was not existed any human resource planning strategy which was integrated with the institution's strategy for achieving the institutional goals.

Lacuna of training and development practices at Panchayat level were also found during field visit. Maximum training programme organized by the Panchayat basically on projects, schemes, accounts and audit related but, there was hardly found training and development programme on human resources. which ultimately made the workforce ineffective and inefficient.

During field visits and at the time of data analysis, it was also found that, there was not existence of any performance appraisal system at Panchayat level to ensure institutional effectiveness through correcting employees for standard and improved performance and suggesting the change in employee behaviour. It was hardly found the system of individual performance appraisal for the functionaries of the Panchayat. Moreover, there was not any system of rewarding for good, responsible & accountable staff/member at Panchayat level.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the era of globalization and technological advancement the nature, volume and variety of works of an organisation were changing fast. In the competitive global scenario organizations were facing so many problems against their progress and prosperity. To keep up their

progress intact organisations needed to develop and nurture their vital assets i.e. human resources. If human resources of an organisation were competent, efficient and effective then the performance of the organisation would be accordingly. HRM is assumed to affect knowledge, skills, abilities (Schuler & Jackson 1995), attitudes and behaviour of employees (Guest 1997), and may therefore affect the performance of an organisation (Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe 2004).

HRM is concerned with the proper and effective uses of employees to achieve organizational and individual goals. Through human resource management it is possible to make competent, efficient and effective workforce for the organisation. Through which an organisation enables to take proper strategy, planning, programmes and can execute the same also. By such an effective workforce organisations become able to produce in time service delivery. Therefore, the role of workforce in an organisation is not only vital but essential also. To motivate the workforce and to extract the potential towards attainment of organizational goal and success, human resource management acts as an important tool. The practice of HRM is that people are the organization's key resource and organizational performance largely depends on them (Armstrong 2006).

Under the above circumstances and after reviewing the Panchayat system in West Bengal it was detected that HRM policy was partly or totally absent. After through analysis of the Panchayat system it was found that, importance had been given on infrastructure, agriculture, poverty alleviation, sanitation, health, education etc. but there was lack of interest and initiative for the development and management of Panchayat level functionaries i.e. members & Staff etc. It was also observed that, there was not found such type planning, training and development and performance appraisal practices which made the Panchayat functionaries dynamic, effective and efficient, so that they took an active and vital role in rural development. If they were not competent, efficient, accountable, responsible, how they took appropriate and effective planning, need based planning for rural development. There was hardly found such type policy which helped and made the Panchayat functionaries effective and dynamic for this purpose.

Better rural development was possible only by those Panchayats that had better managed human resources. If the human resources of a Panchayat were good, accountable, responsible and efficient, rural development under that Panchayat could be performed accordingly. For this there was the need to build accurate and efficient human resources for perfect Panchayat administration and institutional set up. Through proper human resource planning, training and development and potential appraisal system it was possible to build perfect management and efficient administration of Panchayat for rural development. For this there was an urgent need to develop workforce and human potentiality through HRM.

In conclusion Panchayats were to be well developed and well managed along with communication, technological development, which was demanding responsibility, accountability, leadership quality and efficiency of workforce. It needed to introduce new management techniques to develop human resources for speedy decision making, planning, proper service delivery and enhancement of capacity, proper dealing with stakeholders among the staff/members of Panchayats to meet the challenges of new millennium.

Therefore, the role of human resources at Panchayati Raj institutions was very important and inevitable. Even only planning, programmes, projects, infrastructure and money were not able to meet the purpose of necessary rural development in West Bengal, without efficient,

competent and effective Panchayat functionaries. Therefore, human resource was the core and vital issue for rural development in West Bengal. Through HRM it was possible to nurture, motivate and developed the capacity, efficiency, competency of the staff and members of Panchayat institutions and which ultimately helped the Panchayat towards attainment of rural development.

References

- i. Armstrong, M 2006, A Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice, 10th ed., London, Kogan Page, P. 44-76.
- ii. Ann, G, Jerry, WG, Scott, AQ & Pamela, D 2009, The Praeger Handbook of Human Resource Management, Praeger Publishers, London, p. xvi-xvii.
- iii. Annual Report, 2008-2009, Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal
- iv. Bakshi, A 2011, 'Weakening Panchayats in West Bengal', Field Report, Review of Agrarian Studies, vol. 1, no. 2, Review of Agrarian Studies, Bangalore, India, pp.203-205 available at www.ras.org.in.
- v. Beer, M, Spector, B, Lawrence, P, Mills, DQ & Walton, R 1985, Human Resource Management: A General Managers Perspective, New York, Free Press.
- vi. Census Report, 2011, Government of India (Provisional).
- vii. Chakrabarti, B, Chattopadhyay, R & Nath, S 2011, 'Local Governments in Rural West Bengal, India and their Coordination with Line Departments', Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance, no 8/9: May-November 2011.
- viii. Den Hartog, DN, Boselie, P & Paauwe, J 2004, 'Performance Management: A model and research agenda', Applied Psychology: An International Review, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 556-569.
- ix. Flippo Edwin B 1984, Personnel Management, McGraw Hill International Editions, 6th Edition, New York, p-5
- x. Gupta R.K. 2004, Rural Development in India , Atlanta Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd, New Delhi.
- xi. Guest, DE 1997, 'Human resource management and performance; a review of the research agenda', The International Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 263-76.
- xii. Joshi R.P., Narwani G.S. 2002, Panchayat Raj in India : Emerging Trends Across the States, Rawat Publications, Jaipur
- xiii. Jucius Michael 1973, Personnel Management, Richard D. Irwin, Illinois, Homewood, pp. -37-38.
- xiv. Megginson, Leon C. 1977, Personnel and Human Resource Administration, Richard D. Irwin, Illinois, Homewood, p. - 4
- xv. Pareek, U & Rao, T V 1992, Designing and managing human resource systems, New Delhi, Oxford & IBH Publishing Company.
- xvi. Rensis Likert 1967, The Human Organisation : Its Management and Value, New York : MacGraw-Hill Book Co.) p.1.
- xvii. Schuler, RS & Jackson, SE 1995, 'Understanding human resource management in the context of organizations and their environment', Annual Review of Psychology, no. 46, pp. 237-264.
- xviii. Yoder Dale 1972, Personnel Management and Industrial Relations, Prentice Hall of India, New Delhi, p. - viii.
- xix. Wright, PM, McMahan, GC & McWilliams, A 1994, 'Human resources and sustained competitive advantage: A resource-based perspective', International Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 301.



Roy Tirtha

Ph.D. Reading

Department of International Relations

Jadavpur University

India

roytirtha.2008@rediffmail.com
