

Thana Administration in Bangladesh: Role of Thana Development Coordination Committee in Administration of Development Activities (Published in 1997)

a) Researchers' Identity

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b) Objectives

The general objective of the study was to assess the performance of TDCC in planning, coordination and management of development activities at the Thana level. The other objectives were as follows:

- i. To explore the dominant functions that is transacted at committee meetings;
- ii. To study the nature of participation by the members attending the committee meeting;
- iii. To explore the effect of the TDCC on the management of development projects; and
- vi. To suggest some sidelights on the tentative structure of the local government at the Thana level.

c) Executive summary

Thana administration in Bangladesh has passed through many ups and downs after its transformation into a unit of development administration in 1960s. The latest change is the annulment of the local government system at the Thana level in 1991 and in its place of the formation of the committee called

Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC) in 1993. This departure has been subjected to several criticisms. Against this background, the present study was intended to examine the present situation of Thana administration in planning, coordination and management of development activities. The other objective was to give some sidelights on the need as well as the future structure of the local government system at the Thana level. The study is mostly an opinion survey based on the views of three categories of people; Thana level officials, Union Parishad Chairmen and the selected villagers of the study areas. Besides, some data were also collected through referring the government documents, minutes of the TDCC meeting and the findings of other relevant studies on the field of administration in Bangladesh. As a matter of fact, the study concentrates its scope on five areas: inter-departmental relationships, planning and implementation of development activities, resource mobilization, performance of training activities, role in supplies and services, , performance of meeting and decision making process and importance of the local government system at the Thana level. With these few words about the background of the study, the subsequent paragraphs are devoted to highlight the major findings of the study.

1. Interdepartmental Relationships
2. Planning and Implementation of Development Activities
3. Resource Mobilization
4. Role of Thana Training and Development Centre in Training
5. Role of Thana Administration in Supplies and Services
6. Performance of TDCC in Respect of Meeting
7. Importance of the Local Government at Thana Level

d) Conclusion

The present study has examined the significance of Thana administration in terms of three things: supplies and services including training rendered to the rural people, its role in planning and implementation of development activities; and resource mobilization. Secondly, it has examined the status of inter-departmental relationships taking cognizance experiences of the two systems; Upazila and TDCC. Finally, an attempt has been made to assess the need of the local government system at the Thana level and its structure as well. The study suggests that Thana as an unit of development administration occupies an important position in the eyes of the officials, public representatives and the general people of the rural areas. In spite of many difficulties, rural people reap the benefits from Thana headquarters in many

ways. However, the study shows the process as to how the Thana administration gradually moves backward in respect of linkage between the public and the officials. There are evidences of official's domination over the public representatives in the absence of the proper accountability at the Thana level. Besides, the study reveals problems in several important areas: (a) low level of people's participation in planning and implementation of development activities; (b) excessive dependence on the central government; and (c) gradual fall in training activities. A comparative discussion between Upazila and TDCC suggests that Upazila is apparently more effective in all respects. However, it was also not completely free from drawbacks which are already evident from the responses of many respondents of the present study. Apart from this, survey findings of the several other studies on Upazila system also confirm the truth of these facts. Over and above, it seems that neither Upazila nor TDCC is free from defects.

As a remedy for these difficulties, the study underlines the need for a local government system with sufficient autonomy in all respects. A few gleanings from the views of the different categories of respondents indicate that the local government system would ensure five major benefits: (a) assurance of people's participation (b) certainty in official's accountability of the concerned department's (c) assurance of proper interaction among the public representatives and the officials and smooth implementation of development activities thereof (d) planning and implementation of development activities keeping in conformity with the people's demand and (e) increase in the scope for people's participation and transparency in development activities. However, the need for accountability of local administration and people's participation in development appear to become the major concerns of all the groups of respondents.

The study evidences some interesting points with respect to the structure of local government. First, the respondents are apparently unanimous over the idea that there should be a provision of Thana council comprising a Chairman and the required number of representative members to be elected through adult franchise. Besides, the respondents have pointed out some other categories of members of the council and their selection process as well. Here, in some cases all the groups have several points in common. As for instance, membership of the Thana level functionary heads, membership of the Chairmen, provision of representatives from each union through direct election and election of women members are some of the common elements. However, it seems that there is a difference of opinion among the different categories of the people regarding the detailed structure of the system. Firstly, a difference of opinion is evident in respect of the membership of TNO. For example, a large number of UP Chairmen put stress on the need

for TNO as member-secretary of the council whereas the officials are supposedly reluctant to accept the ideas. Secondly, it is appeared that officials want to emphasize the selection of non-political person as Chairman but in the contrary, the UP Chairmen seem to be divided on the issue.

Regarding the powers and functions of the local government body at the Thana level, the study suggests that all categories of respondents apparently aspire to see a strong local government body. As for instance, the council should be empowered with authority over several important areas: planning and implementation of projects at the local level, resource mobilization through collection of taxes, rates and official's accountability for their activities. But the views of the officials and the UP Chairmen differ from one another in some cases. For example, all the official respondents have clearly expressed the need for their membership with voting rights. But the UP Chairmen are diametrically opposed to this demand of the officials. This nature of responses of the two groups has some overtones of a fear of domination of one group over the other. Finally, a small segment of UP Chairmen is found completely against any sort of control by the local MPs over the council. Moreover, they opposed to the idea of deputation of officials from the central government.

The nature of responses with regard to the structure, powers and functions of the local government seems to be quite relevant in many respects except for the areas where different opinion is found to be dominant. However, it can be important to throw some light on the points of difference purporting to examine the rationale of their views. Even a cursory look over the nature of a few responses of the two groups appears to show a sense of uncompromising attitude marked by a lack of mutual respect for each other. Beside from this, some of the views apparently reflect that their ideas are nebulous in many respects. The idea of discounting the deputation system may be cited as an example. If the government intends to put this concept into practice, there is a need for "Local Government Council Service" which requires a lot of other involvements. This, in turn, can cause a tremendous pressure not only on the national exchequer but also on the quality of the service. Therefore, in the context of the present national economy, it is neither possible nor desirable to develop such kind of service system overnight. By the same token, the demand of the officials voting rights in the council can impinge upon the concept of their accountability. Moreover, it can eventuate in the circumscription of the autonomy of the council. In view of the overall condition as discussed in the foregoing pages, a tentative model for the local government at the Thana level can be suggested by highlighting the composition, structure, power and functions.