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**PRIA**

# research report

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## **Rural development Functionaries in PR bodies Are They Responsive? By Sujit K Datta**

**(The Study Based on Manipur PRI)**

Two main functionaries namely, Government officials appointed by the Government (Government Servants) posted at the respective Panchayat Raj Institutions and elected representatives of the concerned Panchayats by their electorates i.e. people's servant, are together responsible for the rural development works as an agent of development. It is assumed that they are supposed to perform both original (preparation of plans for economic development and social justice) and the agency function such as implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule (Bandyopadhyay, 1997, EPW Sept. 27). This is enshrined in the 73rd Amendment Act. In this circumstance when the functionaries are different, it is indeed a necessary condition for the benefit of the schemes that PR functionaries (both official and elected one) should work together with proper understanding. It seems that proper implementation of Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs), besides other factors, is dependent upon the local bureaucracy district level and below. Few studies have been made, such as the work of Prof.S.N.Mishra (1997), but his study concentrated exclusively at the gram panchayat level. The present study is done for the entire state of Manipur and the respondents are the participants of one of the interface training between elected representative and the officials held in Manipur in the current year. The present study focuses broadly on the general awareness of the government officials placed in Panchayat for carrying out mainly the PAPs and the role played by the PRIs and how far their role is effective, and whether there is a proper co-ordination and co-operation between the Government officials and the people's representatives on which is an essential impediment for the successful implementation of any programme, this in turn tells about the responsiveness of the functionaries of the PRT in Manipur today. In addition to this various suggestions of these functionaries were taken into account which are prerogatives to the theme mentioned.

#### **PR System in Manipur after Independence till today:**

Two tier PRIs were set-up in the state initially under borrowed law namely the U.P. Panchayati Raj Act 1947, 227 Gram Panchayats and 13 Nyaya Panchayats started functioning in the state with effect from 1st September 1964. However, second general election of Panchayats was held in 1971 and the state could pass its own PR law in 1975 and prescribing for 3 tier system consisting of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and Zilla Parishads. Under this law, election for Panchayats were held in 1978, 1985 and 1991. It is interesting to note that Zilla Parishad were never set up in the state because of the apprehension that the non-tribals may have to share power with tribal communities in the valley areas whereas the non-tribals have no representation and say in the district councils in tribal dominated hill areas (Srivastava, 1997). Panchayat system in Manipur is existing now only in four valley districts, namely; Imphal, East and West Bishnupur and Thoubal. The hill districts are having their respective local Governments and run with the respective customary laws. The Panchayats in the state was have 2 tier structure, i.e. at the village level consisting of 166 Gram Panchayats and at the middle level (Block level) 9 Panchayat Samities and the term came to an end in September, 1996. After the election in January 1997 the state prescribed again for two tier system i.e., at the apex it is Zilla Parishad and at the grass roots level Gaon Panchayat. Middle level they found not necessary, hence they abolish it.

#### **Assigned Functions to the PR Bodies: At the Gram Panchayats Level:**

Sanitation and health, public works, education, sports and culture, village defense, welfare, agriculture, forest, animal husbandry, village industries etc. Taxes and fees that could be levied by the Gram Panchayats.

#### **At the Panchayat Samities Level:**

Almost similar areas as in the case of Gram Panchayats, but it provides for transfer of shares in land revenue, other taxes and fees, surcharge on duty on transfer of immovable property and motor vehicles tax apart from revenue from own levies directly from the state Government.

**At the Zilla Parishad level:**

They were given the task of a supervisory role vis-a-vis the 2 tier of Panchayati Raj Institutions within the district and were expected to advise the state Government on all development matters related to the specific district. The apex body could also raise their own taxes and fees but were largely dependent on transfer from the state Government.

**Role played by these Bodies:**

In practice the GPs did not perform any duties they are expected to do other than the matter of selection of beneficiaries for various State and Centrally sponsored schemes. Panchayat Samities did supervise the utilisation of funds related to some schemes at the block level. But they largely failed in raising funds internally by exercising the powers given to them. On the contrary these function were taken mostly by the government line departments which were supposed to be taken care by the PRIs in the state. These bodies however forgotten their traditional administrative and judicial functions, even they are not involved in planning for economic development and social justice. They are confined mostly in implementation of development programmes only. Hence, they are unable to attach themselves wholeheartedly with the programme.

In conformity with the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, the Manipur PR Act, 1994 was passed and was in force on April 23, 1994. The Act provide for 2 tier system comprising Gram panchayats and Zilla Parishads, the middle tier i.e., Panchayat Samiti was dropped even there was no provision for Nyaya Panchayats. The new Act however rendered an enormous amount of responsibilities on the Gram Panchayats and Zilla Parishads with adequate devolution of power in order to raise their independent resources as well.

**A Brief Activities of PR Bodies in the State: Works Related to RD:**

1. Assisting Block officials in preparation of household survey and selection of beneficiaries of the schemes.
2. Planning and implementation of the works of JRY.
3. Registration of persons seeking employment and maintenance of Registers as regards EAS work.

**Miscellaneous Works:**

1. Assisting Revenue Officers in control over Public Distribution System in the villages; assessment of the damages caused by natural calamities and ethnic clashes; preparation of photo identity cards of the voters.
2. Assisting the officials in the implementation of key development programmes of social welfare, health, sanitation, agriculture, forest, horticulture, fishery, veterinary and animal husbandry etc.

The above activities clearly indicates that the true devolution of power is yet to be given to these bodies as a result of which they remain under the subservient conditions of the officials and do the function related to welfare as well as assistance to the lower level bureaucrats at the grass root levels. And for which the four chair persons of the four districts are quite un happy and gave a representation to the Prime Minister. Government of India that he should give instruction to the Government of Manipur either to devolve the power and functions to the PRIs or to dissolve the PRIs of Manipur within three months'. The memorandum consisting of six points are as follows:

- i) Government of Manipur failed to devolve any of the 29 items of the powers and functions enumerated in 11<sup>th</sup> schedule of the constitution.
- ii) State Government violating the rules and regulations and guidelines of DRDA regarding the power and functions of CEO and Zila Parishad.

- iii) The Central Grant of Rs.4.66 crores released to the State Government for strengthening the rural local bodies under the 10th Finance Commission grant for the previous two years has not been released to the rural local bodies even though the guidelines prescribed by the commission does not permit to divert the said fund for any other purposes.
- iv) EAS fund is misused by the members of the district level advisory committee for EAS by distributing among themselves instead of giving it to the needy and unemployed youth of the region.
- v) According to guidelines NSAP and Balika Samridhi Yojana should be implemented through the Panchayats and municipalities concerned, but these are left out violating the guidelines.
- vi) Demanding the transfer of DRDA to the concerned Zilla Parishad for the Valley districts of the state where PRI has been established and the funds meant for DRDA should be sent to the Zilla Parishad.

The elected members feel that they cannot come closer to the people as they are unable to serve them adequate as promised. This is largely marked in the country side of Manipur, and the Panchayat functionaries are unable to maintain their statuesque in the villages among the beneficiaries. On the contrary they are busy in negotiation with the officials in the state Secretariat or at the District and Block level officials dealing with the centrally and state sponsored schemes. In this process they remain aloof from the people of the villages.

## II Perceptions of Government Officials on PAPS

In Manipur all the Gram Panchayats are linked with their respective blocks for the purpose of the schemes implementation and other matters related to development. The recent election of Panchayat was held in January 1997, Chief Executive Officers were sent to the respect Zilla Parishads gradually. However, they are yet to be experienced but could spell the various programmes such as IRDP, JRY, TRYSEM, IAY, DWCRA etc. Which is in operation now. Most of them are quite knowledgeable about PAPS (see Fig. 1).

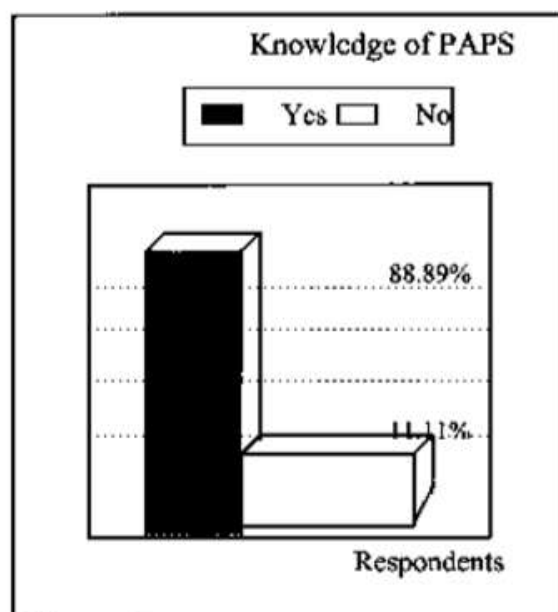


Figure 1

About the success of these schemes majority of the respondents remarked that the programmes were partially successful (see Fig.2) only one person is quite biased saying that the programmes were fully

successful . Of course, there were varied opinion among the participants and it is largely felt that corruptions among the officials which is responsible for the improper implementation of the schemes. Further, they feel that the Government is

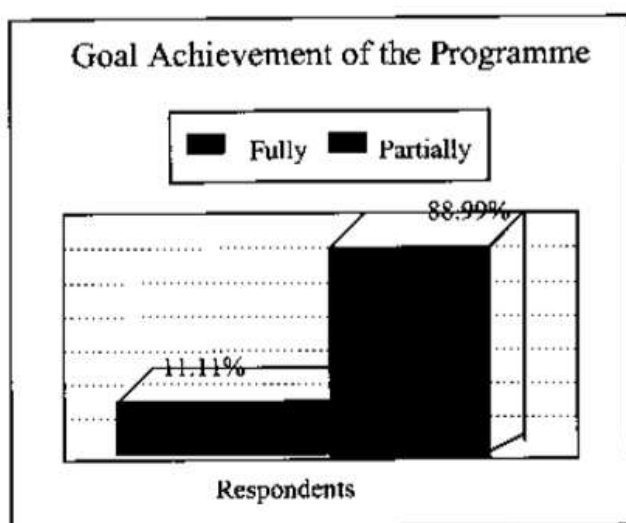


Figure 2

unable to play the active role as a vigilant to the corrupt practices. All the officials agreed that PRIs are essential and only means to bring the success of the PAPs (see Fig.3).

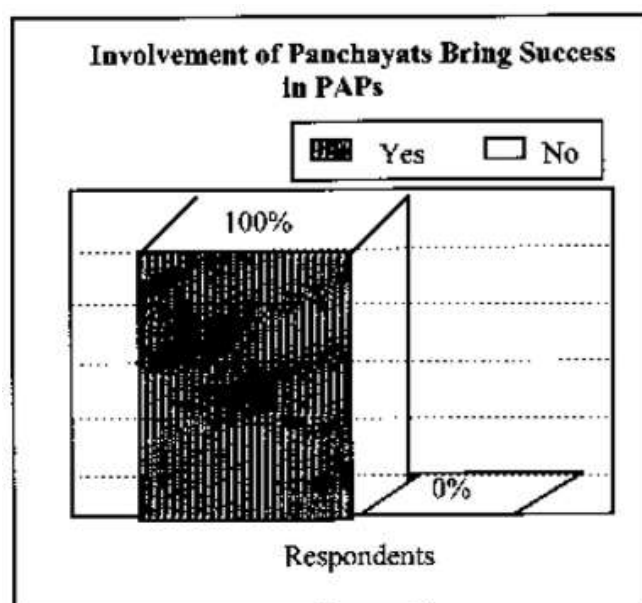
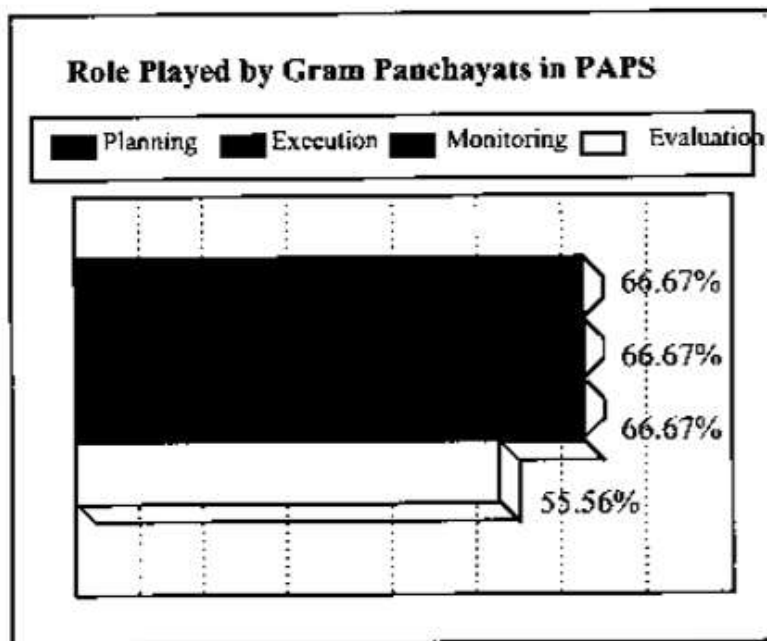


Figure 3

They have also felt that the Gram Panchayats active role towards PAPS is urgently needed in respect of Planning, Execution, Monitoring as well as evaluation of the schemes (see Fig.4). To organise these programmes the PR.



**Figure 4**

functionaries are expected to involve the beneficiaries also for whom the schemes are meant. Hence, he should at times play the role as a facilitator. He should also keep an alliance with the officials in order to get clear idea about the official guidelines required to implement the schemes. Hence, the entire thing should be seen as an integral. The manifestation of the schemes will depend largely on this integrity. Since the officials are not sensitive to local conditions and moreover they are generally urbanites, hence they have little knowledge about the village and are dependent on the PR representatives as regards the implementation of the schemes. For the purpose of the same they do consult the PR leaders quite often or sometimes (see Fig.5). Through them they get the feed back which help them acting further and if some modifications are necessary or they may be able to attend, even they will be able to tackle the conflicting ideas emerged out of this. The officials are of the view that the PR leaders are able to cooperate in respect of selection of beneficiaries mostly and partly with the selection of priority area but only 3 each respondents feel that they can be utilised for monitoring work as well as sanctioning of loan and subsidy (see Fig.6). This simply indicates that majority of the officials do not want to share the decision making and monetary power with the elected representatives. It is interesting to mention that there is not much of political interference, all the respondents view that the political leaders are helpful regarding the implementation of PAPS.

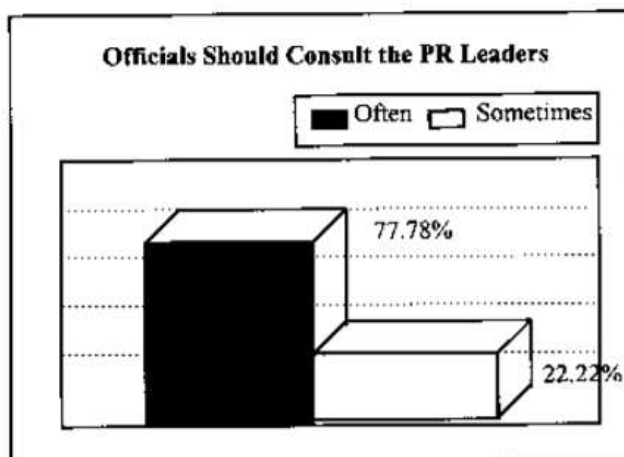


Figure 5

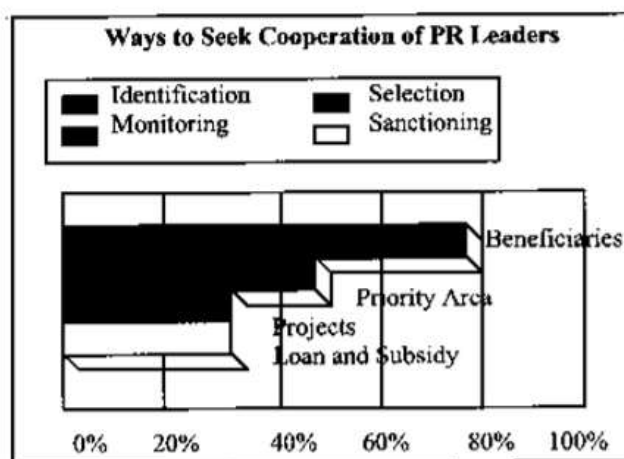


Figure 6

As regards the guidelines of the schemes. out of the 9 officials 7 of them have the knowledge, only two do not have, as they are newly posted officers. Those who are aware they follow the guidelines, the rest of them require training and they agreed to go through the guidelines (sec Fig.7). The officials are quite happy with the present structural arrangements of the PR institutions only one of them is not happy as it is reflected from his statement that the present structural system of Panchayat is still under the experiment stage, as a result many a times they have abolish the Zilla Parishad and now the middle tier needs to be abolished. It is yet to take its own shape in the state.

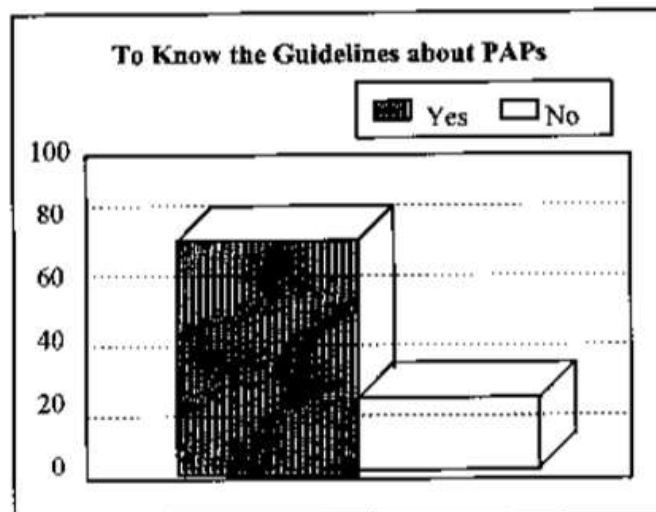


Figure 7

It is also reported that Panchayat functionaries and officials are at times at logger heads or sometimes they enter into collusion. In both the cases, the worst suffer is the people because the development programmes came to a halt. However, the officers refuted these charges (see Fig.8). While a good

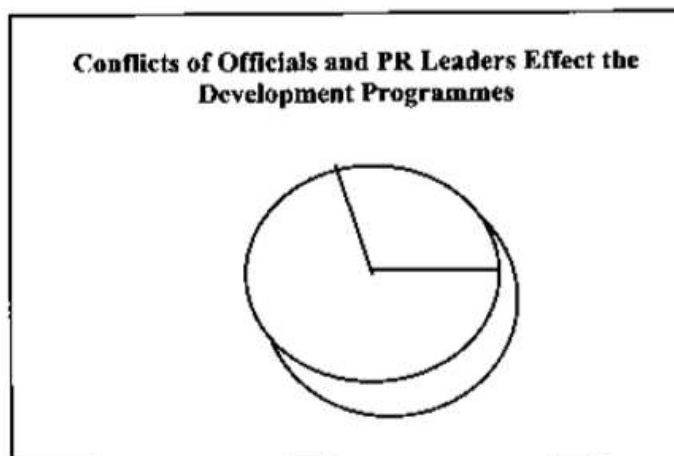


Figure 8

number of respondents agreed about the inefficiency of the officials, some of them disagree to this statement (Fig.9). In this regard two opinions came from both the groups, i.e., those who agree and those who do not. Those who are in agreement as regards inefficiency are of the opinion that most of the officers do not have experience to work with the non-officials as a result they always find fault with them and even they do not help them in learning things and in the process there are many things that remain unlearnt from both the sides. The officers who disagree about their administrative inefficiency flatly said that it is difficult to deal with the people who do not have the desire to learn things. But they are yet to believe that learning together is also possible. In this particular circumstance the gap between officials and non-officials widen. In order to overcome such difficult situation, the officers suggested few things:

1. Well experienced and progressive officers should be posted at the Panchayat;
2. Officers should implement the programmes in collaboration with PR functionaries as well as beneficiaries, by following the guidelines of the respective schemes;
3. Government should train the concerned officers frequently, so that they will be motivated in implementing the schemes more effectively;
4. Officers should be more flexible while working at the PRI.



The officials posted in the PRI consult with other officials, political leaders at various level who are involved in PR issues directly. It is found that mostly they consult other officials more than the political leaders. They meet officials more frequently almost every month. Only some of them consult block and district level officials every week. Some of them however meet the political leaders at the village and block, district and state level every month. Quite a few of them do not meet any one whether the political leaders or other officers. They only carry out the written instructions (see Table-I). But on the contrary the officials receive mostly village leaders almost every day as regards the schemes are concerned. Consequently, the block level leaders visit them once in a week, at the district level every month, state level leader come once in every six monthly but Centre leaders rarely come (For details see Fig. I 0-14).

As has been pointed out by the officials that the achievement of PAPs is partial (see Table-2). The reasons of partial achievements are due to ill-informed about the programmes to the planners and most of the time the targets are unrealistic which are not easily achievable. Even the decisions taken at higher level are always delayed. Further, when good work is done by some officials, they do not get proper appreciation or incentives i.e., in other words no encouragement. Some progressive officials cannot take initiative of their own even when they want to do so. Many officials are in need of proper training so that they would be in a position to tackle the situation more effectively, which is not given (further details see Table-2).

Respondent came forward with numerous suggestions as regards the demarcation of responsibilities are concerned (Table-3). According to them broad policies should be done by both officials and non-officials together. The fixing of priorities for programme implementation should be done by both of them, as well as selection of beneficiaries, but some suggested that in order to avoid discrepancy the local leaders may be required to be involved. However, site selection should be given to both. In the staff selection, distribution of government grants, training of block and district staffs and the evaluation work they want to involve the Panchayat functionaries. In fact they would like to see the progress on day to day basis. In this way they look for total transparency of the programme.

#### Conclusion and Suggestions:

From the above mentioned facts and analysis of data and information available it is quite clear that village, block and district level officials are concerned about the general masses. Even the local level leaders are concerned and they often come in contact with the officials but the State and Central level leaders are less concerned about the local problems though they are elected by the local people. As they are not involved they are unable to direct the local level bureaucracy to solve the local developmental problems. But at times they bluntly accuse the local level bureaucracy for their administrative inefficiency. In such a situation the bureaucracy became quite sensitive to the behaviour of these leaders and remain dormant and the people only suffer in such a situation.

It is reflected that though the political interference is not there, yet officials need to be equipped with the knowledge of implementing programmes of Poverty Alleviation. They are still in passive stage. However, it is not their desire but it is their inability. This inability can be partially done away with proper training.

**Table- I**  
**Officials posted at PR bodies consult the following categories of personnel**

Types of Personnel		Frequency of Consultation (in percent)					No Response
		Weekly	Monthly	Half - Yearly	Annually	Never	
1		2	3	4	5	6	7
Village Leaders	Political	--	33.33	--	--	22.22	44.44
Block Leaders	Political	--	33.33	--	--	22.22	44.44
District Leaders	Political	--	33.33	--	--	22.22	44.45
State Political Leaders		--	22.22	11.11	--	22.22	44.45
Village Officials		--	55.55	--	--	22.22	22.23
Block Officials		11.11	44.44	--	--	22.22	22.23
District Officials		11.11	66.67	--	--	22.22	--
State Officials		--	44.44	11.11	--	22.22	22.23

\* Total Number of Respondents= 9

**Table-2**  
**Reasons of Ineffectiveness of Administration as viewed by the Officials**

S.No.	Reasons	Opinion of the Respondents (Officials)	
		2	3
	1	Agree	Disagree
1.	Planners are ill informed about the real problems and they set unrealistic target	66.67	33.33
2.	Inadequacy of staffs and funds	33.33	66.67
3.	Goals are not clearly defined	33.33	66.67
4.	Politicians do not cooperate	33.33	66.67
5.	No incentive to good works	66.67	33.33
6.	No scope for personal initiative	44.44	55.56
7.	Superior officials do not give proper guidance	44.44	55.56
8.	Decisions are delayed at higher levels	77.78	22.22
9.	Proper Training is not given	55.56	44.44
10.	People are not co-operative	44.44	55.56
11.	Officials do not have sufficient authority to control their subordinates	33.33	66.67
12.	Face too much political interference	44.44	55.56

\* Total Number of Respondents= 9

**Table-3**  
**Suggestions Regarding the Distribution of Responsibilities among the Functionaries**

S.No	Types of Responsibilities	Demarcation of Responsibilities Among the Functionaries at PRI in percent		
		2	3	4
	1	Officials	Leaders	Both
1.	Formulation of Broad Policies	33.33	11.11	55.56
2.	Fixing priorities for Programme Implementation	33.33	--	66.67
3.	Day to day work of the Pogramme	44.44	--	55.56
4.	Distribution of Loans	44.44	--	55.56
5.	Selection of Beneficiaries	22.22	22.22	55.56
6.	Selection of Sites for Programmes	11.11	--	88.89
7.	Recruitment of Staffs	33.33	--	66.67
8.	Distribution of Government Grants	44.44	--	55.56
9.	Training of Block and District level Staff	44.44	--	55.56
10.	Evaluation of Works	44.44	22.22	66.67
11.	Promotion of Staffs	11.11	--	55.56

\* Total Number of Respondents= 9

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### III Perceptions of Government Officials on PAPS

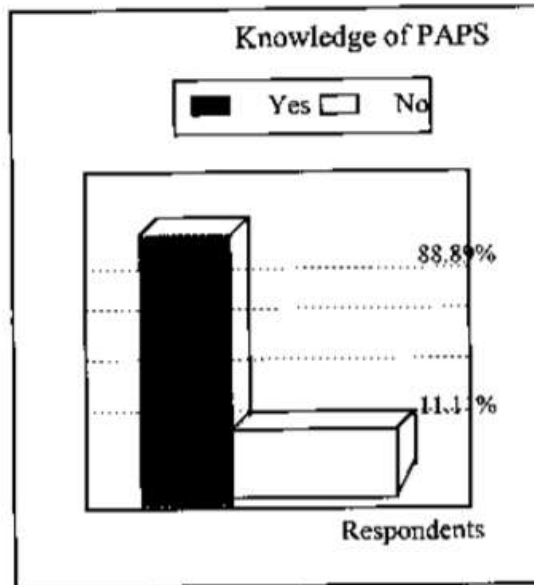
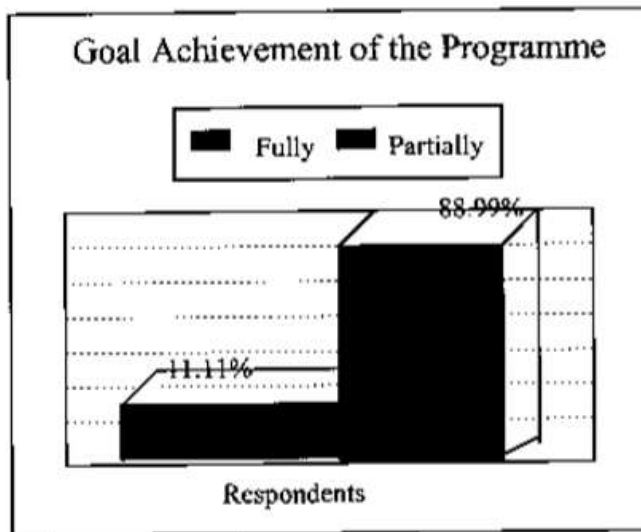


Figure 1



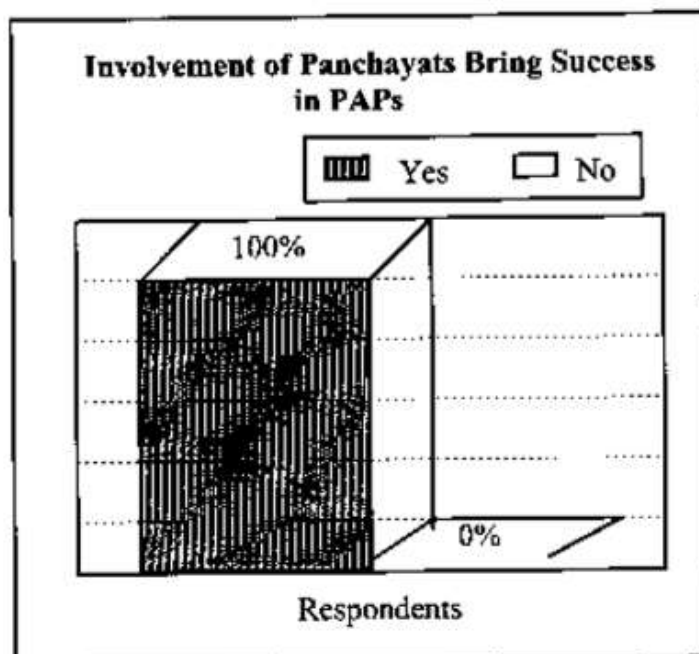


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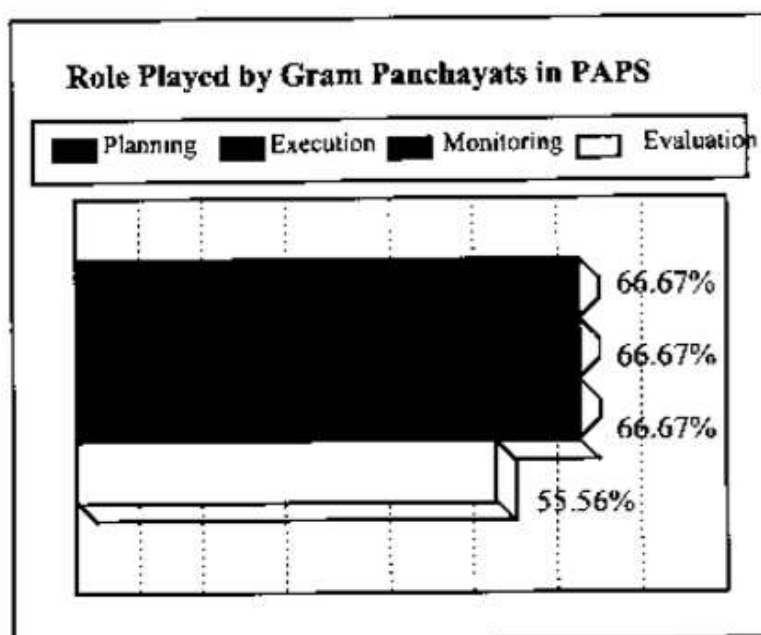


Figure 4

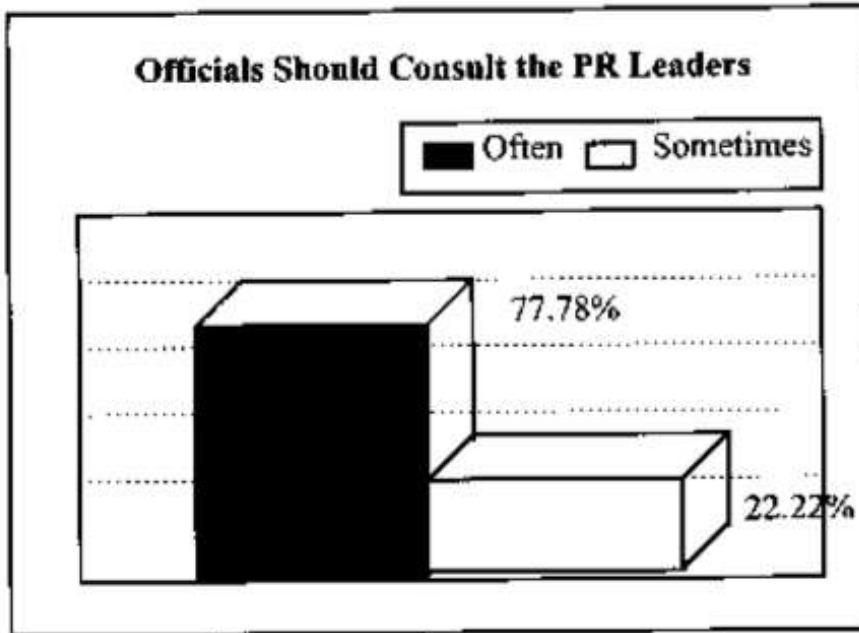


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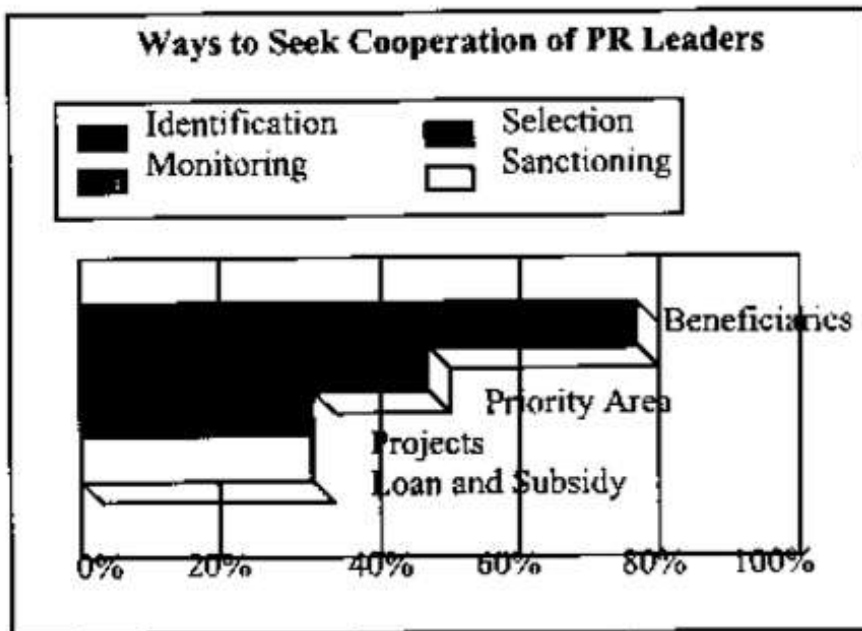


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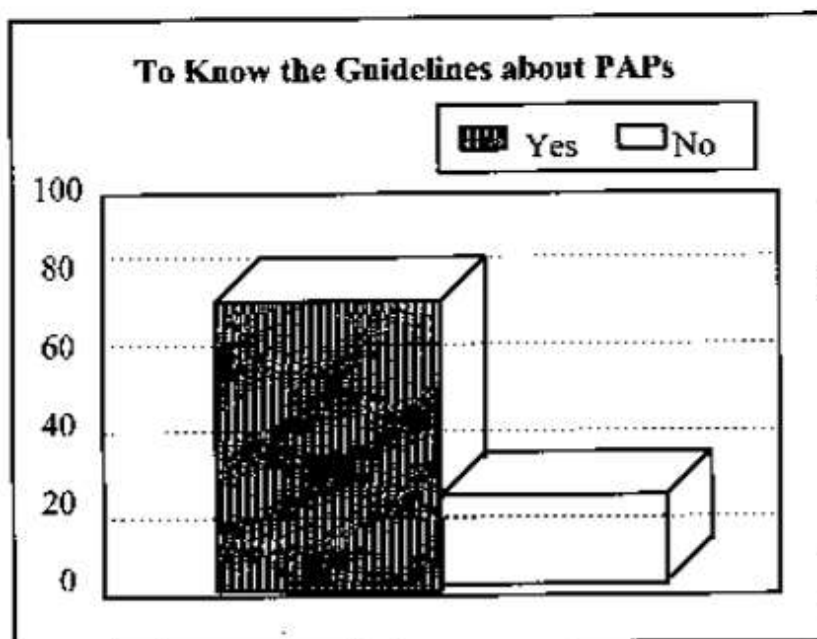


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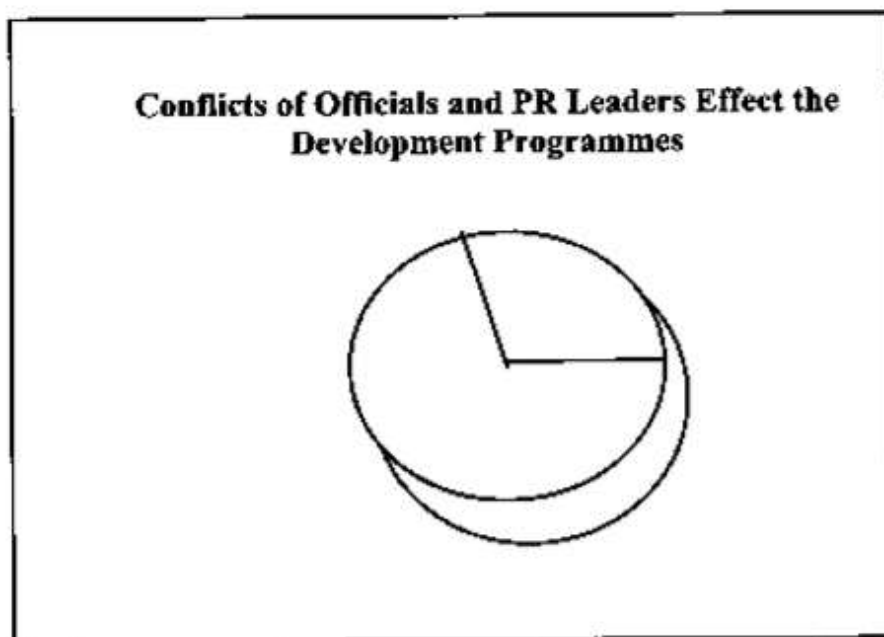


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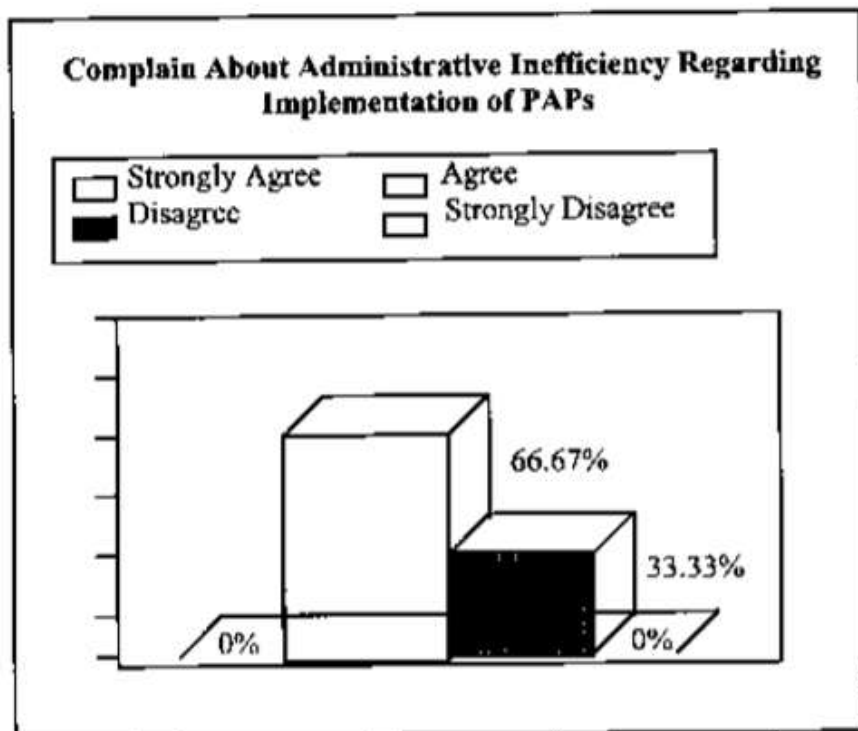
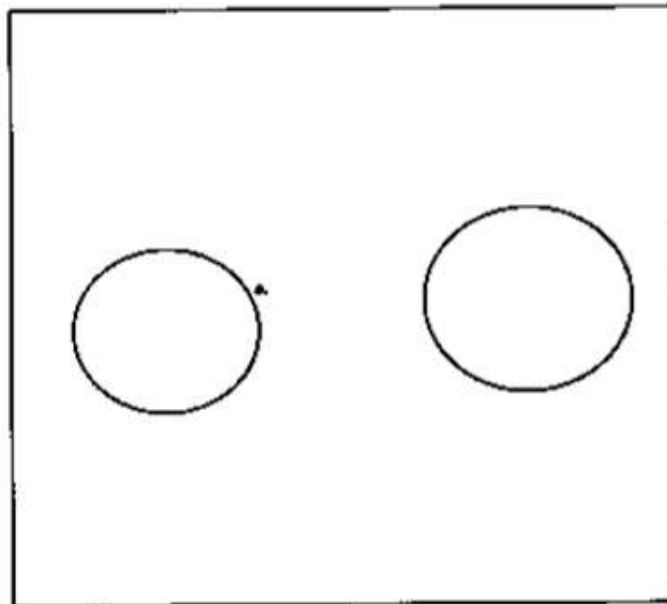


Figure 9





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