

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT FOR ENERGY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

In this section of the study an attempt has been made to identify the issues related to planning and management for energy development. The emphasis is more on the use of the existing structure and how it could be modified to meet the objectives of energy development. Weaknesses of the local level institutions have been identified and measures to strengthen and reinforce them have been suggested.

Van (forest) Panchayats

A *Van Panchayat* is a voluntary organisation at the village level, consisting of the right holders of a *Panchayat Forest* who may belong to more than one village. The objectives of a *Van Panchayat* are:

- o to protect and develop the forests and to distribute the forest produce among the right holders in an equitable manner,
- o to demarcate the forest boundary by fixing stone pillars, and
- o to develop grass and bushes in a *Panchayat Forest* (a *Van Panchayat* may enclose some portion of the forest area in which animals are not allowed to graze).

Management of a Van Panchayat

A *Van Panchayat* can be formed by the decision of more than two third holders who are required to elect five to nine members known as *Panchas* from among themselves. One of the members must be from the scheduled caste/scheduled tribe (SC/ST) group. The members elect a *Sarpanch* who is responsible for the management of all organisational works of the *Panchayat Forest*.

A *Van Panchayat* can raise funds from the sale of forest resources. Except for the operating expenditures for forest management, all other expenses require the approval of the District Magistrate, thus limiting the authority of *Van Panchayats*.

The Forest Department is authorised to extract the resin from pine trees in a *Panchayat Forest*. Ten per cent of the total income is to be deposited at the District level Resin Royalty Fund, of which 40 per cent

can be drawn by the *Panchayat* for forest development and the other 40 per cent for development projects, both with the approval of the District Magistrate.

Present Situation of the *Van Panchayat*

Decline in People's Participation

The number of meetings of a *Van Panchayat* is taken as an important indicator of the level of people's participation. As shown in Table 9 the frequency of such meetings has been declining over the years, indicating a decline in people's participation in the activities of *Van Panchayats*.

Table 9: Details of Meetings of *Van Panchayats* (1964-1980)

	Years			
	1964-68	1969-73	1974-78	1979-80
Total number of meetings held	26	16	13	8
Average per year	5.2	3.2	2.6	4.0
Number of meetings held with participation of villagers	17	12	11	3
Without participation of villagers	5	4	2	-
No information about participation	4	-	-	5

Source: Records of the *Van Panchayat* Office. District Magistrate, Almora.

Inability to Obtain Resources

According to district officials, this problem stems from the fact that the *Van Panchayat* members are not able to develop appropriate plans for area development.

Limited Effectiveness in Dispute Settlement

There are many unsettled cases of encroachment and mapping of lands resulting in illegal felling of trees.

Absence of Women's Participation

Women do not play any role in the activities of *Van Panchayats*.

Weaknesses of *Van Panchayat* Administration

1. In Almora District there are 1,717 *Van Panchayats* which are managed by four *Panchayat* Forest Inspectors. They do not have adequate field support and their mobility is restricted because of heavy workloads. A system of incentives to motivate fieldwork is also missing.

2. Elections of the functionaries have not been held in many cases, indicating a weak organisational structure.
3. The skill of the village level staff is low due to the inadequacy of the training imparted to them.
4. There is a lack of communication between forest officials and *Van Panchayats* regarding villagers' preferences for plant species, time schedule for the availability of planting materials, etc.

Energy Planning

Current planning activities are largely concentrated in the office of the State-level authorities overlooking the role of grassroots' level workers. Contrary to this a bottom-up approach should be the essence of the new energy planning process. Since the energy development plan should be based on the assessments of energy resources, micro-level surveys should assume importance. These surveys should aim at identifying the energy requirements and related parameters of different end uses. Any village energy development plan, which does not have an organisational design for implementation with a participatory approach for involving villagers, has limited value. This brings us to two important related aspects:

1. training of extension personnel
2. strengthening of local institutions.

Training of Extension Personnel

An extension worker ideally should not only be technically equipped in the area related to his job but also should have social understanding to perform the role of the facilitator for village groups. In a participatory development approach this is of utmost importance.

An extension worker at the village level should have comprehensive training in various aspects to enable him:

- a) to deal with village groups effectively,
- b) to prepare plans for project implementation and to develop proposals,
- c) to carry out surveys in energy-related aspects,
- d) to gain technical knowledge in energy-related aspects, and
- e) to train villagers in developing capabilities to run village institutions.

Strengthening Local Institutions for Energy Development

The existing local institutions (*Van Panchayats*) have demonstrated mixed results with respect to their effectiveness. However, their existence itself provides potential scope for future development of the programme. Hence, the important task is to revitalise the existing *Van Panchayats*. This can be accomplished by emphasising the following aspects.

Organisational Capabilities. Strengthening organisational capabilities at the grassroots' level through the formation of a need-based organisational structure, election of functionaries, and definition of roles of functionaries.

Skill Development. Training the *Van Panchayat* members in skills (such as bookkeeping, leadership skill, etc) required to run institutions without much external help.

Participation in Activities Relating to Other Energy Sources. Since the system of *Van Panchayat* is a progressive step in participatory development and is already involved in one sector of energy, viz., fuelwood, it would be worthwhile to introduce it in the implementation of other energy-related activities.

Access to Funds. According to present arrangements, the income from the sale of forest produce and 40 per cent of the *Van Panchayat's* Resin Royalty Fund can be used in development projects only after the approval of the District Magistrate. This authority should be decentralised to make funds easily accessible to *Van Panchayats*.

Women's Participation. Women's participation can be increased by disseminating energy alternatives and proper reorientation of forestry programmes. Women should be trained in running institutions such as *Van Panchayats*, and the possibility of *Van Panchayats* managed entirely by women's groups should be explored.

Federation of Village Level *Panchayat* Forests. The possibility of federating the village level *Panchayat* forests at the block level, should be explored as local concerns are reflected through this platform. Similarly, the problems of the district authorities can be understood by the people at the implementation level. This enhances the effective implementation of plans.

Suggested Changes in the *Panchayat* Forests' Administrative Structure

As pointed out earlier, the *Van Panchayat* administration has a weak organisational structure. In Almora District a *Panchayat* Forest Inspector looks after 500 *Van Panchayats*. This has resulted in poor monitoring and follow-up actions. The following paragraphs deal with the restructuring of administration for effective planning and follow-up activities.

An important element of any organisational structure is hierarchy. Hierarchy is primarily an integrative device and a coordinating mechanism. In designing any organisational structure, two factors should be kept in mind: i) vertical span of control and ii) horizontal span of control.

For an implementing agency involved in field-based activities such as integrated energy development, a tall hierarchy with many levels has negative implications for upward and downward flow of information. Hence, a short hierarchy at the district level is proposed.

In addition, hierarchy is also a way of dividing work. Since the Chief Executive Officer of the district organisation is expected to be involved largely in non-routine, unstructured, and complex problems and in making strategic decisions that have long-term consequences, sufficient authority should be provided to him/her. Since a Village Level Extension Officer is at the lower end of the continuum of strategic decision-making, a middle level authority between the Chief Executive Officer of district organisation and the Field Level Extension Officer is proposed. The village level officers will report to the proposed middle level authority, thus reducing the burden of the Chief Executive Officer for field level coordination. The horizontal span for each new middle level authority can be suitably determined to achieve a balance between cost and efficiency. The suggested structure is shown in Figure 1. At the field level, each Extension Officer will be responsible for five villages and the Unit Manager (middle level authority) will have four such extension officers under him.

Control System

Each Extension Officer will prepare a monthly progress report for each village and submit it to the Unit Manager. The Unit Manager will compile information on his area and submit it to the district office. The information from such reports will be standardised for use as indicators of the progress of the programme. The instruction flow from the district level and the unit level will follow the proposed organisational structure.

District level planning will be based on the bottom-up planning approach. Each extension worker will prepare his own annual target according to his past performance and other factors. Such a plan will be submitted at the unit level. Each Unit Manager will submit his/her annual target and budget requirements

at the district level. A review session will be organised to review the submitted plans by the extension officers in the light of broad organisational objectives.