Evaluation Study of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of DRDA Administration

Executive Summary

The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) has been traditionally the principal organ at the District level to oversee the implementation of different anti-poverty programmes. The DRDA Guidelines of 1999 primarily define the role of DRDA as a Supporting and Facilitating Organization and being a catalyst in the development process. The guidelines also indicate the need for developing a greater understanding of processes necessary for poverty alleviation/eradication as well as developing capacity to build synergies among different agencies for most effective results.

After eight years of implementation of the scheme, the Economic and Monitoring Wing of MoRD sponsored a study to evaluate its performance. The study envisaged not only evaluation of the DRDA Administration Programme but also to evaluate effectiveness of the whole rural development administration structure that is in existence. The study also sought to assess relative performance of DRDAs which are under the Panchayati Raj Institutions vis-à-vis those under the District Administration.

Specific objectives of the study laid major thrust on evaluation of actual functioning of the DRDAs with available staff vis-à-vis the guidelines for implementation of the various Rural Development Programmes. It covered assessment of scheme implementation vis-à-vis the norms, including manpower deployment, adequacy and usefulness of existing manpower, ascertaining role of DRDAs/ZPs in planning, implementation and coordination of IEC of rural development programmes, assessing the extent of success with which DRDAs integrate other agencies, institutions and networks in its fold and bring synergy in development programmes. The study also aimed at assessing effectiveness of systems envisaged for maintaining financial discipline and the monitoring and evaluation mechanism in place.

The study thus expected to identify of gaps in current functioning and to suggest steps to make DRDAs more effective, keeping in view the emerging requirements including need for upgradation of skills and expertise of the manpower deployed as well as suggest state specific / area oriented appropriate modifications in the rural development administrative framework of DRDAs in terms of their infrastructure and functions etc.

Evaluation study was undertaken to get an overall picture of DRDA and thus needed to be a cross-sectional study covering various levels. The study covered all the 28 states of the country. Two districts from each state were selected for the study. Per capita utilization of funds in the last three years (2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07) under various schemes was considered for selecting the districts. This helped to identify poor and better performing districts from each state based on fund utilization. Care was also taken to select one NREGS district (if available). Five blocks were identified through systematic random sampling from each district and in turn five Gram Panchayats from each block were selected for field assessment. The study thus attempted to obtain an overall picture integrating facts and perceptions of both primary and secondary stakeholders.

The evaluation study envisaged to learn from experience and contribute to improve the planning and implementation of DRDA projects and programmes within the realm of poverty reduction/alleviation programme. Thus the approach of evaluation has been to generate learning for improvement rather than control. The study focused on understanding the operational structures and the working systems adopted by various states & districts, and specific learning experiences of state functioning.
The DRDA guidelines have set out the Role of DRDA. It states that

- DRDAs are not the implementing agencies, but can be very effective in enhancing quality of implementation through overseeing the implementation of different programmes and ensuring that necessary linkages are provided.

- DRDA is a supporting and facilitation organization and needs to play an effective role as a catalyst in development process.

- DRDA is visualized as a specialized and professional agency. It will continue to watch over implementation of RD programme to ensure effective utilization of funds intended for anti-poverty programmes, as well as develop a greater understanding of the process necessary for poverty alleviation/reduction.

- It will need to build synergies among different agencies for most effective results.

- The role of DRDA thus will be distinct from all other agencies, including Zilla Parishad.

The evaluation study thus focused attention of assessing the role performed by DRDA and identification of factors that facilitated the performance and more importantly factors that led to suboptimal achievements of DRDAs in relation to the role set for DRDAs.

**Governance and Organizational Structure of DRDAs**

The Guidelines suggest registration of DRDA as a society under Societies Registration Act or to function as a separate cell created in Zilla Parishad. This Cell should be under the charge of CEO or alternatively an officer who has qualification to be the Project Director. MoRD scheme guideline suggest specific staffing structure as well as suitable personnel policy to function effectively.

The study reveals that out of the 28 states studied across India, 22 states have formed separate “DRDA” society –under the Societies’ Registration Act. Six states namely Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Karnataka, West Bengal and Kerala have DRDAs functioning under the Panchayat Raj institutions. Out of these, in three states namely Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Rajasthan DRDAs are quite ahead in implementing the 73rd Amendment Act and function through the Panchayat Raj Institutions. In these three states, DRDAs are known as Zilla Panchayat. In West Bengal and Karnataka, DRDA functions as a cell of ZP. In Kerala, DRDA functions as Poverty alleviation cell under ZP.

States of Jharkhand and Jammu & Kashmir do not have Panchayats and thus DRDA schemes are implemented through Block Development Office. Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim are other two states which have different organizational structures. In Andhra Pradesh DRDAs are associated with SGSY scheme only. A Separate Agency namely District Watershed Management Agency (DWMA) has been created for Watershed Programmes. NREGS is implemented through DWMA. The state housing board is associated with Indira Awas Yojana.

DRDA is visualized as a professional body as well as a knowledge centre of rural development at the district level. To facilitate functioning in this manner, the Guidelines propose staffing structure headed by Project Director and other staff divided into seven different wings viz. Self Employment Wing, Wage Employment Wing, Watershed Wing, Engineering Wing, Women’s Wing, Accounts Wing and Monitoring Wing. Specific functions have been assigned to each wing for effective functioning.
The study reveals that formation of wings is reported by DRDAs in three fifth of study districts. However, the same was not seen in actual practice. Programme staff responsible for various DRDA schemes are arranged under the “wing heading” on paper only. In all states, APOs are titled based on the schemes they implement, such as APO-SGSY, APO-IAY, and APO- SGRY instead of functions as envisaged in the guidelines. No functioning with wing focus was observed during district visits.

The organizational structure consisting of wings was created to develop DRDA into a body of knowledge on rural development. Absence of such structure and mere scheme specific implementation based on human resources planning has been the main factor in adversely affecting the purpose of the agencies created.

**Staffing**

MoRD has defined staffing pattern of DRDA based on the wing structure and size of districts across the country. All districts across the country are divided into four categories based on the number of blocks per district and the staffing requirements are worked out. This pattern has been adopted by state Rural Development Departments with need-based variations. In spite of these variations, a number of staff posts are vacant in DRDAs. Such vacant posts are a major area of concern.

The assessment of availability of programme staff in DRDAs revealed that 32 districts have more than 50 percent vacant posts of programme staff against defined norms. Some states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have over 75 percent of programme staff posts lying vacant in the study sample districts. Only 11 districts have Project Economist posts filled which is critical for setting up the Monitoring Wing.

The guidelines recommend Executive Engineer to head the Engineering Wing. The study revealed that 35 districts do not have the EE position filled in DRDAs. This affects the technical support functions envisaged to be performed by DRDAs.

Accounts maintenance and financial discipline are critical functions under DRDA. The staffing pattern suggests posting of accounts officer for self employment and wage employment wings. The wing is envisaged to be headed by a Sr. Accounts Officer either on deputation or by engaging services of chartered accountants. The well-designed structure of Accounts Wing recommended by the guidelines is not followed by the DRDAs. The study revealed that two fifth of districts across the sample DRDAs which have neither an Accounts Officer nor a Sr. Accounts Officer.

The DRDA guidelines have laid major thrust on inducting quality staff of young age. Thus, the guidelines have defined the age of programme staff. The norm set for the PD and APOs suggests that the PDs and APOs should not be more than 40-45 years of age and in any case not more than 50 years of age. It was observed that that the norm of age is not strictly followed. Though about half of the staff is in the range of 40-50 years of age; about two fifth and one third of POs & APOs are more than 50 years of age.

The DRDA guidelines have not specified qualification requirements of staff apart from APO-Credit, who is expected to be an official having experience of commercial banking sector. However, this was not observed in DRDAs studied. The field assessment of qualifications, experience and posting in DRDA puts forth the need for defining qualification and experience requirements to strengthening the functioning and improved operational efficiency.
The personnel policy detailed out in the guidelines lays major thrust on hiring employees on deputation for specific periods to avail the advantage of better choice of staff and flexibility in staffing pattern.

None of the DRDAs studied have permanent staff. The staff is generally either deputed from state rural development department and other line departments or Zilla Parishads. The primary finding is that the objective of having staff on deputation for having advantage of staff motivation has not been observed in the study districts. In most of the districts, staffs on deputation are not satisfied with DRDA and are keen to join their parent departments. One of the important reason quoted by APOs included the variation in service conditions of DRDA and their departments. The staffs deputed to DRDAs are not able to get the service benefits similar to their counterparts in line departments. Variations in service conditions and lack of benefits to DRDA deputed staff have led to unwillingness of many aspirants to join DRDAs. Even those who join look for opportunities to go back to the parent departments to get the service benefits. Further, deputation of technical staff has again been a problem where line departments themselves face staff shortage for implementation of departmental programmes.

DRDA guidelines suggest posting of one dedicated PO or APO to look after each scheme, but due to inadequate staff in many DRDAs, POs and APOs look after more than one scheme leading to lack of concentration and focus on schemes handled by them.

**Training and Capacity building of staff**

Training and capacity building of staff is one of the important activities envisaged in the DRDA guidelines. Thus, pre-service and in-service training are suggested by the guidelines.

The field assessment revealed that arrangement of pre-service training is not followed in DRDAs. However, in most cases, Project Directors, PO and APOs have participated in regular training programmes arranged by National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) or the State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRD). Orientation on DRDA activities is provided to the staff after joining DRDA. Lack of pre-service training or DRDA specific training, has led to lack of clarity on role of DRDA The Programme staff has limited themselves to scheme coordination, monitoring rather than generating learning on rural development.

Scope of in-service training is limited to scheme information, guidelines and some skill oriented trainings. These trainings also have not been received by about half of DRDAs. Consolidated picture indicates that training on critical aspects (like Scheme guidelines, RD administration) is not received by more than half of the programme staff in the study districts. Exposure visits as a tool for capacity building of staff is not exposed to about 40 percent of DRDA program staff from various states. The analysis reflects on weakness of training and points out the need for major improvements in training related activities.

The neglect of training and capacity building of staff leads to restricted understanding of development and gaps in understanding of new development approaches and tools. Lack of receipt of this knowledge, would ultimately reduce the sensitivity and commitment towards the poverty alleviation programme of DRDA. Hence, actions need to be planned to strengthen the training and capacity building activities within DRDAs.
The field assessment indicates that SIRD is the main agency engaged in training of staff and functionaries associated with DRDAs. It would be useful to explore possibilities of special allocation to SIRD for DRDA. Specific allocation to state RDD for training and facilitative support can also be thought of to increase the scope of training of staff beyond scheme specific trainings. Plan of pre-service training to DRDA programme staff may also be prepared in association with NIRD, SIRD and state RDD.

**Use of IEC for awareness generation and promotion of transparency**

Awareness generation as an activity is proposed by the guidelines to fulfill the objectives of reaching to poor by DRDA. Initial awareness generation activities need to be supplemented through promotion of transparent operational systems as well as participatory planning process and these will lead to building confidence in DRDA target group households. However, focus has remained on awareness generation right in the introduction stage of the scheme. It is also observed that IEC is majorly dependent on inter-personal media. The programme staff does not feel the importance of IEC activities in reaching the target group households.

There is a need for promotion of better communication tools and media including audio visual and mass media. IEC actions also need to go beyond scheme information and orientation. The field study identifies a definite need for developing common and shared understanding role of IEC in community based functioning through trainings.

Newsletter and website are the tools that can be used for promoting transparent operational systems and building confidence in them. However, there seems to be a lack of clarity about the utilization of these tools by DRDA Project Directors and thus planning and implementation of these needs a review.

There is a need for orientation and training to project directors for improved governance through transparent operational system and through efficient use of tools such as website and newsletter by improving contents and management.

**Integration with other agencies**

The guidelines envisage DRDAs to be a professional body that is able to interact effectively with other agencies especially line departments, Panchayat Raj Institutions, banks and other financial institutions for resources required for poverty reduction effort. The evaluation study thus focused attention on understanding of functioning of DRDA with regard to coordination with line departments and other agencies. The study objective emphasized on assessment of intimacy, through which DRDA integrates other agencies, institutions and networks in its fold and bring synergy and harvest benefits of rural development programmes.

The study revealed lack of role clarity on integration with other agencies as a need and function as per the DRDA guidelines. Further, non-adoption of organization structure suggested by guidelines has affected integration function. Utilization of programme specific agencies by states like AP, though has achieved operational efficiency, but has missed on an opportunity of generating overall understanding of rural development under the umbrella of DRDA.
A number of responses by DRDA staff indicated issues of coordination with line departments due to variation in level of Project Directors and Line Department Officials.

Operational issues relating to specific schemes also emerged during the study. These include small, one–two staff bank branches in remote areas definitely affect response time from banks. Similarly, SHG based record keeping seems to be a need to understand clear picture of repayment. There is a need for a mutually agreeable repayment recording system by DRDA and bank. Use of IT and community based record keeping system starting from SHG may be an option.

Watershed development is implemented in a project mode and thus is able to have better integration with line departments. However, in many cases, in lieu of technical expertise, DRDA is viewed only as a “funds transfer agency”.

The study sample covered 14 DRDAs having more than 50 percent tribal population. These areas have ITDAs in place which focus on tribal development. The DRDAs though working for poor and below poverty line households do not have any collaborative working with ITDA.

All these aspects need a critical review of the organizational and governance structures as well as actions need to be planned for building further clarity on role of DRDA among the programme staff.

**Funding and Financial systems**

The DRDA Administration Scheme which is envisaged to be implemented through Central and State Share is not observed in many districts. Only six states have paid their share in last three years leaving a large number of states (22 states) not contributing their share.

There is a gap between funds entitlement under DRDA Administration scheme and funds release. This gap is in base level entitlements finalized in 1999-2000. The provision of enhancing the allocations annually @ 5% have not been implemented leading to huge gaps in funds requirement and funds availability with DRDAs.

Study of Accounts and Financial Systems in DRDA indicate that Accounts Wings have not been structured in many districts due to the fact that there are more than – districts which do not have Accts Officers. About four fifth DRDAs still follow manual accounting system. Internal audit function envisaged placement of one Senior Accounts Officer. This again was not observed due to non availability of Sr. Accounts Officers in 82 percent districts.

The entire financial system needs to be reviewed with states to understand the issues and reasons of lapses. Unless issues relating to staffing and funds are resolved, further improvement would seem to be difficult.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The DRDA guidelines define monitoring as one of the important functions. However, this understanding has not reached DRDAs at district level. Lack of Project Economist in four fifth of districts has limited the scope of monitoring.
Secondly, districts which have Project Economists posted also use them in scheme coordination leaving behind their primary functions. Field visits are occasionally undertaken by the APOs including M&E. The Project Directors, however in both DRDAs, take up M&E visits regularly for about 10-12 days in a month. Constraints for field visits indicated by the APOs are travel support and overall budget availability for field visits based monitoring. The support envisaged through scheme budgets is not specific and thus gets submerged leading to reduced monitoring events. Inclusion of a separate and specific provision for field based monitoring in guidelines will go a long way to strengthen the operations.

Newer schemes like NREGS have included social audit in the scheme guidelines. Such community based systems need to be introduced for all DRDA schemes.

Studies and programme specific assessments taken up by half of the districts have proved to be one of the factors in performance of the districts. Such studies were taken up in 5 of better performance districts whereas the same was observed to be 1 in poor performance districts.

**Comparative Performance of DRDAs** functioning as part of PRI and others functioning under District Administration

No significant variations are observed in DRDAs under PRI and DRDAs under district administration. Some factors having influence in operational management are-

In PRI merged DRDAs have relatively senior level staff functioning as Project Director. There is no significant variation in vacancy positions in both categories of DRDAs.

Relatively more number of APOs are handling multiple schemes in PRI merged DRDAs than in the other category.

Status of integration with other agencies was observed slightly better (67% in merged & 63% in non-merged) in DRDAs of PRI merged districts.

Monitoring and evaluation status is also better in PRI merged DRDAs in comparison with DRDAs under District Administration.

Financial system of DRDAs under PRI is better than that of DRDAs under District Administration.

**Synergy and synchronization among similar schemes**

A number of schemes are implemented in some districts which have focus on local infrastructure development, betterment of poor by providing wage employment, self-employment opportunities. All these activities need village level /GP level planning. Overlaps among schemes like NREGS, , RSVY, BRGF, ITDA area programmes in some districts lead to repetitive planning as well as lack of synergy. There is a need to evolve a system of synchronization among these schemes.
Similarly, a number of similar schemes are taken up by state governments. These include IAY, SGSY being implemented by states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil nadu, Maharasthra, Karnataka. Variations in benefits and support provided under these schemes create problems at operational level. There is also a need to identify a solution to address this issue.

**Special Projects**

Interactions with senior officials associated with DRDAs especially CEO, ZP and District Collectors indicated need of flexibility and provisions to address area specific needs. This was observed in some states under the Special Projects category. Special projects like “Wadi Project” implemented in Nandurbar have been helpful to meet local needs. A separate study for understanding utility of special projects and infrastructure component under SGSY will lead to better utilization of these and bringing synergy in local development.

**Financial Power devolved**

Assessment of cadre of Project Directors indicated that over four fifth of Project Directors are state government cadre officials. Financial powers devolved to their state cadre posts in most of the states that are higher than DRDA norm. There is a need of review of possibility of extending limit of financial powers devolved to Project Directors.

**Emerging Development Scenario and refining role of DRDA’s**

Sphere of development activities has widened over the past two decades and various development programmes are being implemented towards betterment of rural people especially the poor. Some of these are also implemented /coordinated through MORD. However, DRDA is engaged in coordination of limited number of programmes/schemes. The study also identifies variation in these across various states.

The need for protecting interest of the DRDA target group still continues in all development endeavors. However, it is observed that functionality of DRDA’s due to limited availability of resources on decline and development demands are on increase. The study also revealed that DRDAs in some states play a facilitative role in district level planning.

In such a situation, following options emerge for the transformation of the role of DRDAs.

- To work as planning and management unit as part of District Planning Committee
- Function as a resource agency for strengthening of Panchayat Raj Institutions
- Function as a coordination agency for all developmental programmes of MoRD

A series of brainstorming discussions along with strategic review and planning may be taken up to strengthen the DRDAs.

In any case, there is a definite need for initiating intensive actions to strengthen the existing DRDAs and improve their capacity to play these roles.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The earlier chapters presented key area specific status of DRDAs. This chapter aims at presenting a consolidated picture with findings and related recommendations. Each item of performance is discussed along with the issues identified by the study and suggested actions to improve the functioning.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

DRDA is visualized to be a professional body as well as a knowledge centre of rural development at the district level. The Guidelines propose an organizational structure that facilitates functioning. It indicates DRDA being headed by a Project Director and staff and divided into seven different wings viz. Self Employment Wing, Wage Employment Wing, Watershed Wing, Engineering Wing, Women’s Wing, Accounts Wing and Monitoring Wing. Specific functions are assigned to each wing for effective functioning. However, the study brings forth the fact that wing structure as envisaged is not followed by states. This has led to DRDA being an agency that coordinates scheme implementation rather than being a body of knowledge on rural development. Absence of such structure and mere scheme specific implementation based human resources planning has majorly affected the purpose of the agencies created.

GOI adopted 73rd and 74th Amendment promoting decentralized management. Implementation of the same is being introduced by different states at varying pace. The field study assessed DRDAs functioning under District Administration and DRDAs merged in Panchayat Raj. The field study observed that in six states, DRDAs function under Panchayat Raj system. The study observed some variation in day to day performance. However, the overall understanding of the objectives defined by the guidelines as well as adoption of structure as per the guidelines and organizing functioning in such a mode was however not observed in both categories. On this account, DRDAs of both categories stand the same.

Recommended Actions

There is an urgent need to plan actions to create the structure as envisaged with reorganizing of roles and responsibilities of existing staff at the DRDA level. This does not entail re-labelling of staff under wings but make the programme staff responsible for functions as envisaged by the Guidelines. This will help to provide visibility and improve functionality of wing structure. This necessitates orientation and discussion with State Rural Development Dept/Commissioners on vision and functions of DRDA and the needs of staffing and functions of each wing envisaged by the guidelines. Help from professional agencies can be taken for this purpose. Involvement of agencies like NIRD can also be helpful to plan capacity building of programme staff after reorganization and gap filling by respective state governments. Close monitoring on this aspect by MORD will be essential to bring about the changes.
Availability of Programme Staff: The assessment of availability of programme staff in DRDAs revealed that 32 districts have more than 50 percent vacant posts of programme staff against defined norms. Some states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have over 75 percent of programme staff posts lying vacant in the study sample districts. Only 11 districts have Project Economist posts filled which is critical for setting up the Monitoring Wing.

The guidelines recommend an Executive Engineer to head the Engineering Wing. The study revealed that 35 districts do not have the EE position filled in DRDAs. This affects the technical support functions envisaged to be performed by DRDAs.

Accounts maintenance and financial discipline are critical functions under DRDA. The staffing pattern suggests posting of accounts officer for self employment and wage employment wings. The wing is envisaged to be headed by Sr. Accounts Officer either on deputation or by engaging services of chartered accounts. The well-designed structure of Accounts Wing recommended by the guidelines is not followed by the DRDAs. The study revealed that there are two fifth districts across the sample DRDAs which have neither an Accounts Officer nor a Sr. Accounts Officer.

Quality of staff: The DRDA guidelines have laid major thrust on inducting quality staff of young age. Thus, the guidelines have defined the age of programme staff. The norm set for the PD and APOs suggests that the PD s and APOs should be more than 40-45 years of age and in any case not more than 50 years of age. It was observed that norm of age is not followed strictly.

The DRDA guidelines do not specify qualification requirements of staff apart from APO-Credit, who is expected to be an official having experience of commercial banking sector. However, this was not observed in DRDAs studied.

The field assessment of age, qualifications, experience and posting in DRDA puts forth the need of defining qualification and experience requirements to strengthening the functioning and improved operational efficiency.

Staff on Deputation: All staff is thus either deputed from State Rural Development Department and other line departments or Zilla Parishads. The primary finding is that the objective of having staff on deputation for having advantage of staff motivation has not been observed in the study districts. In most of the districts, staff on deputation is not satisfied with DRDA and is interested in joining back the parent department. One of the important reasons quoted by APOs included the variation in service conditions of DRDA and their departments. The staff deputed to DRDA is not able to get the service benefits similar to their counterparts in line departments. Variation in service conditions and lack of benefits to DRDA deputed staff has led to unwillingness to join DRDA. In case the staff joins, he keeps on looking for opportunities for going back to the parent departments to get the service benefits. Further, deputation of technical staff has again been a problem where line department themselves face a staff shortage for implementation of departmental programmes.
Recommended Actions:

High levels of gaps in programme staff availability definitely affect the quality of functioning. MORD needs to plan urgent actions to ensure deployment of staff as per the staff norms adopted by state. MORD should interact with the state Rural Development Departments about the DRDA guidelines, the wing structure proposed, roles to be performed by DRDAs and the plan for urgent actions for deployment of staff.

Accounts staff has emerged as an area that needs serious attention of not only MORD but also State Rural Development Departments. This matter may be sorted out on top priority.

Training and capacity building of accounts and finance staff for shifting to commercial account systems using IT based software should also be taken up at the earliest.

Age limits defined by the guidelines may be reviewed after discussion with State Rural Development Department and others concerned; as posting of the staff is envisaged from state level. Guidance for staff supplementation through contract staff, induction of NGOs, liaison coordination with other line department may also be needed after discussion and understanding local state specific issues. Such case specific actions may also be needed in states like J&K and Uttaranchal.

Matters relating to deputation of staff also need discussion with state Rural Development Departments. This can be clubbed with discussion on wing structure adoption by states.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Trainings and capacity building of staff is one of the important activities envisaged in the DRDA guidelines. The guidelines envisage constant training of DRDA staff. Thus, pre-service and in-service trainings are suggested in the guidelines.

The field assessment revealed that arrangement of pre-service training is not followed in DRDAs. However, in most cases, Project Directors, POs and APOs have participated in regular training programmes arranged by National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) or the State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRD). Orientation on DRDA activities is provided to the staff after joining DRDA. Lack of pre-service training or DRDA specific training, has led to lack of clarity on role of DRDA. This has led to programme staff limiting themselves to scheme coordination and monitoring rather than generating learnings on rural development.

Scope of in-service trainings is limited to scheme information, guidelines and some skill oriented trainings. These trainings also have not been received by about half of DRDAs. Lack of staff availability for regular work also leads to low number of trainings attended by programme staff.

Consolidated picture indicates that training on critical aspects (like Scheme guidelines, RD administration) is not received by more than half of the districts programme staff. Exposure visits as a tool for capacity building of staff is not reached to about 40 percent of DRDA program staff from various states. The analysis reflects on weakness of trainings and points out the need of major improvements in trainings. Source of funding for staff training remains to be state RD training budget; this can be one of the reasons of less number of staff covered under trainings.
The neglect of training and capacity building of staff leads to restricted understanding of development and gaps in understanding of new development approaches and tools. Lack of receipt of this knowledge, would ultimately reduce the sensitivity and commitment towards the poverty alleviation programme of DRDA. Hence, actions need to be planned to strengthen the training and capacity building activities within DRDAs.

**Recommended Actions**

The field assessment indicates that SIRD is the main agency engaged in trainings of staff and functionaries associated with DRDAs. It would be useful to explore possibilities of providing special allocation to SIRD for DRDA trainings. Specific allocation to state RDD for training and facilitative support can also be thought to increase the scope of trainings of staff beyond scheme specific trainings. Plan of pre-service training to DRDA programme staff may also be prepared in association with NIRD, SIRD and state RDD. Involvement of NGOs as well as professional agencies for training should also be considered for specific training areas.

Exposure visits definitely help to bring in qualitative learning among the participants. Thus, planning and directives for increased exposure to programme staff, both at district and block level, may be helpful to ensure that all staff receive some exposure to other development initiatives and stimulate their thinking for improvements in their work.

**FUNDING AND FINANCIAL SYSTEMS**

The DRDA Administration Scheme which is envisaged to be implemented through Central and State Share is not observed in many districts. Only six states have paid their share in the last three financial years leaving a large number of states (22 states) not contributing their share.

There is a gap between funds entitlement under DRDA Administration scheme and funds release. This gap is in base level entitlements finalized in 1999-2000. The provisions of enhancing the allocations annually @ 5% have not been implemented, leading to huge gaps in funds requirement and funds availability with DRDAs.

Study of Accounts and Financial Systems in DRDA indicates that Accounts Wings have not been structured in many districts due to the fact that there are about two fifth districts which do not have Accts Officers. About four fifth DRDAs still follow manual accounting system. Internal audit function envisaged placement of one Senior Accounts Officer. This again was not observed due to non availability of Sr. Accounts Officers in 82 percent districts.

The entire financial system needs to be reviewed with states to understand the issues and reasons of lapses. Unless issues relating to staffing and funds are resolved, further improvement would seem to be difficult.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The DRDA guidelines define monitoring as one of the important functions. However, this understanding has not reached DRDAs at district level. Lack of Project Economist in four fifth of districts has limited the scope of establishing a proper monitoring wing within DRDAs. Secondly, districts which have Project Economists posted, also use them in scheme coordination leaving behind the primary functions.

Field visits are occasionally undertaken by the APO- M&E. Field visit based monitoring was observed in about half of the districts. Constraints for field visits indicated by the APOs are travel support and overall budget availability for field visits based monitoring. The support envisaged through scheme budgets is not specific and thus gets submerged leading to reduced monitoring events.

MORD has developed a computerized online MIS for DRDAs. Information is fed into this system from District level. However, the information for this purpose is collected and compiled manually using MS-Excel worksheets from block level. This involves a major work at DRDA level for using the MIS for regular reviews.

Recommended Actions

It is recommended that each DRDA develops online MIS on lines of DRDA system to facilitate information collection and use of the same for regular monitoring. Such online system can be web-based and linked to DRDA website. This will help to improve operational efficiency as well as help promote transparency through easier and automated packaging of information to indicate physical and financial progress. A separate and specific provision for field visit based monitoring in guidelines will go a long way to strengthen the operations.

Newer schemes like NREGS have included social audit in the scheme guidelines. Such community based systems need to be introduced for all DRDA schemes.

USE OF IEC FOR AWARENESS GENERATION AND PROMOTION OF TRANSPARENCY

Awareness generation as an activity is proposed by the guidelines to fulfill the objectives of reaching the poor by DRDA. Initial awareness generation activities need to be supplemented through promotion of transparent operational systems as well as participatory planning process and these will lead to building confidence in DRDA target group households. However, focus has remained on awareness generation right in the introduction stage of the scheme. It is also observed that IEC is majorly dependent on inter-personal media. The programme staff does not feel the importance of IEC activities in reaching the target group households.

There is a need of promotion of better communication tools and media including audio visual and mass media. IEC actions also need to go beyond scheme information and orientation. The field study identifies a definite need for developing common and shared understanding role of IEC in community based functioning through trainings.
Newsletter and website are the tools that can be used for promoting transparent operational systems and building confidence in them. However, there seems to be a lack of clarity about the utilization of these tools in DRDA Project Directors and thus planning and implementation of these needs a review.

There is a need of orientation and training to Project Directors for improved governance through transparent operational system through efficient use of tools such as website and newsletter by improving contents and management.

**Recommended Actions**

The IEC currently restricted to scheme information and scheme orientation needs to go beyond and needs to cover awareness generation on collective action, development opportunities available, establishing linkages with various institutions and agencies to have better access to opportunities. Staff orientation is essential for this purpose. This can be done by organizing special training programmes. Developing common and shared understanding role of IEC in community based functioning through trainings is the need of hour. Training is also essential on use of different media and communication tools.

The Project Directors and the programme staff need to be oriented on use of technology and tools for promoting transparency in operations. DRDAs are equipped with infrastructure and facilities but they need to be trained to utilize them for enhancing their own capacity for use of the same to improve operational efficiency. Skill trainings in operation and management of tools like website, newsletter, web-linked MIS etc are also essential.

**SYNERGY WITH OTHER AGENCIES**

The guidelines envisage DRDAs to be a professional body that is able to interact effectively with other agencies especially the line departments, Panchayat Raj Institutions, banks and other financial institutions for resources required for poverty reduction effort.

The study revealed a lack of role clarity on integration with other agencies as a need and function as per the DRDA guidelines. Further, non-adoption of organization structure suggested by guidelines has affected integration function. Utilization of programme specific agencies by states like AP, though has achieved operational efficiency, but has missed on an opportunity of generating overall understanding of rural development under the umbrella of DRDA.

A number of responses by DRDA staff indicated issues of coordination with line departments due to variation in level of of Project Directors and line department officials

Operational issues relating to specific schemes also emerged during the study. These include small, one -two staff bank branches in remote areas definitely affect response time from banks. Similarly, SHG based record keeping seems to be a need to understand clear picture of repayment. There is a need of a mutually agreeable repayment recording system by DRDA and bank. Use of IT and community based record keeping system starting from SHG may be an option.
Watershed development is implemented in a project mode and thus is able to have better integration with line departments. However, in many cases, in lieu of technical expertise, DRDA is viewed as “funds transfer agency”.

The study sample covered 14 DRDAs having more than 50 percent tribal population. These areas have ITDAs in place which focus on tribal development. The DRDAs, though working for poor and below poverty line households, do not have any collaborative working with ITDA. Reasons of low level of integration with agencies by DRDA level can be summarized as -

- Low level powers vested with Project Directors
- Staff shortage at the level of line departments
- Lack of clarity on need of association with support agencies
- Organizational structure and state level plan of utilization of DRDA as a body e.g. AP on one side, Gujarat -on the other
- Lack of role clarity on resource implementation as a need and function as per the DRDA guidelines
- Non-cordial relationships due to variation in level of Project Directors and Line Department Officials

**Recommended Actions**

There is a need for critical review of the organizational and governance structures as well as actions need to be planned for building further clarity on role of DRDA among the programme staff. This needs to focus attention on the broader role of DRDA as a professional body generating in-depth knowledge of rural development programmes. This will need orientation of state Departments, DRDA officials on need of synergetic working and building synergies in development efforts especially for DRDA target groups so that they receive all need based support to improve their quality of living.

Before reaching the level synergetic working, there is a need on priority to resolve the operational issues in coordination with various departments.

**SYNERGY AND SYNCHRONIZATION AMONG SIMILAR SCHEMES**

A number of schemes are implemented in some districts which have focus on local infrastructure development, betterment of poor by providing wage employment, self-employment opportunities. All these activities need village level /GP level planning. Overlaps among schemes like NREGS, RSVY, BRGF, ITDA area programmes in some districts lead to repetitive planning as well as lack of synergy. There is a need to evolve a system of synchronization among these schemes.

Similarly, a number of similar schemes are taken up by state governments. These include IAY, SGSY being implemented by states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharasthra, Karnataka. Variations in benefits and support provided under these schemes create problems at operational level. There is also a need to identify a solution to address this issue.
SPECIAL PROJECTS

Interactions with senior officials associated with DRDAs especially CEO, ZIP and District Collectors indicated the need for flexibility and provisions to address area specific needs. This was observed in some states under the Special Projects category. Special projects like “Wadi Project” implemented in Nandurbar have been helpful to meet local needs. A separate study for understanding utility of special projects and infrastructure component under SGSY will lead to better utilization of these and bringing synergy in local development.

EMERGING DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO AND ROLE REFINING FOR DRDA

Sphere of development activities has widened over a period of one to two decades and various development programmes are being implemented towards betterment of rural people especially the poor. Some of these are also implemented /coordinated through MORD. However, DRDA is engaged in coordination of limited number of programmes/schemes. The study also identifies variation in these across various states. The need of protecting interest of the DRDA target group still continues in all development endeavors. However, it is observed that functionality of DRDA due to limited resources availability is on decline and development demands are on increase. The study also revealed that DRDAs in some states play a facilitative role in district level planning.

In such a situation, following options emerge for transformation of role for DRDAs.

• To work as planning and management unit as part of District Planning Committee

• Function as a resource agency for Panchayat Raj Institutions strengthening

• Function as coordination agency for all developmental programme of MoRD

  A series of brainstorming discussion alongwith strategic review and planning may be taken up to strengthen the DRDAs.