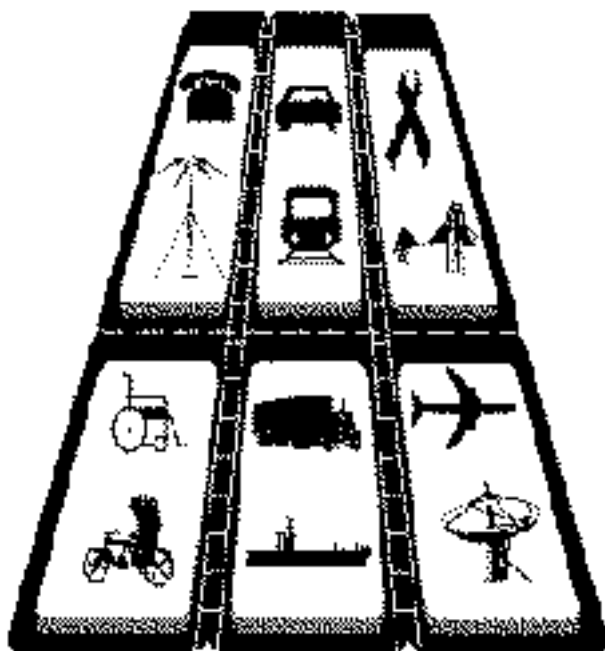


ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



**TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS BULLETIN
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

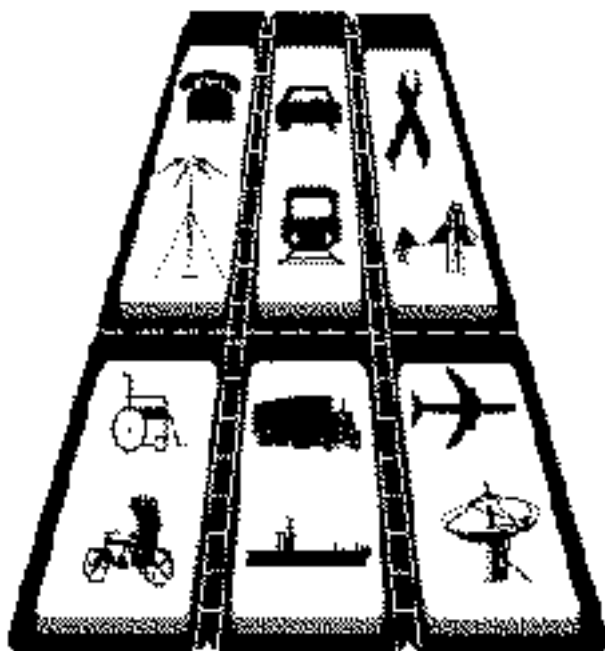
No. 69

**Participatory approach to
transport infrastructure development**



UNITED NATIONS

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Editorial statement

The *Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific* is a journal published once a year by the Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The *Bulletin* is interested to provide a medium for the sharing of knowledge, experience, ideas, policy options, and information on the development of transport infrastructure and services in the Asian and Pacific region; to stimulate policy-oriented research; and to increase awareness of transport policy issues and responses. It is hoped that the *Bulletin* will help to widen and deepen debate on issues of interest and concern in the transport sector.

According to the new publication policy, each volume of the *Bulletin* focuses on a particular theme of interest, primarily in the transport sector. The theme for the previous issue of the *Bulletin* was urban transport. The chosen theme for this issue (No. 69) was the participatory approach to transport infrastructure development. A set of four articles has been selected which focus on some of the issues in transport infrastructure development through a participatory approach. The articles are policy oriented and describe some of the known “best practices” in the region. It is expected that they will generate further debate on the issues that have been discussed and increase awareness of their policy implications and responses.

The *Bulletin* welcomes analytical articles on topics that are currently at the forefront of transport infrastructure development and services in the region and on policy analysis and best practices. Articles should be based on original research and should have analytical depth. Empirically based articles should emphasize policy implications emerging from the analysis. Book reviews are also welcome.

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PANCHAYATI RAJ AND PLANNING IN INDIA: PARTICIPATORY INSTITUTIONS AND RURAL ROADS

Yoginder K. Alagh*

ABSTRACT

The institutional structure of the Panchayati Raj, the local self-government system in India, and the implementation of rural development programmes in the context of a participatory approach have been examined in this paper. Although the Panchayati Raj institutions have existed for many years, owing to inherent weaknesses in the systems they were not very effective in the implementation of rural development programmes. Through constitutional amendments a third tier of local self-government has been set up and steps have been taken to remove the inherent shortcomings of the system. It is expected that the new Panchayati system should now provide the much needed non-bureaucratic institutional support to rural development programmes. With a more aware rural population, the prospects for success are perhaps brighter. The functioning of the new decentralized system has been examined with three case studies concerning rural roads planning and their implementation. Policy conclusions are drawn based on a general analysis of the new set-up, past experience and the findings from the three case studies.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the institutional structure and the implementation of rural development programmes in the context of participatory approaches in a decentralized framework. The description of the structure is accompanied by detailed case studies of rural roads planning. The paper is divided into three sections. The first sets out a brief background of decentralized development efforts in India and the considerable attempts at reorganizing the system in the late 1980s and

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the early 1990s. It then sets out the institutional framework of implementation, particularly around and after the Seventy-second and Seventy-third Amendment of the Constitution of India on Panchayati Raj (setting up a “third” tier of local self-government). The second section gives three case studies of rural roads planning and development. The first is a study of a successful project in Ahmedabad district of Gujarat. The second relates to a plan for the development of a road network in a watershed development project in India’s first major cooperative sugar factory area in western India. The third is the Marathwada study of local planning in Aurangabad district, which has as yet not taken off. The third section draws policy conclusions for institutional development to enhance the effectiveness of participatory approaches to rural development in India.

The research is largely based on secondary data. The three case studies were developed by field visits followed by data collection by the author and selected field collaborators. Data and reports from the Rural Development Division of the Planning Commission gave an up-to-date assessment of the countrywide situation. The concluding section is based on these sources and the author’s own experience.

I. DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN INDIA

A. Historical background

Recognizing the importance of democratic institutions at the grass-roots level, the Indian Constitution laid down in Article 40 of Part IV of the Directive Principles of State Policy that the state would take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as might be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. The Panchayati Raj institutions became a state subject under the Constitution. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was appointed in 1957 to study the Community Development and National Extension Service programmes, especially from the point of view of assessing the extent of popular participation, and to recommend the creation of institutions through which such participation could be achieved. The Committee recommended the constitution of statutory elected local bodies with the necessary resources, power and authority devolved to them and a decentralized administrative system working under their control. It also recommended that the basic unit of democratic decentralization should be located at the block/samiti level.

The Committee envisaged directly elected panchayats for a village or group of villages, an executive body called Panchayat Samiti for a block with directly elected and co-opted members, and an advisory body called Zila Parishad at the district level constituted mainly through ex-officio members from the lower tier and others with the district chief as Chairman. The National Development Council affirmed the objective of democratic decentralization. This was the genesis of the Panchayati Raj system and when ushering it in, Nehru described it as “the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of New India”.

In 1972, the Planning Commission advised the state governments to set up state planning boards as apex planning bodies with the Chief Minister as the Chairman and the Finance Minister, Planning Minister, and technical experts representing various departments and disciplines as members. The plans envisaged the decentralization of the planning process to districts and ultimately to the block level. District planning bodies were constituted in all the states except Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

However, the district planning machinery has not really started functioning in some states. The current status is as follows:

Table 1. Current status of district planning machinery in the states of India

<i>Status</i>				
<i>Set up</i>	<i>Set up, but requires strengthening</i>	<i>Not yet set up</i>	<i>Proposals approved but personnel not in position</i>	<i>Not in favour of setting up of planning machinery</i>
Bihar	Andhra Pradesh	Assam	Haryana,	Sikkim
Karnataka Orissa	Gujarat Himachal Pradesh (in ten districts)	Madhya Pradesh	Tamil Nadu (for three districts)	
West Bengal	Jammu and Kashmir Kerala Maharashtra Manipur Meghalaya Nagaland	Punjab Rajasthan Tripura Uttar Pradesh		

According to the information available, planning at block level has been entrusted to the Panchayati Raj bodies in West Bengal. Block level plans are being formulated in the state by block planning committees which are chaired by Sabhapatis of Panchayati Samitis. Thus, district plans and block plans and the schemes formulated for execution with the help of district plan funds are mainly implemented by the Panchayati Raj institutions, such as Zila Parishads, Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats, and other local bodies.

In Karnataka, Zila Parishads and Mandal Panchayats have been entrusted with the responsibility of formulating and implementing district development plans after these bodies were set up under the Zila Parishads and Mandal Panchayats Act of 1983. The district planning committees function under the Zila Parishad. In some other states, such as Gujarat and Maharashtra, the district and block level agencies have been involved in plan formulation for a longer time.

B. Ferment in the 1980s

A number of committees and study groups reviewed the situation and made recommendations to strengthen the systems of integrated decentralized planning. The Ashok Mehta Committee reviewed the situation in 1978, recommending an institutional design for the Panchayati Raj in the light of the developmental thrust and technical expertise required for the planning and implementation of rural development programmes.

Working groups were appointed by the Planning Commission. The Working Group on Block Level Planning headed by Professor M.L. Dantwala in November 1977, and the Working Group on District Planning headed by Dr C.H. Hanumantha Rao, Member of the Planning Commission in September 1982, studied various aspects of decentralized planning at the district and block levels. Both Working Groups recommended that the basic decentralized planning function had to be at the district level. The Working Group on District Planning recommended that:

- (a) For decentralized planning to make headway, institutional mechanisms had to be more broad-based with the active involvement of local representatives and endowed with a greater degree of autonomy in local decision-making;

- (b) Panchayati Raj institutions and other local government institutions should play a crucial role in the district planning process.

The Committee to Review the Existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation headed by Dr G.V.K. Rao, Member of the Planning Commission (March 1985), also went into the question of decentralized planning and recommended that:

- (a) Rural development should be the major component of district planning, though the District Plan should encompass the total activity of the district;
- (b) The district should be the basic unit for policy planning and programme implementation. The Zila Parishad should, therefore, become the principal body for the management of all development programmes that could be handled at that level;
- (c) Panchayati Raj institutions at the district level and below should be assigned an important role in respect of planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes;
- (d) Some of the planning functions at the state level might have to be transferred to the district level for effective decentralized district planning;
- (e) In order to give some leeway and manoeuvrability in planning and decision-making, it was necessary to make some funds available to the District Planning Body, funds which were not tied to any departmental schemes and which might be used towards small schemes meant for the local priorities, needs and aspirations of the local community.

The mid-1980s saw the emergence of an influential movement to revitalize local self-government structures in India and link them with the agricultural and rural development process. There were two basic reasons for this. The first was the belief with the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that India was too 'large' a country to be ruled from a central place. The responsibility of the centre for many functions had to be at the local level. This would lead to accountability in the long run,

although in the short run resources would have to be allocated at the local level (if accountability was to be enforced) and these resources could be misused. Rajiv Gandhi, however, believed that in the long run democratic policies would take care of such abuse and so insisted on the political and economic enfranchisement of poorer groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women). The second reason was the fact that India's initial agricultural planning systems were somewhat linear in nature, emphasizing, for example, canal and tube-well irrigation and high-yielding varieties and led to the favoured region, favoured crop strategy. The mid-1980s saw this strategy being questioned and the whole issue of widespread agricultural growth raised in terms of an agro-climatic plan. This in turn raised the question of local participation and voluntary organizations and the associated question of resource allocation and functioning of decentralized markets. The question raised was the manner in which special programmes for employment and rural development could be integrated with the agricultural development.

The mid-term appraisal of the Seventh Five-year Plan had anticipated these problems, as the following abstract shows:

“However, it is noticed that wherever the Panchayati Raj institutions have been actively involved, the implementation of rural development programmes has been better and the selection of beneficiaries and designing of schemes have been more satisfactory. The Planning Commission has been impressing upon the states that various rural development programmes will be realistic and meaningful only if people's representatives are actively involved and associated in local level planning, design formulation and implementation of those programmes and the selection of beneficiaries in the anti-poverty and employment programmes such as IRDP, NREP, RLEGP etc. and that there is no better instrument to meet this need other than the Panchayati Raj institutions” (Government of India, 1987:16).

The original Panchayati Raj Bill (1989) was an initiative not only to decentralize power, but to politically enfranchise the poorer sections of society, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women, who form a large part of the landless labourer and artisan populations. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), a nationwide employment scheme, attempted to put economic power behind this change.

The manual of JRY clearly brought out these intentions as follows:

The construction or renovation of irrigation tanks is one of the important community works which can be taken up under JRY. Similarly, items, such as land shaping, drainage, and field channels on private lands which are part of a project to improve the productivity of an area can be undertaken. However, only those blocks of land would be taken up under the programme if more than 50 per cent of the landholders were small and marginal farmers and they owned not less than 25 per cent of the land in the block. The total number of farmers covered by any such works should not be less than 10. No recovery of the cost of land development will be made from the small and marginal farmers. In the case of large farmers, the recovery pattern will be prescribed by the state government. The rate of recovery will be the same as in a similar scheme being implemented by the state government.

The original Panchayati Raj Bill tied it all up as follows:

- (a) Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in every Panchayat and the number of seats so reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Panchayat as the population of the scheduled castes in that panchayat area or of the scheduled tribes in that panchayat area bears to the total population of that area.

If the population of the scheduled castes or, as the case may be, the scheduled tribes, in a panchayat area is not sufficient for the reservation of any seat, one seat for the scheduled castes or, as the case may be, one seat for the scheduled tribes, will be reserved in that panchayat.

- (b) As nearly as may be, thirty per cent of the total number of seats reserved under Clause (a) shall be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes or, as the case may be, the scheduled tribes.

Subject to the provision of the Constitution, the legislature of a state may, by law, endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain

provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to:

- (i) The preparation of plans for economic development and social justice;
- (ii) The implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matter listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

The organizational structure was to be in position to address the basic problems of underdevelopment in the Eighth Plan. However, the process was delayed and many of the original provisions of the Bill were watered down since discretionary powers were given to the states. However, the central features remained, namely, compulsory election; reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women; devolution of resources and powers as outlined above; and rural development programmes, such as JRY which would directly allocate resources at the village level, depending on the indicators of unemployment.

A village can now receive around 60,000 rupees under JRY, or 2,000 person days of employment. Thus, twenty families can have up to 100 days of employment. This kind of input can desilt a village tank by about 3 feet or meet around 30 per cent of the labour requirements of contour bunding and gully plugging in a medium-sized watershed. Thus, integration possibilities existed with the agro-climatic plan. The agro-climatic plan was to be operationalized at the district level (Alagh 1990: Government of India 1993) to fulfill the objectives of minimum needs and employment.

A recent ILO review of this programme (ILO 1997) states the following:

A number of employment generation schemes had been initiated in India, specially since the mid-1960s, in order to help the poor raise their income levels through additional employment. Most of the initial schemes were tentative and limited in scope. At the end of the 1970s, an attempt was made to rationalize these schemes into two comprehensive nationwide schemes – the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and the Rural

Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). The operation of these schemes left much to be desired; assets created were usually not economically productive, felt needs of the people were not reflected, funds did not go where they were most needed, the system of project approval was inefficient and time-consuming, and the states tended to use the funds allocated for the programmes for other purposes. All this led to the replacement of NREP and RLEGP with a single scheme – the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) towards the end of the 1980s.

JRY, a nationwide programme, is funded jointly by the central (80 per cent) and state (20 per cent) governments. Allocation of funds is based on a formula designed to ensure that the distribution of funds corresponds to the distribution of the poor across the regions. Part of the funds (less than 25 per cent) allocated to a state are earmarked for two sub-schemes of JRY: Indira Awaas Yojana – a scheme for building houses free of cost for the weaker sections (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and liberated bonded labour), and the Million Wells Scheme for constructing dug-wells free of cost for small and marginal farmers. Of the remaining funds, 80 per cent goes to village Panchayats and the balance to the district authorities.

The village Panchayats are free to decide on the use of funds, except that 22.5 per cent must be devoted to works that directly benefit the weaker sections of society. Funds allocated to the district, however, must be spent in accordance with a given schedule, including an individual beneficiary scheme for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Significantly, 10 per cent of the funds are to be allocated for the maintenance of assets already created.

The choice of community assets to be built is not restricted. Assets that may be owned by a group of individuals can be included in the works if they result in a flow of income for the group. Land development in small and marginal farms is also permissible if the owners are in the poor category, as are works for identified poor individuals among the weaker sections.

The responsibility for identifying and executing works rests at the district level with the District Rural Development Agency or the Zila Parishad (district Panchayat) and at the village level with the village Panchayat. The latter is empowered to take up any project that has been technically appraised and approved by the Panchayat Samiti

(block Panchayat). To avoid deviation and malpractice, the village Panchayat is required to prepare muster rolls in detail for the labour employed and display them at a public place. For all works under JRY, the wage paid is the minimum wage as prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act. Two kilograms of foodgrains at subsidized rates are also made available to the workers.

All works undertaken are included in the Annual Action Plan. Priority is required to be given to incomplete works from the previous Plan. At the village level, the Plan has to be discussed in the village Panchayat and care has to be taken to ensure that top priority is given to works benefiting the weaker sections of the community. The village Panchayat must also report on the progress of work to the *Gram Sabha* (village assembly) at least twice a year.

Since its inception in April 1989, an average of 8 to 9 million mandays of employment have been annually created under JRY. An average amount of 32.7 billion rupees was available to JRY in the first two years. In the following two years, the implementation of macroeconomic stabilization measures led to a substantial decline in the resources available to JRY. In 1993/94, however, there was a substantial increase.

It is evident that the Panchayats are, in principle, substantially involved in implementing JRY. However, the Panchayats have so far been ineffective and, consequently, government bureaucracies have played a dominant role in the implementation process. There were several reasons for this, most importantly the inherent weaknesses in the Panchayat system as provided for in the Constitution. Recently, the government has been able to mobilize political support for bringing the Panchayat system to centre stage and passed the Constitution (Seventy-second Amendment) Bill, 1991 thus removing the system's inherent shortcomings. The new Panchayat system should now provide the much-needed non-bureaucratic institutional support to the poverty alleviation programmes and with a more aware rural population, the prospects for its success are perhaps brighter (Alagh 1993).

The Act enjoins the states to endow the Panchayats with such powers as to enable them to prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice. Clearly, devolution of power has to be both administrative and financial. It envisages the constitution of a state finance commission once in every five years to review the financial

position of the Panchayats. The 11th schedule in the constitution lists 29 functional areas to be brought within the purview of the decentralized planning level, including agriculture and allied activities, irrigation, social forestry, village and small-scale industries, water supply, housing, roads, education and poverty alleviation programmes. Resources and funds flowing from various departments of the state governments and from centrally-sponsored schemes to the district and sub-district levels can be dovetailed within a local area plan. This would ensure better utilization of resources under one umbrella with priorities assigned to activities on the basis of the felt needs of the people.

State governments have enacted appropriate conformity legislation. Similarly, all the states have set up state finance commissions to review the financial positions of the Panchayats and recommend principles which should govern the distribution of the net proceeds of duties and taxes etc. between the states and Panchayats and between Panchayats at different levels. They also suggest ways of raising their own resources by the Panchayats. Meanwhile, the government has accepted the recommendations of the Tenth Central Finance Commission to give ad hoc grants-in-aid of 43.81 billion rupees to the states in four instalments commencing from the financial year 1996/97.

Panchayats have been empowered by the Seventy-third Amendment. Access to and effective control over resources is a critical component of this empowerment. The real issues of such access are knowledge and awareness of the needs of the people, legal rights, availability and accessibility of social and economic resources. These changes in procedures and organizations have as yet not fully taken place as envisaged in the legislation. It also requires restructuring relationships including looking at gender issues both at the micro and macro level.

II. WORKING OF THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING SYSTEM: RURAL ROADS CONSTRUCTION AS CASE STUDIES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

A good way of examining the working of the set up created by these Constitutional Amendments is to examine the actual functioning of the decentralized system. We do so with three case studies of rural roads planning and their implementation. The first is from a developed

district, Ahmedabad in Gujarat – a state with a long tradition of decentralized development and a reputation for some institutional reform. The second is from an area which has a long tradition of rural development, but not through government efforts. India's first cooperative sugar factory was set up at Loni, a backward area of western Maharashtra in Ahmednagar district. Its founders were the rural development leader, Vikhe Patil and the economist, D.R. Gadgil. The issue here concerns the coordination between people's representative institutions and a non-governmental organization (NGO) such as an all-purpose development cooperative. The third case study is from a backward area of a state, the Aurangabad Division of Maharashtra, which has a well-developed system of decentralized institutions but development planning at the local level has not yet been activated. This would be the case of the "problem area".

A. Ahmedabad rural road development plan

The Ahmedabad district is in central Gujarat and is dominated by the industrial town of Ahmedabad, where the first textile factory in India was set up in 1868 AD. In 1991, the district had a population of 4.80 million, of which 74.7 per cent was urban. The district consists predominantly of alluvial soil and has 90 cm of annual rainfall on average. The River Sabarmati traverses the district from a north-easterly to a south-westerly direction and ends in the marshes of the Gulf of Cambay off Dholera. The Khari, Meshwo, Onkar, Bhadar, Neelka and Utavali drain into the Sabarmati at Voutha. Rainfall is mostly from June through September and the rivers flood in this period. The district consists of the Talukas of Dascroi, Sanand, Dehgam, Dholka, Viramgam and Dhanduka.

A district road plan was prepared in the early 1970s when India's Fifth Five-year Plan laid down the objective of connecting of each and every village as a minimum need. This was approved later by the District Planning Board. First priority was given to villages with a population of 1,000 and above. The remaining villages were to be connected later. The plan consisted of works to connect every village to the nearest road. Villagers were not involved in the choice of the network although representatives were involved in priority setting.

Funds for the construction of rural roads were obtained from different sources, such as the state budget, Minimum Needs Programme (now Basic Minimum Services), Central Assistance for Rural Landless

Employment Guarantee Programmes, famine and drought relief, and Employment Guarantee Programme. Some of these programmes were later merged into one programme under the name 'Jawahar Rozgar Yojana', abbreviated to JRY.

By March 1993, Ahmedabad district had rural road links to 645 villages out of a total of 653 villages. Seven out of the remaining eight villages have also been provided with metalled roads. The status of road links in the district is as follows:

Table 2. Status of rural roads in Ahmedabad district, 1998

<i>Category of roads</i>	<i>Blacktop (km)</i>	<i>Water-bound macadam (km)</i>	<i>Earthern (km)</i>	<i>Total (km)</i>
Major district roads	1 024	35	30	1 089
Other district roads	297	34	8	339
Village roads	623	202	179	1 004
Total	1 944	271	217	2 432

Source: Master Plan for Balanced Development of Ahmedabad District.

Given the available resources, the existing work plan for rural roads is given in table 3.

Table 3. Existing work plan for rural roads

<i>Type of work</i>	<i>Number of works</i>	<i>Total length (km)</i>
Village to be connected with highway	1	2.40
Metalled or earthern work needing completion and black topping	43	79.85

Source: Master Plan for Balanced Development of Ahmedabad District.

Field work in the district suggests that connectivity, in the sense of a working link with a district, state or national highway, is no longer a problem in Ahmedabad district. The problems now are whether the community is willing to contribute a share for improved communications.

We will return to this problem later. Meanwhile, the working of the system at the local level is fairly effective. The standard of work achieved in rural and village roads is good. Community participation in the implementation of the construction programme is effective. The villagers normally donate land for the road through their Panchayats. Sometimes, there is a labour contribution; always the villagers are involved in the construction; they keep watch on the material used and the progress of work. Deficiencies are reported to the supervisory authorities and soon become an issue. There is a separate rural roads organization for back-up. Planning of works is on an annual basis and is transparent. The source of construction material at the Naguesh quarry is identified and the rate structure is worked out for each village in the schedule of rates.

The real problem now is the identification of additional works given that all villages stand connected. Field responses suggest two reasons for additional demands, economic and religious.

Granite polishing has come up in Sola village on the border of the Ahmedabad Municipal area. Around 134 persons are employed in the cutting and polishing factories. A majority of them commute from two villages which as the crow flies are 3.5 and 5 kilometres away. These are Chainpur and Jagatpur. But during the four-month monsoon period the direct fair weather path is not available and they have to commute more than 12 kilometres using National Highway No. 8 off which Sola is located. On account of the fast expansion of building activity, the work of granite cutting and polishing is expected to expand rapidly.

The village of Ganapatipura is near Dholka a town in rural Ahmedabad. It boasts of a centuries old Ganesh temple, the origins of which are shrouded in antiquity. On Saturdays and “*Chaturthi*”, the fourth day of the lunar calendar, up to fifty thousand pilgrims throng to the temple. On special occasions, this crowd can double. The village of Ganapatipura is situated off a district road. All the villages around the temple have a high demand for a direct connection to this religious centre. Two such connections to clusters of villages have already been constructed. One more has just been approved.

It is broadly estimated that from diverse sources – people’s contributions, employment programmes, contributions from local area development funds of members of the state legislature – from 20 to

25 kilometres of such roads are built annually. But there is no comprehensive plan for demand oriented road construction, which is additional to the All India plan for rural connectivity.

Ahmedabad district is also interesting in that a special bond for financing development works has been issued by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation. The Corporation is financing investments, in part, through India's first municipal bond issue. This investment programme is the culmination of a progressive programme of administrative and financial reform within the corporation itself and a partnership developed between USAID, the FIRE Project of USAID and the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

The Ahmedabad project features two important innovations in the urban infrastructure sector. First, it is financed by India's first municipal bond issued without a state guarantee. Ahmedabad's first credit rating, issued in February 1996 was A+, indicating adequate security for investors, for an issue of 1 billion rupees. The Municipal Corporation returned to Credit Rating Information Services of India (CRISIL) the following year, however, with a structured debt obligation, a concept introduced by the FIRE Project, to request an SDO (structured debt obligation) rating. CRISIL issued an AA(so), indicating a high degree of security. With this SDO approach, the corporation was able to draw greater interest in its bonds.

The bond issue was prepared by IL & FS (lease financing agency) whom the corporation had appointed as its investment bankers. Structured basically as a general obligation, it also had a revenue bond flavour due to credit enhancement in the form of a structured repayment mechanism. Specified revenues, in this case receipts from specified octroi collection posts, are deposited in an escrow account and payments to bond holders are supervised by a trustee. The issue was structured as a 75 per cent public placement, with the remainder publicly issued. When the bonds were finally issued in January 1998, they were fully subscribed and regarded as a great success.

The second innovation relates to the management and implementation of the Corporation's infrastructure investment plan. Project management consultants have been enlisted from the private sector to facilitate the process of project design and approval, tendering, construction supervision, quality control, audit and budgetary controls and payments. This structure is based on the approach developed by

the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Mumbai to successfully execute a number of large projects simultaneously. The FIRE Project has been worked out to promote the use of project management consultants from the private sector as a means of increasing efficiency, lowering costs and decreasing time and cost overruns.

Another innovation has been a 3.5 kilometre market in the prime commercial area of Ahmedabad constructed with private-public partnership. Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation appointed Mr Bimal Patel, an award-winning architect who also runs a non-profit corporate firm of town planning services, to design the most “modern” urban road in the country. A local firm agreed to finance the 35 million rupee project. Advertisement rights of the new road have been given to the firm for seven years to recover its costs.

B. A road project in a cooperative factory area: The case of Pravara

The Gogalgaon group of five villages belongs to a perpetually drought prone area. Rainfed crops, such as millets, lentils and fodder crops, were grown here. Allied economic activities such as dairying and poultry gave some income stability to the farmers. Dr Vitthalrao Vikhe Patil Cooperative Sugar Factory and the many educational institutions provided employment opportunities. From 1995, the villages were covered under an integrated watershed development project, with the support of PIRENS Loni, an NGO. The project components include farm bunding to prevent rain water and top soil run-off, continuous contour trenches along the hillside and tree plantation in those trenches, grass-growing to encourage stall-feeding of cattle so as to protect the trees, etc. In the first year, the water table improved and there was a shift to growing fruits, vegetables and flowers. About 40 per cent of the land abandoned earlier due to water shortage was brought under cultivation.

The villagers contribute 16 per cent of their daily wage earnings as their project contribution and 100 rupees per year per family as a maintenance fund. The entire project is being implemented with the help and cooperation of a village watershed committee which receives technical and managerial inputs from the project staff and takes the necessary decisions. Once in two months, all the villagers come together to review the progress of the project. They use this platform to discuss

conditions, access to health-care facilities and the need for a sports ground. The women of the villages have formed a self-help group. Discussions are ongoing about the economic activities they would like to start.

The first activity undertaken by the villagers, apart from the project work, was filling the craters on the approach road to the project site to facilitate the visits of people to see the progress of the project. They contributed the tractor time, stone and labour. As a goodwill gesture, the NGO met the fuel expenses to run the tractor. They covered the open drains at points where there was maximum seepage. A fairly good road which interconnects three villages and ultimately connects to the Mumbai-Nashik State Highway became the top agenda during village meetings. The road, as proposed by the villagers, would reduce by 10 kilometres the distance to stable markets for the fruits and flowers grown in the villages. It would improve access to the Indian Technology Institute and the arts, science and commerce college in Rahata. Sugar cane growers from Ashwi and nearby areas need to transport cane to the Pravaranagar sugar factory. For them, the distance would now be reduced. Students from Ashwi and nearby villages would have a shorter distance to travel to reach the schools and colleges, including technical, medical and dental colleges in Loni, if the new road was constructed. The speciality hospital in Loni would become more accessible to the villagers. The distance of the villages to Shirdi, a major pilgrim centre, would also be reduced by 10 kilometres. This pilgrimage centre attracts thousands of pilgrims on major Hindu and Muslim festivals.

A technical team from the NGO visited the villages for a pre-feasibility study of the road project. Details about the ownership of the land that would be covered under the project were collected by the villagers themselves. There were village panchayat meetings and village level meetings where resolutions were passed to support this project. Representatives of the NGO participated in some of these meetings where the village leaders highlighted the existing road structure and the benefits of building the proposed road. Rough sketches of the project were prepared and benefits from it were worked out.

The NGO deputed a technical team to actually measure the proposed road length, prepare the technical details and work out the project costs. The project details, as worked out, are as follows:

- Total road length proposed: 10.5 kilometres.

- ❑ Cost of the project covering 10.5 hectares and 6 drains: Rs. 4.3 million approximately, 0.4 million rupees per kilometre.

As already mentioned, the villagers are at present paying 16 per cent of their daily wages as their contribution and 100 rupees per family towards a maintenance fund, and have committed themselves to contributing similar amounts if this project is implemented. The Zila Parishad, however, is not able to fund this project and the villagers are looking for a funding mechanism for it. The initial reactions of the funding agencies are encouraging.

C. Roads in a backward region: The Marathwada case study

The Constitutional Amendments have set up a legal structure but in many areas the instrumentalities for development planning at the local level have not as yet been activated. The Marathwada area in Maharashtra, which is a backward drought prone area but with a long tradition of local self-government, is an example of this pattern. Recent case studies in different parts of India suggest that own resources as a method of financing development efforts has decreased. This has also meant a decline in the ability of local bodies to raise institutional finance. This, in turn, has meant that the operational flexibility of these institutions has decreased. Their dependence on central resources, particularly through the employment scheme – JRY, has increased. The share of the local bodies' own resources funding recurring expenditure – mainly salaries of staff – has gone up. The overall size of development expenditure has in many cases gone down. In many areas there are too many “starts” of investment projects leading to lack of completion and cost overruns through works in progress. Generally, maintenance of existing assets has been neglected. There has been in many cases no relation between levels of development and the size of the development effort.

Many of the features described above are reported in detail in the Marathwada Study conducted by Swami Ramanand Teerath Research Institute. This study was conducted in the six districts of Nanded, Aurangabad, Parbhani, Beed, Osmanabad and Latur, and the results are reported in table 4.

Table 4. Panchayati Raj finances in Marathwada

(thousands of rupees)

S. No.	Particulars	Nanded	Aurangabad	Parbhani	Beed	Osmanabad	Latur
1.	Finances of Z.P.						
2.	Incomes						
3.	Tax and cess.	901.60 (8.3)	81.45 (0.26)	59.02 (15.9)	61.15 (0.9)	33.44 (0.4)	67.00 (0.8)
4.	Non-tax	47.01 (0.5)	62.15 (0.5)	17.92 (0.8)	76.90 (1.2)	60.91 (0.9)	1.71 (0.1)
5.	Grant from government	9 579.31 (88.7)	6 699.05 (52.2)	38.81 (10.5)	6 917.47 (96.8)	7 828.43 (98.7)	8 309.12 (95.0)
6.	Borrowing/ other	273.60 (2.5)	5 987.24 (46.7)	255.22 (68.8)	89.34 (1.1)	1.50 (Neg.)	363.47 (4.1)
7.	Total	10 801.52	12 829.90	370.97	7 144.86	7 926.28	8 741.30
8.	Expenditure						
9.	Total (expenditure)	9 798.56	12 521.92	442.16	7 905.03	7 957.02	12 865.01
10.	Capital (expenditure)	498.04	1 008.40	300.27	–	1.50	5 297.09
11.	Revenue (expenditure)	9 300.52	11 513.52	141.89	7 905.03	7 956.52	7 567.92
12.	Per capita (Rs.)						
13.	Tax income	49.51	5.48	3.60	4.09	3.08	5.03
14.	Non-tax income	2.58	4.19	1.09	5.14	5.62	0.13

Source: Swami Ramanand Teerath Research Institute, undated, Marathwada Study, Aurangabad.

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of the total.

The main sources of revenue are taxes, non-tax user charges, grants and borrowings. Per capita tax income varies from Rs. 3.1 to Rs. 49.5, but non-tax user charges are low in all districts, less than or equal to Rs. 5. In the poorest district of Parbhani grants are the lowest and tax revenue share the highest.

Expenditure, both revenue and capital, is low in the most backward districts. Per capita expenditure varies from Rs. 21 in Parbhani to Rs. 960.7 in Latur. There is no provision for maintenance. JRY is an important source of funding and activity.

According to the study, about 8 to 10 per cent of expenditure was on roads and bridges. The poorest district of Parbhani had only Rs. 18.7 spent on this head, although it had a separate allocation under the Tribal Sub-plan. In other districts the allocations varied from Rs. 50 million to around Rs. 120 million annually.

It may be pointed out that in this “problem area” of a backward region the instrumentalities for development planning at the local level have not yet been activated because of the local bodies’ inability to mobilize their own resources or to raise institutional finance. This fact has been clearly brought out by the results of the above study as presented in table 4.

III. POLICY AREAS FOR INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In this section, we briefly review the current situation of local institutions for participatory planning in India. The basic constructs of the system have been set up. Effectiveness depends on three factors. The first is a genuine attempt at giving flexibility to local institutions in implementing major developmental initiatives such as the Basic Minimum Services Programme and the Special Employment Programme (JRY). The second is the need to involve local institutions in the country’s economic liberalization and restructuring programmes. The Ahmedabad Municipal Bond issue focuses on this issue, which is basic to the success of participatory planning for infrastructure development in India. Without restructuring, local bodies will not be able to mobilize resources for such development. This restructuring has to be done at three levels – local, state and central. Finally, when the three tier system has been set up, its development will need continued emphasis on transparency, genuine transfer of power and administrative coordination and reform, particularly in planning and implementation.

The first aspect to underline is that while local government, as a part of the process of democratic decentralization, is over four decades old in India, it was the Seventy-third Amendment to the Constitution which was indeed a far-reaching, if not a revolutionary step. It gave constitutional validation and empowerment to the third tier of government. Elected leadership at the local level became mandatory. The provision of positive affirmation mandated through the constitutional

law that one third of the elected leadership at the local level had to consist of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women, was indeed a major breakthrough. The process of transfer of power has begun and in the long run there will be no going back.

The discussion in this paper underlines the fact that there is a need for greater focus on the central resources made available to the Panchayats through JRY. The system of responsibility and resource-raising at the state level has as yet not been set up in an organized way and the question of restructuring and reform needs urgent attention. As regards roads, the problem of rural connectivity is still to be solved in some regions, but in others, the quality of the road link is becoming the issue. Resources for the purpose will involve a restructured system of local finance.

The basic minimum need for roads is an accepted norm in India. The situation at present is that in some large states substantial progress lies ahead. In Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab and Rajasthan, less than 40 per cent of villages are connected (table 5). The Annual Plan for 1996/97 contained a long-term policy on the provision of seven basic common services throughout the country in a time-bound manner, including rural roads. An allocation of 24.6 billion rupees for basic common services was made under the heading 'Central Assistance to State Plans'.

For this, a group of Chief Ministers working with the author evolved a strategic approach to the State Plan. This indicated development options by the Planning Commission, leaving details to the state authorities, and the stipulation of much stronger evaluation procedures. The Planning Commission indicated the overall ceilings of additional resources to the state and they, in turn, decided on the phasing of priorities in areas such as drinking water, rural literacy, health programmes and rural roads. The state governments were requested to take similar initiatives towards decentralization at the local level (for details, see Government of India 1997).

This approach, which is included in the approach paper to the Ninth Plan, was described by the present author as follows:

“Economic growth and employment opportunities in themselves may not be sufficient to improve the living conditions of the poor. They need to be accompanied by measures which enhance the quality of life.

Table 5. Total number of villages connected with rural roads in 1995

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>States/UTs</i>	<i>Total no. of villages</i>	<i>Villages connected by 31.03.95</i>	<i>Percentage connected (State)</i>	<i>Balance of villages to be connected</i>	<i>Percentage unconnected (All India)</i>
1.	Andhra Pradesh	27 355	16 174	59.13	11 181	3.66
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	3 257	755	23.18	2 502	0.82
3.	Assam	22 496	15 877	70.58	6 619	2.17
4.	Bihar	67 566	24 016	35.54	443 550	14.25
5.	Goa	398	373	93.72	25	0.01
6.	Gujarat	18 114	16 538	91.30	1 576	0.52
7.	Haryana	6 745	6 707	99.44	38	0.01
8.	Himachal Pradesh	16 807	7 557	44.96	9 250	3.03
9.	Jammu and Kashmir	6 215	3 941	63.41	2 274	0.74
10.	Karnataka	27 028	13 267	49.09	13 761	4.50
11.	Kerala	1 268	1 268	100.00	0	0.00
12.	Madhya Pradesh	70 883	19 756	27.87	51 127	16.73
13.	Maharashtra	36 385	17 424	47.89	18 961	6.20
14.	Manipur	2 037	982	48.21	1 055	0.35
15.	Meghalaya	4 902	2 501	51.02	2 401	0.79
16.	Mizoram	737	643	87.25	94	0.03
17.	Nagaland	1 119	1 034	92.40	85	9.46
18.	Orissa	47 305	18 396	38.89	28 909	9.46
19.	Punjab	12 168	12 150	38.89	28 909	6.93
20.	Rajasthan	33 305	12 125	36.41	21 180	0.04
21.	Sikkim	440	325	73.86	115	2.56
22.	Tamil Nadu	25 299	18 485	70.29	7 813	0.27
23.	Tripura	4 718	3 895	82.56	823	20.34
24.	Uttar Pradesh	112 566	50 376	44.75	62 190	6.50
25.	West Bengal	3 874	18 196	47.79	19 878	
26.	A & N Islands					
27.	Chandigarh					
28.	D & N Haveli					
29.	Daman and Diu					
30.	Delhi					
31.	Lakshdweep					
32.	Pondicharry					
	Union territories	1 110	869	78.29	241	0.08
	All India	589 317	283 631	48.13	305 886	100

Source: Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment.

For concretising this approach, a number of steps have already been taken which provide the initial outlines of the larger initiatives that will be contained in the Ninth Five-year Plan. At a conference of Chief Ministers held in July 1996, it was decided to implement a programme for the achievement of total coverage of seven basic minimum services in a time bound manner. It was agreed to raise the outlays of these programmes by 15 per cent in spite of the stringent fiscal situation. The Ninth Five-year Plan will continue this commitment in real terms through each of the five years. While the objectives of this programme have been decided through the process of mutual consultation, the states have been given full opportunity to decide on the phasing of the target for each specific sector. The achievement of these targets will be jointly monitored by the state and the central governments. This approach is an ideal blend of national commitments with local initiatives.

The method of planning for agriculture related infrastructure, irrigation and water planning, and other infrastructure such as power, railways, communications and information technology and science and technology will be a variant of the methods developed for the basic minimum services programme. Plans will be set up with well defined targets set at the national level in detailed consultation with the states. Policies will be explored in each sector to provide for more investment from the private sector, from cooperatives and voluntary organizations and international private investment. However, the slack in these selected sectors will be taken by public investment. The objectives will be defined nationally but the states and local governments will be given much larger freedom for choice of programmes, phasing of schemes and choice of appropriate instruments of finance”.

The system of greater involvement of Panchayats in rural development was institutionalized in 1989/90 with the launching of JRY where there was a substantial flow of funds to the village level, every village having access to JRY funds, though the amount varies. In addition, the village Panchayats prepare an inventory of assets and give details of the projects taken up by them under JRY. This acts as a social audit. The works to be taken up are decided in the meeting of the Gram Sabha and these are prioritized according to the felt needs of the local people. It is thus possible to take a holistic view of the development needs of the area. This enables the village Panchayat to meet the critical gaps in rural infrastructure and also to generate income via supplementary wage employment to those willing and able to do manual

work. It is hoped that with greater people participation in decision-making, formalized through the institutions of Panchayati Raj, there will be greater transparency in the functioning of these institutions eventually leading to fuller accountability.

As discussed earlier, apart from the basic minimum services programme, JRY would, if properly implemented, give autonomous resources to people's representative institutions.

This paper suggests that some Panchayats and municipal bodies are able to meet a substantial part of their current expenditure from their own revenue sources. Such bodies should become the norm for others and the state finance commissions could provide the background for a devolution scheme that provided for such a desirable outcome. When this happens, the policies should be developed to permit local bodies to go in for "borrowing" to meet their infrastructure reforms. At present, successful borrowing schemes, such as the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation which received a high CRISIL rating, are very few. A financial reform process is required for this purpose so that municipal and panchayat paper is traded in financial markets and India moves towards meeting its large social and economic infrastructure requirements by a strategy in which those communities are helped which decide to organize themselves for this purpose.

Local bodies must have well-defined tax and non-tax bases and autonomy in fixing bases and rates. Their responsibilities in raising revenues have to be clearly defined and these must become a base for public debate and discussion. The costs of irresponsibility must be brought out. The norms of performance can be developed from need, as also from the experience of better performing local bodies. The principles of transfer to the local bodies from the state governments and between the local bodies must be transparent, stable and defined in relation to need and efficiency objectives.

Non-tax user charges are to be emphasized from both the angle of revenue and, more important by from the view of optimal use of scarce resources and environmental and susceptibility criteria. The existing successful experiences need to be documented and replicated.

As local bodies move over to more viable financial fundamentals, their capacity to mobilize resources from borrowings will improve. Local bodies have to demonstrate that they can function effectively

within a hard budget constraint. They can then use a set of instruments to mobilize borrowings for long-term needs. Tax-free bonds, innovative methods of securing collateral for borrowing for community purposes and design of new financial instruments, in an increasingly developed financial market, should be examined both at the technical and policy level. These last set of institutions have to be set up as a part of national fiscal reform. It must, however, be realized that the process of restructuring will be time-consuming. As such, well-defined short term and medium term targets must be defined and accepted, and progress towards them regularly monitored.

CONCLUSIONS

The basic local institutions for participatory planning in India have been set up. However, these institutions ought to have adequate autonomy as units of self-government so as to decide on the local needs and priorities and design and implement the necessary action. The challenge of making this new phase of democratic decentralization successful depends on the commitment of the political leadership, bureaucracy and the people themselves. The state governments have the responsibility of transferring schemes as provided in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution and also of transferring corresponding funds to the Panchayats. Similarly, the staff available for the implementation of schemes related to these subjects should also be placed under the control of the Panchayats. Sufficiently clear and workable regulations have to be framed to streamline the inter-tier relationships and functions of each tier.

The change which has been initiated by the Seventy-third Constitution Amendment needs to be managed and sustained effectively through innovative strategies. Panchayats have been empowered by this Amendment. Access to and effective control over resources is a critical component of this empowerment. The real issues of such access are knowledge and awareness of the needs of the people, legal rights, and availability and accessibility of social and economic resources. These changes in procedures and organizations have as yet not fully taken place as envisaged in the legislation. It also requires restructuring relationships, including looking at gender issues at both the micro and macro level. A culture of equality has to be evolved not only between men and women representatives but also between officials and non-officials manning the decentralized development structure.

The district has been recognized as the basic unit for decentralized planning functions. Operationalizing the concept of district planning requires functional local institutions. The District Planning Committee is the statutory authority for preparing plans for local development area planning. The involvement of the people in the planning process is necessary to take into account their felt needs, to mobilize local resources, to increase the speed of implementation by securing the people's cooperation, to increase the acceptance of the plan and projects and also to bring about a change in the power structure in people's institutions in favour of the poor. Strong leadership and political will are the necessary conditions for facing the challenge of enabling the local self-government institutions to become effective instruments of social and economic development of rural areas.

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TAMBON ADMINISTRATION ORGANIZATION: ARE THE PEOPLE IN THE *DRAMATIS PERSONAE* OR IN THE AUDIENCE?

Chaiyan Rajchagool*

ABSTRACT

The Tambon Administration Organization has been recently founded in rural Thailand as the main organization of local management. It is generally viewed both as a step forward in the realization of a village self-management body as well as a milestone in the decentralization policy. This paper examines the formal and actual operations of the organization regarding the participatory approaches laid down in development planning and strategy. To do so it looks at the organization as a formal working body and as a socio-political construct in the community setting. The introduction and the historical background at the beginning provide a leverage from which the main discussion proceeds. The conclusion is neither conclusive nor prescriptive, but rather in reflection beckoning further reflections on the problems of both the organization and the participatory approach itself.

INTRODUCTION

Before the curtain rises

With modern means of transport and communications, the world has become ‘a global village’. With this comes a global perspective that has in recent years gained considerable and widespread interest in both academic circles and in the popular consciousness. However, the overwhelming majority of the globe’s inhabitants live their lives in a rural setting within the confines of their villages and local communities. The deficiencies or even the lack of access to serviceable means of transport and communications compel us to pay serious attention to the

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local perspective too. To ensure that their living conditions are improved, the development of access to physical infrastructure and related services is, inter alia, a pressing need. Past experiences have shown that the engagement of people in the process is essential. In Thailand, the Tambon Administration Organization (TAO) has recently been re-established to bring about and accommodate the people's participation. The realization of the objectives of TAO naturally depends on the overall political environment, public activism, the management skills of people involved, and many other economic, social, environmental and institutional aspects. However, as far as the organization itself is concerned, two components, namely, the administrative and the financial mechanisms, are of prime importance. The administrative component, as the structure of the operation, provides the necessary institutional infrastructure. But unless the organization has financial sufficiency, it will not be able to function. With these two components in place people's participation has the potential to maximize efforts from communities themselves and to maximize collaborative efforts between them and government agencies.

These considerations provide the rationale behind the recommendation for participatory approaches as stated in the *ESCAP-UNDP Guidelines for Participatory Planning of Rural Infrastructure*. In the context of Thailand the introduction of TAO, perceived and publicized as a decentralization policy, is also seen as an embodiment of participatory approaches. According to official policy, it is a community organization that is a realization of the state commitment to community development. With a view to drawing lessons and sharing experiences, this essay is an attempt to portray TAO in the light of its principles and its practices. To do so it examines the working and work implementation of TAO in conjunction with the practices of a participatory approach.

The idea environment

Before discussing TAO, it is perhaps helpful to look at some key elements from which the advocacy of participatory approaches have sprung. The idea of participation, which has gained the status of a received idea, has manifested itself in different terms depending on the context. Localization as opposed to globalization, the bottom-up as opposed to top-down approaches, decentralization as opposed to centralization, are not only common vocabularies, they sound virtuous

also. TAO obviously has an affinity with these concepts. It was originally conceived as a decentralization policy. Lately it has included by the idea of localization. These two concepts, decentralization and localization, have aided the birth and growth of TAO. We shall touch upon them briefly.

The idea of localization has emerged in relation to globalization. Hence, while we have the idea of 'think local', we also have the global trend which encourages the 'think global' perspective. Both are contesting for predominance on the stage of ideas. The publicity and popularity of globalization has its own merits, but at the same time it could obliterate the idea of 'think local'. Looking around the globe, the problems of localization have not been superseded. On the contrary, in some cases, they have even intensified. On the one hand we have witnessed the incorporation of small units into a bigger unit, be it on political or economic fronts. The European Union and many trade agreements are obvious cases in point. On the other hand we are also confronted with centrifugal forces in many parts of the world. Some have manifested themselves in cultural and social terms, while many others have taken the political form. Secessionism, regionalism, localism are terms that often appear in the mass media. The disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the civil wars (numerous in the past and ongoing on at present) are examples of the extreme kind. Countless cases of a non-violent nature could also be cited. Even, Great Britain, an early nation state, has been experiencing the problem for quite sometime, and 'devolution' is a step in the direction towards a higher degree of regional/local autonomy.

Along the similar vein of localization, the idea and the phenomena of decentralization follow the trend and experiences worldwide. The relationship between the central state and local entities has a great impact on development. It could result in very serious repercussions (if coupled by other conflict dimensions, such as ethnicity, race, language, religion, wealth), such as the break up of a state, armed conflicts, political tension and dysfunction of the state mechanism at the local level. But if the relationship works in a satisfactory way, the performance of the national as well as local administration would be enhanced. Two major methods, at the risk of oversimplification, are (a) at the national level, and (b) at the local level. The policies of federalism, of autonomy and of different forms of self-determination are types of the former, whereas the creation and adjustment of local

organizations within the existing framework of the state structure would fall into the latter type.

The method applied in the local context has been carried out under various banners. Decentralization, in contrast with centralization, is a common policy. The term, either as a matter of reality or desire, signifies a relationship between a locality and its related larger entity, with the emphasis on the locality. The relationship can be with different entities and in various forms. As for TAO, it is a matter of its relationship with the central state and the division of its functions.

The relationship in question is best understood in the context of how the state mechanism is to reach the populace at large. With the emergence of the nation state, the relationship between the state authority and its subjects is one of the most common problems of the state in general and the central state in particular. Or to put the problem in a more problematic form, it is a question of how and in what manner and in what matters the state exercises its power over the inhabitants inside a certain boundary. Is it to treat them in an authoritarian manner or with the recognition of their rights in self-government, or with variations between these two themes? Given the varying degree of state centralization, it can be assumed that the more the state is centralized, the more remote the opportunity of people's participation becomes. With the idea of decentralization in mind, the development of TAO can be illustrated in the light of its history, to which we now turn.

The historical background

With respect to Thailand's experience, the idea of participatory approaches has been conceived under different terms in different contexts. These are, for example, grass-roots democracy, participatory democracy, decentralization, local self-government and people's power advocacy. TAO, among many other experiments, has been founded as a local organization based on people's participation. To have come this far, it has travelled a long journey. In retrospect there are four political milestones that need to be understood in the development process of TAO. The process began (a) at the early stage of state formation around the turn of the century. It was followed by (b) the watershed in 1932 when the absolute monarchy was transformed into a constitutional monarchy. An intense struggle for democracy during the period 1973-1976 (c) marked a significant turning point in popular democratization. The 'Reform' period between 1992 and 1997

(d) eventually gave birth to the present constitution (B.E. 2540¹), which affected the TAO Act (2537).

(a) *The early stage of state formation*

The emerging modern state had to face, inter alia, the problem of the expansion of state power into the population at large. That is to say, how to establish the vertical linkages between the state agencies and the people at the village level? This vertical expansion gave birth to the positions of the *kamnan* and the *phuyaiban*². A *phuyaiban*, being the village chief, was both a traditional position and an official appointment, in fact the latter was based on the former. A *kamnan* was elected or chosen among the *phuyaiban* of a cluster of villagers or a *tambon*. And both were lifetime appointments. This channel between the central authority and its subjects was first initiated in 1892. From the state's point of view this innovation proved successful. The structure was put into law in 1914 under the Local Administration Act (2457), and placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. Since then *tambons* and villages with *kamnan* and *phuyaiban* as their representatives have been incorporated into the modern state structure. Seen as an administrative/political institution, this structure is a village-based device within a legal framework and by that token it can be said that it is the state-sanctioned body at the lowest level.

(b) *The transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy*

When the constitutional monarchy replaced the absolute monarchy in 1932, some democratic reforms were initiated. However, the idea of local self-government was not a high priority on the agenda. It was only after the Second World War that it gradually materialized. The idea was conceived in the name of grass-roots democracy and

¹ Years in the Buddhist Calendar (BE) can be converted to the Gregorian Calendar (AD) by deducting 543 years.

² A *tambon* is a group of *mubans* (5-15), the head of which is the *kamnan*. A *muban* (village or hamlet, averaging 200 households) is supposedly the lowest unit in the state administrative system, the head of which is the *phuyaiban*. These two levels of local authorities, formerly indigenous, have increasingly since 1914 become quasi-state bodies. Over them are the *amphoe* (district, composed of 4-10 *tambons*) whose head is the *nai amphoe*. At the upper scale is the *changwat* (province, ranging from 3 to 20 *amphoes*), the provincial governor sits at the top, but come under the Bangkok centre (the ministries and the cabinet). The *amphoe* and *changwat* administrations are state authorities in the full sense of the term.

decentralization as an administrative principle. The idea subsequently brought TAO into being in 1956. However, it was short-lived and unevenly applied. It was dissolved in 1966 as a measure against the “communist insurgency” particularly in the north-east, the poorest region of the country where the armed struggle by the Communist Party of Thailand was most active. The organization was put out of existence all together during the period following the coup d’état in 1971.

(c) *Popular democratization during the period 1973-1976*

Following the democratic turning point in 1973, the local organization at the *tambon* level – the Tambon Council, the predecessor of TAO – began to receive serious attention in 1975. Under the banner of ‘the funding project towards the rural area’, it was made the recipient of direct budget allocation from the government. Prior to this novel policy, the state budget had always been allotted through the ministries for works in the rural area and elsewhere. Though many shortcomings abounded, all in all the direct funding to the village-based organization proved valuable for rural development. The policy became a standard practice for successive governments. Currently the state subsidy item of the TAO revenue, which is the most important source for around 80 per cent of all TAOs, can be seen as the successor of this policy.

(d) *The ‘Reforms’ of the 1990s*

In 1994 the government promulgated the TAO Act (2537). It came into effect in 1995, and it is the Act which is in force today. However, it was not intended to replace the Local Administration Act (2457), but it runs in parallel with it. In view of its relatively easy birth, it can be explained as a result of popular demand for decentralization in the midst of the enduring atmosphere of political reform. The ultimate outcome of the ‘reform’ was the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (2540) which has a special section of 10 articles on local government. The Constitution is unarguably the democratic and forward-looking in both terms of political and philosophical frameworks. Specified under the transitory provisions of both the Constitution and the TAO Act, there was a grace period (1994-1999), in which the *phuyaiban* and the *kamnan* by virtue of their posts were full members of TAO. After this transition phase, they no longer sat on the boards of TAO. Hence it can be said that the politico-administrative significance of the *phuyaiban* and the *kamnan* as legal entities has been largely undermined. TAO now assumes the

legal status of being a juristic person and it is meant to be the formal self-management organization for the *tambon* and associated villages. In this respect many have regarded the introduction of TAO as an important watershed in the central state/village relationship, a relationship of grass-roots democracy in practice and advanced decentralization.

At least two points can be drawn from these historical steps. First, the existence and the *raison d'être* of TAO are closely related to the democratic environment of national politics. Second, TAO in its present form has gone through a number of metamorphoses³.

In the past the institutions of the *kamnan* and the *phuyaiban* had been formed to act as a 'channel of transmission' from the *amphoe* (district authority) to the villagers. By and large they are charged with implementing policies and directives of state agencies from all ministries, especially the Ministry of Interior. They are the point of contact that officials rely on to have works done in villages. In other words, by law and also by practice, they have been an integral part of the top-down mechanism, whereas TAO was founded as a community-based, self-governing organization based on the principle of people's participation.

Against the background of the participatory approach as a desirable strategy in development, a set of questions about TAO arise. How far is the TAO working method conducive to the participatory approach? Is it a genuine attempt at democracy? Is it an embodiment of democracy in name or in fact? Or is it a state-sponsored/operated body preaching the idea of grass-roots democracy? All these questions are obviously interrelated. Though the issues are complex, the questions are simply put to indicate the lines of inquiry and the areas of investigation rather than to imply answers in a 'yes' or 'no' fashion. To tackle them we need to look at how TAO works in principle as well as in practice. In other words we need to examine TAO from two perspectives: (a) as a formal administrative organization and (b) as a socio-political construct.

³ Additional information to the previous footnote: with the exception of Bangkok Metropolis with its own particular administrative set-up, the rest of Thailand is territorially divided into 75 provinces. The geographical size is 517,000 sq. km., the demographic size 57.5 million. Bangkok alone has registered residents of around 6 million. The medium-size province has an average population of 500,000 and represents the first tier of local administration. The *amphoe* is the second tier, the *tambon* the third.

I. TAO AS A FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION

As with any formally functioning body, the operation of TAO can be viewed comprehensively in the following aspects: (a) structure, (b) finance, (c) functions (powers and duties), (d) operations, and (e) place in the overall administrative structure.

(a) *Structure*

TAO is composed of two elected representatives from each village in a *tambon*. The size of membership therefore depends on the number of villages⁴ within a *tambon*. Modelled on the British system of parliament, the organization is divided into an executive committee (“the cabinet” or “the government”) and the council (or “the parliament”) which assumes the roles assigned to the legislative branch. The council includes all elected members while the executive committee is composed of three members elected out of and by the TAO members. The executive committee is the core of the organization being in charge of the stipulated activities by law and of projects approved by *nai amphoe*. Each TAO has a secretary who is a non-elected permanent official appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Their position in TAO is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand they are officials under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior, hence organizationally under the *nai amphoe* and the provincial governor. On the other hand, they are on the payroll of TAO, but not directly accountable to it. According to the Act they are a secretary in the strict sense of the word, being there to help TAO. But in practice they could turn out to be the executive secretary. For as full-time workers of TAO, they run its offices on a day-to-day basis and are in control of the employees. With their expertise in official procedures, laws and regulations, TAO is dependent on them to a large extent. The executive committee members work only on a part-time basis and the council generally meets only once a month.

⁴ The minimum is 1, the maximum 27. For example a *tambon* in the North, familiar to the present author, has 9 villages. Each village’s population varies from 3,000-4,000 inhabitants, except village no. 9 which has only 700-800. Hence this TAO comprises of 17 members, (village no. 9 has only one member) representing a population of around 17,000. The ratio between the representative to the rank and file is approximately 1:1,000.

(b) *Finance*

TAO is ideally supposed to be self-governing and also financially self-sufficient. To qualify as a TAO, the Tambon Council – the TAO predecessor – must have an annual average income (excluding the state support budget) of 150,000 baht⁵, calculated from the last three consecutive years' revenue and expenditure accounts. The TAO sources of revenue are derived from three main categories:

- (i) Taxes and fees (raised from within the locality):
 - Taxes (municipality, land, building, sign board)
 - Duties (charges, surcharges, fees, fines, licences, permits)
 - Value added tax (VAT), slaughter house licences, gambling licences, special business taxes, liquor taxes, excise taxes, automobile/vehicle registration taxes

- (ii) State support budget:
 - Regular annual budget allocations
 - Special funds earmarked for specific purposes from particular government agencies

- (iii) TAO income:
 - Income from its own properties
 - Income from the provision of infrastructure facilities and services
 - Donations in cash and in kind
 - Supplements/contributions from government agencies and other allocative arrangements
 - Miscellaneous revenue

At present not all these items are collected for TAO, for example, VAT and special business taxes. The state budget allocation to TAOs and the revenue of different TAOs can vary a great deal. Those in

⁵ The exchange rate, as of mid-September 1999, was around 40 baht for 1 dollar.

suburban or prosperous areas are in an advantageous position as they can earn higher incomes than those far from the cities or in the economically destitute areas.

(c) *Functions*

According to the TAO working manual⁶, there are two lines of work. One is as an initiator, the other as an implementer. The latter is to coordinate and to carry out plans and projects designed by higher authorities and government agencies. The former is to carry out eight obligatory functions and four optional items of work. The eight obligatory functions are as follows:

- The construction and maintenance of water and land transport infrastructure
- The management of public cleansing (roads, waterways, walkways and public spaces) and the disposal of waste
- The prevention and eradication of epidemic diseases
- The surveillance of public safety
- The promotion of education, religion and culture
- The promotion of the development of women, children, youth, elderly people and people with disabilities
- The protection and preservation of the environment and natural resources
- Assignments from government agencies

The optional items of work are

- The provision of water for consumption, utilities and agriculture
- The provision and maintenance of electricity, or of light by other means
- The procurement and maintenance of sewage systems
- The procurement and maintenance of meeting places, parks, and sports, leisure and entertainment facilities

⁶ Issued by the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior, unspecified date.

(d) *Operations*

TAO begins by making a plan of work on an annual basis. The next step is to adjust and modify the plan according to the available budget and vice versa. Subsequently it is the implementation of the plan which principally comprises works outside the office. The annual plan is supposed to be an integral part of the five-year plans of the *tambon* and *amphoe*. The *tambon* five-year plan is to be made in conformity with the NESDB⁷ plan, the provincial development plan, the *amphoe* development plan, and the related town planning regulations etc. The *tambon* plan and its corresponding budget, once agreed among the council members, has to be submitted to the *nai amphoe* for approval.

(e) *Place in the overall administrative structure*

From the *tambon* standpoint there are a large number of state agencies working in its “territory”. They range from traditional ones, such as schools, health centres, stations providing agricultural extension services, to modern undertakings, such as telephone, electricity, irrigation, and other infrastructure facilities. Formally speaking these offices and enterprises are entirely independent from TAO. They may inform TAO about their works and projects and they may ask for cooperation, but they are under no obligation to do so.

TAO is not designed for running vital, let alone total, public affairs in its area of jurisdiction. Its place is principally under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. It is stated in the TAO Act and other related regulations that the *nai amphoe* acts as the field representative of the Ministry of Interior. In this capacity his or her roles include the control, supervision and approval of TAO activities. In the official wording, “...the provincial governor and the *nai amphoe* are to direct and oversee the operation of TAO to ensure that it functions within the framework of law and follows the rules laid down by the officialdom.” The duties of the governor and the *nai amphoe* are

⁷ The National Economic and Social Development Board has been responsible for the five-year national social and economic plan since 1961. Under the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1992-1996) the decentralization policy was taken more seriously and emphasized with certain recommendations for the administrative authority at the local levels. Currently Thailand is under the Eighth Plan (1997-2001) in which the bottom-up approach, originally conceived in the last two years of the Fourth Plan and specifically and increasingly elaborated since the Fifth Plan (1982-1986), continues.

specified in the TAO Act (2537) as follows: the *nai amphoe* is (a) to organize and run the TAO election; (b) to receive resignations of TAO members; (c) to ratify/validate the appointment of the president, the deputy president and the secretary; and (d) to approve the annual budget; the governor is (e) to approve TAO activities outside the *tambon* geographical jurisdiction; and (f) other duties are to be specified and assigned to the *nai amphoe* and the governor by the Ministry of Interior and other ministries. Moreover, the governor and the *nai amphoe* can remove a TAO member on behavioural or moral grounds, or if a member fails to perform his or her duty or if he or she has a conflict of interest. In short though TAO is a local organization in its own right, it is subject and accountable to the state bureaucracy, particularly one of its branches, namely, the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior.

Further reflections on TAO as a formal administrative organization

From the above account it is clear that TAO, like any other formal organization, is a bureaucratic body. Its method of working is in principle the same as that of a small-size semi-autonomous government office. It enjoys a self-governing and working mechanism that had been absent in the past. At the same time, however, it is a part of and, to be more precise at the bottom of, the overall machinery of the administrative hierarchy. In other words, it is positioned as an appendage to the core central state agencies and in the line management of the upper administrative units. From this perspective TAO is a continuation within the existing framework of a large state bureaucracy. The past legacy lives on.

TAO has to operate and execute work within the framework of stipulated activities. It is also required to follow the plans and directives of higher authorities. These compulsory duties, which could be directly or indirectly useful to the villages, well reflect the TAO administrative status. On the one hand TAO has a well-defined mandate working on the community's basic needs. From this perspective TAO has a built-in capacity for a wide range of activities. On the other hand its functions regarding the tasks essential to the life of the community are limited. They do not include, health care, education, agricultural extension services, marketing facilities for local outputs, natural resource management etc. Perhaps TAO needs to prove itself to be capable of taking on these potential tasks and probably a certain period of maturation is necessary. Considering the year of its inception was 1994,

and 1995-1998 was a transition period in which the *kamnan* and the *phuyaiban* were weaned from TAO, it is still a young body.

It is common knowledge that the spending of the TAO budget is, more often than not, on construction rather than on education/welfare-oriented projects. One of common explanations is that the villagers are inclined to see development in terms of tangible or rather material results. But this commonplace explanation overlooks the functions of the central state. “Decentralization” needs to be considered in conjunction with the expansion of the state into rural areas. In Chiang Mai as of 1992, for example, agencies of the central state number approximately 194 out of a total of around 256 state organizations (Thanet 1997:344). These numerous organizations, under their respective central commands, have their own prescribed principal tasks to carry out in various localities. Hence the room for TAO to embark on new initiatives is limited, apart from those state functions already in existence. With the exception of the usual works, i.e., road building and pond digging, the possibilities for TAO projects at present are rather restricted.

Looking at the TAO-related actors, the working of TAO involves four categories of people. They are (a) the agencies of the Ministry of Interior above TAO, especially the *nai amphoe* and the governor, (b) the TAO executive committee and the council, (c) the TAO secretary and the office staff, and (d) the villagers. The agencies of the Ministry of Interior, which are not physically present in a *tambon*, have supervisory roles and a judiciary function in cases of conflict. It, so to speak, supplies official forms to be filled and signed, it lays out procedures to be followed, it requires paper work to be submitted etc. It also has the authority, both in the legal as well as in the traditional sense, in intra- and inter-organization conflict management. But conflicts of a larger scale, such as serious disagreements with government projects (for example, irrigation dams and mining licences), are not covered in the Act.

The executive committee and the council’s way of working are analogous to that of the government and the parliament. The secretary and the office staff carry out the work of TAO on a daily basis, like state employees and staff. The villagers are ‘the people’ implicitly and explicitly focused upon as the ultimate point of reference and as beneficiaries. But they are not emphatically regarded as participants, neither in the planning process nor in that of implementation. In other

words their resources, be they physical labour, morale support, ideas or experience, are not really tapped as implementers, let alone as innovators. Notwithstanding this state of affairs the villagers, however, have a clear role as the electorate. The TAO members are of their choice. That is to say they, or rather the majority, have their own representatives in the TAO to work for them. Seen from this angle the system of TAO is that of representative democracy, with a restricted degree of people's participation. Legally speaking and strictly interpreted, TAO is not a participatory type of organization. Nevertheless the villagers have ways and means to "participate" in the activities of TAO, as will be discussed in the second part.

The TAO financial component could well reflect its characteristics. The total budget for all of the 6,397 TAOs (and 568 tambon councils) in the whole country has been 10,000 million baht since its inception in 1995. With a specific means of calculation, based on a set of variables, including population, geographical size, village numbers and TAO's own income, this amount is distributed annually to the TAOs as a state subsidy. Most of the TAOs, which are in categories lower than Class I (whose annual income exceeds 20 million baht) and Class II (less than 12 million baht), received subsidies in the range of 1.3-1.8 million baht. This item of revenue represents a major, and for some still substantial, slice of the cake for these TAOs which make up 97 per cent of all TAOs. Two examples of the revenue in the fiscal year of 2540, one from the north-east and the other the north, would illustrate this point.

Table 1. The revenue of TAO Phralao in Amphoe Phana, Changwat Amnatcharoen, north-eastern region
(baht)

<i>Taxes</i>	<i>Fees</i>	<i>Property income</i>	<i>State support (subsidy)</i>	<i>Total</i>
691 857 (30.6)	194 562 (8.6)	14 227 (0.6)	1 360 000 (60.2)	2 260 646 (100)

Source: Provincial and Village Administration Division, Department of Local Administration.

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of total revenue.

Table 2. The revenue of TAO Nongphung in Amphoe Saraphi, Changwat Chiang Mai, northern region
(baht)

<i>Taxes</i>	<i>Fees</i>	<i>Property income</i>	<i>Mis-cellaneous</i>	<i>Drawing from saving fund</i>	<i>State support (subsidy)</i>	<i>Total</i>
3 347 561 (16.4)	6 510 069 (31.9)	392 160 (1.9)	88 642 (0.4)	8 733 276 (42.7)	1 360 000 (6.7)	20 431 708 (100)

Source: TAO Nongphung Office, Saraphi, Chiang Mai.

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of total revenue.

The north-eastern case is in Class V, whereas the northern one is in Class IV but about to be ranked as Class III. Class V TAO have annual incomes of less than 3 million. Those in Class IV and Class III are in the income brackets of 3-6 and of 6-12 million baht respectively.

As is generally recognized, the budget can both facilitate and hinder the task of implementation. Delay and rigid categorization in budgeting can hamper or even kill needy work projects. It is rather common to hear complaints that a great deal of emphasis in fiscal/budget regulations is given to monitoring, which is often at the expense of facilitating works. In this respect TAO is no exception. The budgeting of TAO is not only connected with a number of plans, but it also requires the approval of the *nai amphoe*. Therefore he has de facto control over the process and, de jure, the final say on the TAO budget allocation. The *nai amphoe* indeed holds a key position in the operation of TAO, though he is not in it.

In addition to the financial aspect the *nai amphoe* and the governor above him have a very crucial role in TAO. As to their powers outlined above, they may or may not execute them, but they are there when the occasions arise. In the area of administration, by means of personnel management, the *nai amphoe's* role is more pronounced. For the TAO secretary, or '*palad*', is under his consideration for promotion and transfer. Viewed from this direction it can be said that he is also indirectly a chief of TAO. In a nutshell the *nai amphoe* (and the governor above) are, for want of a better term, the absentee administrative lords of TAO.

It has been rather a common trait of current studies on TAO to stress one or the other position of the dichotomy: centralization or

decentralization. However, in view of the profile above it is not so straightforward, in either-or terms, to regard or disregard the introduction of TAO as an accomplishment of the decentralization policy with a participatory approach. The meaning of 'decentralization' and its associated issues are fluid and elusive. One's own position and assumption of the meaning of the term, therefore, determines one's evaluation. Perhaps what could make this kind of picture more insightful is to take TAO as an arena in which many forces contest. In the ongoing contest no definite pattern can be rigidified, no final outcome is a foregone conclusion. The next part then is to consider TAO as a socio-political construct.

II. TAO AS SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSTRUCT

The formal pattern of working of TAO from the above description is drawn from what is written in the law. But the words do not always coincide with the deeds. To understand how the organization actually works, it is probably useful to look at how different people with different interests and world outlook interact in their social web of relations. And this can be understood by another term: the field of power relations.

As earlier mentioned, the emergence and expansion of TAO, similar to many other phenomena, are opened to various interpretations. The advocates are much more vocal and outnumber the critics by far. Even those who find TAO poorly run, see its deficiencies in terms of practice rather than of its inherent formation and its formal mode of operation. Studies on TAO have been mainly in the fields of public administration and, to a lesser extent, of politics. The main line of discussion, nevertheless, invariably revolves around the questions of autonomy and of people's participation. It is often claimed that the greater and the more they are, the better TAO would be. Although the merits of these studies are well recognized, there are other understudied socio-political aspects that deserve a complementary analysis.

TAO is not just a semi-state unit working in the state sector. It is a state-sanctioned organization implanted in a cluster of villages. It has come to be a part of the ongoing socio-political relationship in the villages. Hence on account of its role in the interplay with village life, it can be seen as an entity of a socio-political construct. This perspective hopefully can offer an understanding of TAO in a new light.

The head and the tail of the urban-rural relationship

It is universally known that in relation to all provinces Bangkok is the centre of transport and communications, of economy and politics, and of most other activities down to hairstyles and dress fashion. What is less well known is that the majority of the provinces are the mini-Bangkok to their respective *amphoes*. But the logic does not go uniformly further down to the smaller units. There are a variety of characteristics of the relationships between the *amphoes* and their respective *tambons*. An *amphoe*, for example, is not necessarily the mini-Bangkok to its *tambons*. Some *tambons* are in fact more eminent than their *amphoes* in economic and communication terms. For they have made closer linkages to provincial centres, in some cases outside their own provinces, than to their *amphoes*. This paper makes a reference to these striking facts just as a suggestive point. Research on a large scale is required to exhaust all the models and explanatory power. However, here at least two explanations can be singled out. One is predominant, the other adjunct. The predominant determinant is the historical ascendancy of Bangkok-centricism that still prevails over other forces. In some cases it could subsume or even obliterate counter forces. The other adjunctive determinant is the construction of transport routes and networks. The design of road construction has proceeded in such a way that it runs from the seat of the province to the outlying *amphoes*. The picture of six radiating roads from the city of Chiang Mai to the surrounding *amphoes* is a case in point. As mentioned, however, it does not follow that the roads from an *amphoe* will go to the surrounding *tambons* and then to the surrounding villages. National and regional considerations have predominated in the establishment of the road network. The local consideration (amphoe down to village level) is subsumed under the overall design. Moreover relatively easy land communication together with the availability of the means of motorized transport have increasingly minimized the importance of the seat of an *amphoe* as the centre of its *tambons*. As a result the provincial city or the regional centre stands out disproportionately, with Bangkok becoming even more prominent and hegemonic.

A bird's-eye view can also reveal a micro picture. From a *tambon's* perspective the land transport routes have distinctively resulted in social grouping and interaction in two important ways. First, while they bring various villages closer, they also redirect communication within a *tambon*, and hence relationships among villages, to town and

city. In some cases the roads, which have been designed for long-route-traffic purposes, cut across former coherent units. Very often a highway is the line of land contact for a small village with limited means of transport. It also relocates the layout of dwellings into a straight line. A village across the road is not conveniently accessible and related to its neighbour village. This is not to mention the shocking statistics of frequent road accidents.

Second, the uneven development at the national level is also apparent within a *tambon* and among *tambons*. A village's or a *tambon*'s proximity to a main road or to a town centre, to business enterprises and to industrial locations, has incomparably more economic advantages than another village situated in a field. The revenue of TAO varies from the highest of 113 million baht to the lowest of 78,000 baht. Of course the majority are in the poor income bracket. The stratification of TAOs is in many aspects a replica of the national uneven development. It is true that 80 per cent of all 6,397 TAOs are equal, or better said, equally poor. If left to their own devices and capacities, the disparity among TAOs could be aggravated. The wealthy TAOs could progress far ahead and the poor TAOs lag behind to the point that they would no longer be able to fit under the same laws and regulations. Furthermore it is possible that in the long run the local government may be incompatible with the national development. The decentralization could have adverse impacts, if no fair foresight and corresponding measures are taken to redress the issue.

However it does not follow that the *tambon* or village studies should fall into the centre-periphery mould (Long-1996:50). And, as Long also suggested, the autonomy and boundedness of social and cultural units is better conceptualized as a matter of degree rather than as a set of sharply delineated forms. The point really is that a large number of *tambons* have a strong tendency to orientate towards the urban forces. Hence their images of being independent and self-contained communities are increasingly blurred. These loose characteristics consequently have unfavourable impacts on mobilizing people to participatory actions.

As described above, the TAO organizational structure, separated into executive and legislative branches, makes the TAO working method similar to the national political manner. Hence it adopts the confrontational style of working between the ruling party vis-à-vis the opposition. Hardly any week goes by in the national and local

newspapers without news of murders which involve TAO members in one way or another. This is not to mention prevalent conflicts that have not manifested themselves in violent outbursts. Periodic and regular elections will increasingly politicize the villagers. The elected from a particular village are expected to serve their respective village first. Therefore the wider picture of the *tambon* is often put aside.

In the last TAO election on 18 July 1999, in a *tambon* in the north, there were over 50 candidates contesting for 16 seats from 8 villages. It is an unprecedented figure. The election campaign certainly looked quite professional. Banners, posters, billboards, door-to-door visits etc. had never been seen before for the local elections. The intensity of competitiveness in the election also follows the national pattern, with antagonism among candidates, both within and between villages. This is not to say that conflicts of various kinds are alien to the village life. But the election season and mood could trigger new conflicts and aggravate old wounds. Confrontations in a face-to-face environment often make the outcome much more frightening than those conflicts at the national level. Generally the intra- and inter-village relationships are very multidimensional, “friends, followers and factions” are in flux. But the formal form of TAO solidifies and rigidifies them. The formation of alliances brings a negative sense to village politics. Certain intra-village factions form vertical as well as horizontal alliances with other villages and the township, up to the provincial level. At present it is a little too soon to say that national politics have bearings on politics at the local level. However, there are strong signs that political parties will be trying to organize in localities. If so the politics of TAO will be deepened.

The disintegrating forces are not from political factors alone. Socio-economic causes play an important part too. TAO, as a spatial organization, has a defined “territorial” boundary. But it is not necessarily a self-contained socio-political entity. That is to say, a *tambon* is not a community in the strict sense of the term by which social interaction is regular and frequent, especially when a village, located within the centripetal urban forces, has turned into, as it is aptly dubbed, a dormitory. Villagers leave for work in town in the morning and return to the village in the evening only to rest. Activities – be they economic, social or cultural – are concentrated in town. A village, with easy access to the urban life, has lost much life of its own. The disintegrating forces of a *tambon* and a village, in short, have come

about from several forces and the political dimension could worsen the situation.

The people as subjects

While the creation of the *kamnan* and the *phuyaiban*, as we have seen, was based on the existing indigenous structure, the TAO has been brought into the village socio-political environment based on new concepts. They are the principles underlying the foundation of the municipal government as well as the central government. TAO is on unfamiliar ground a departure from the traditional way of working. As with any organization, TAO has common characteristics that are a combination of adversarial politics and cordial cooperation. However, with TAO the adversarial politics tend to be more pronounced. Adversarial politics do go hand in hand with an electoral process that is regarded as essentially democratic. The indigenous form of organization has fewer antagonistic elements and more cordial qualities. This is, for the most part, linked with the natural process of recruitment over time and with the sanction of the community. TAO, on the other hand, is premised less on moral than legal underpinning.

The proponents of TAO are well aware of the fact that it brings conflict-ridden interactions among the members, among villages and among villagers. They argue that for TAO to function well, this “institutional infrastructure” needs to be coupled with “an understanding of the rules”, “civic minded outlook”, “democratic spirit-competitiveness” etc. That is to say an organization with written codes laid down by law should not strictly follow its diagrammatic chart. It has to work within a certain cultural code. The rules need to be understood in the broad sense of the term. They are both written and unwritten, and together they are the juridical-cultural mode of working. As far as the general juridical rules are concerned, there is little room to doubt that the villagers are unfamiliar with them. In the age of easily accessible media, their acquaintance with the ideas and practices of institutional politics at the national level, the duties of the ruling party and the opposition could not be underestimated. But those make only a part of the whole rules. The villagers have their own cultural code, hence their own rules. As a matter of course they want them to meet their requirements. As previously pointed out, being innovative (from tactful to manipulative) they try to modify TAO to meet their own terms. The modification can be in both the official and unofficial arena. The former is in the matter of legal interpretation, the latter is politics outside the office.

The people's interpretation of the law deserves a place in the law school curriculum. According to fiscal regulations, the TAO budget is not to be given to any government unit. Two exceptions are, however, (a) when the amount is lower than 10,000 baht, or (b) when it is given with the governor's permission. In a *tambon* in the north certain local schools in 1997 requested funding from TAO for children's sports activities and playgrounds. The TAO executive and council members were unanimously in favour of the projects. But the budget for each was between 50,000 to 70,000 baht. A school is by definition an official unit of government, hence under the rules of TAO it is not entitled to TAO budgetary support. The governor's approval was also unlikely for he would argue that the money should come from the Ministry of Education, not from the Ministry of Interior. All, except the direct beneficiaries of the projects, knew well that a positive answer from the education authorities either in Bangkok or in the province was highly improbable. TAO then decided that the projects were to be carried out in the name of the TAO's own projects. A sign board brightly painted with fancy characters, "A TAO project" displayed by the playground would solve all the legal problems.

Another example reveals how TAO can be used as 'the weapon of the weak'. A licence application for a cooking gas filling station received the green light from the governor. Its location was designed to be in a *tambon*, hence under TAO jurisdiction. The prospective gas entrepreneur consequently needed approval from TAO for the station building. The green light from the higher authority was only to allow the operation of gas filling. But it needed to go through the next set of traffic lights. TAO found it a dangerous business so they did not feel comfortable with the request. In the eyes of the businessman, the regulations were troublesome. But from the TAO viewpoint the provincial boss's decision could not enjoy the status of the Gospel.

The politics outside the office, for the people, seem to be a natural course of events. The formal meetings of TAO are to be held at its office. It is the place, according to the written rules, where decisions are made and become legally binding. But many matters, particularly serious ones, are often discussed and agreed upon outside official meeting places. Anywhere, whisky corners, village fairs, ceremonial gatherings etc. can be meeting places where ideas are exchanged and consensus sought. Furthermore the office hours are not only the working time of the TAO but also of every other working person. Naturally the

villagers prefer to “talk” at their leisure. The ideas of quorum, review, revision, acceptance of meeting minutes, the inflexibility of minute records, and of all other bureaucratic procedures, for them are unnecessarily troublesome. The bureaucratic methods exclude people’s participation, hence they are occasionally disregarded. A legally binding decision is regarded as less important than community preferences. It sometimes even happens that an official decision is cancelled or reversed by the directly affected communities. A project, already legally procured, by an unscrupulous contractor was forced to a halt. It was continued only after a solemn promise to the public was made to carry out the project in good faith.

Formal business enterprises, i.e., registered companies, have more advantages over the villagers-run businesses. Bearing the legal status of being a juristic person, TAO’s business dealings (for example, work contracts, purchases) need to be exclusively based on formal channels. The practice is undoubtedly a matter of course in the eyes of auditors and of donors. But it may not be conducive to people’s employment and unregistered village enterprises. This point is a small hurdle to local participation in TAO activities. And since TAOs have money to spend, the business people in town like to plant contacts within villages. Some villagers have turned out to act like brokers between the business enterprises and TAO. And some among them, under the sponsorship of town entrepreneurs and contractors, became candidates for TAO membership. There are no figures as yet to support the known incidence that brokers and even villagers-turned contractors/businessmen have been elected to TAO. It is likely, akin to the type of relationship at the national level, that the relationship between TAO and the town business, rather than between the TAO and the villagers, would increasingly form closer ties.

The electoral politics and the representational mode of working are often not conducive to the principle of people’s participation. The people become onlookers, not participants in the TAO-village affairs. The elected, by virtue of being salaried personnel are to carry the work burden, not the electorate. This limitation of the TAO framework could be redressed, to a certain extent, by the people. The elected representatives to TAO are not necessarily strong leaders, nor are they people with great vision, or even highly revered individuals. Many of them are, insofar as studies reveal, generous hardworking people who could be influenced by others. In order that some forceful speakers can

assume the critical roles of “an extra-parliamentary group”, they are deliberately kept off the TAO board.

Some working characteristics of TAO can be revealed through a case of a man’s death. The funeral rite of a man, a member on the TAO board, who died of AIDS could have passed as an usual case. For health statisticians and many of those who like to preach from the high moral ground, he was probably just another AIDS victim who eventually perished. At first the explanation attributing his death to his membership of TAO was anything but enlightening. It took a great while till a sensible, or at least plausible, reason surfaced. But his case is not just one of that kind. To cut his humble and uneventful biography short, it could be summarized in a long unpoetic epitaph. He followed the path of a typically good man of the village, away from vices of all kinds. Being a well-respected family man earned him elected membership of TAO. As a TAO member he was more or less obliged to go along with his colleagues participating in the usual outside working hour activities, i.e., parties, late dinners, whisky gatherings, with contractors and people from the district office. Being often away from the control and comfort of his family, and subject to the lure of the nightlife, he fell. His may or may not be a typical case, if there could be any. The point being that the actual method and style of working of TAO has a characteristic of its own unlike an official office in town.

As most of the TAO secretary spends his working hours in the localities, he could be befriended and won over to the villagers’ side. It is true that according to the law his legal bosses have the power of sanction and of promotion. And strictly speaking, he is not accountable to the villagers. But being sympathetic to the people is sometimes more rewarding than always siding with the bosses who have less contact with him than the villagers. According to the official architects, TAO is designed to be a subtle form of state control. A careful reading of the concerned state documents indicates the intention of officialdom as such. But the reality of TAO is not necessarily a replica of the creator’s intention. The villagers have their own interpretations and reactions to what was put in their villages, hence TAO has been subject to the villagers using the forces at their disposal.

TAO, therefore, can be seen as an arena where the contending forces of the state and non-state are at play. Seen in this light TAO is rather amorphous. It is a forum of different forces and cultures interacting to reign, to hold on, and eventually to compromise.

Decentralization is not in the realm of the state and the law alone, it is also up to the people themselves. That is to say the contending forces and cultures in TAO are embedded to act on one another. Perhaps this is too broad a point for both the supporters as well as the critics of TAO. And as a general policy, it is easier said than done. A statement of commitment and concern echoes our anxieties too. "How to establish conditions that will enable people to participate voluntarily, without being forced to or without thinking only about the money they will get, and still obey orders and follow rules they do not like themselves, is a salient dilemma for organization theories and proponents of civil society alike" (Ahrne 1998:93).

Ringing down the curtain

At the early phase of state formation, the central state had made direct contact with the general populace at the *amphoe* level. At that point in time it was the lowest level the state could reach. Below that there was rule by proxy via the institutions of the *kamnan* and the *phuyaiban*. They were therefore quasi-state functionaries substituting for full-time state employees that were positioned hierarchically from the ministerial top in Bangkok down to the countryside to the *amphoe* level. The tasks of all ministries, which had no officers of their own at the local level, were to be executed through the *kamnan* and *phuyaiban*, or at least with them as "liaison officers". In the eyes of the state, the *kamnan* and *phuyaiban* were and have been until now the appendages of the state machinery.

Over the last hundred years, the state has grown quite considerably and is able to reach further down to the *tambon*, if not the village level. From this perspective TAO can be understood as an instrument of administration pushed down an extra rung. This point is very evident by the fact that at the beginning the TAO's existence, the *kamnan* was the head whose immediate chief was the *nai amphoe*. At present the *nai amphoe* is only, strictly speaking, the boss of the secretary of TAO. But from the administrative viewpoint, TAO can be very much at the mercy of the *amphoe* and of the provincial administration and, ultimately, of the central government authorities. In this light TAO is well integrated into the existing overall state bureaucracy. However, unlike the administration at the *amphoe* level whose top authority rests with the *nai amphoe*, the TAO is designed as a collective body. Compared with the *amphoe* administration, it is closer to the people.

Compared with the institutions of the *kamnan* and the *phuyaiban*, it is an organization in its own right. Relatively speaking, therefore, it opens a wider gate for gratification and participation. As an organization it has a planning function. It can materialize its own wishes and designs. However, due to the overriding effects of the more dominant plans and ready-made rural projects of ministries from Bangkok, its room to manoeuvre is rather restricted. The vision that projects and programme should be conceived and planned by people themselves can only be narrowly translated.

The other restrictive factor, which is even more daunting, is financial. Only a few TAOs, the Class I and II which comprise 1.16 per cent and 1.22 per cent of the total number, are financially independent and strong. The overwhelming majority are in Class V (with annual incomes lower than 3 million baht) making up 81.3 per cent (5,788 TAOs). In other words, they do not carry the financial edge to transform very much into reality. Though specified in the Act, at present some income items, particularly VAT, are not yet transferred to TAO. The central government has not found it timely to allocate certain sources of income to TAO. Most likely in the foreseeable future the financial independence and strength will be extremely slow in coming. If greater meaningful participation is also dependent on a financial basis, full active involvement from the rank and file is somehow a remote reality.

The vision of effective participation has spelled out the essential prerequisites as ‘empowerment’ and ‘enfranchisement’. The former includes appropriate administrative and financial mechanisms, the latter open and fair political systems. Measured against this vision, it seems as if TAO has a long way to go. Sharing the nature of visionary criteria, the participatory approaches are, as it were, the goals inspiring us forward. But the concept of participation itself cannot be taken for granted.

It is extremely rare to find any country or organization with a popular mandate that does not claim in some way and some how to have the people’s participation. Perhaps it can be analogous to “democracy” which is universally professed, even by countries whose practices have very little in common with what is understood by the term. The term “people’s participation” itself is relatively new both in the lexicon of social sciences and in the popular usage, but the idea of it in the discourse of socio-political practices has a long tradition.

Wonderful as it may sound, certain prominent thinkers, classical and temporary alike, have every now and again called it into question.

Major concerns are from the questions: how to participate and how much. Classical scholars such as Max Weber, a foremost German thinker (1864-1920), did not find participatory democracy tenable for large societies. He and a large number of contemporary academics did not subscribe to idea of participatory approaches on many grounds. They ranged from the indisputably obvious facts such as the enormous size of the population, to more subtle issues such as the crucial roles of leadership with vision, and expertise, not to mention the bureaucracy which was bound to enter into the management of large-scale complex affairs. Their points of reference, however, were made from large-scale societies. The question then is, “does it follow that participatory approaches are only viable for small-scale societies and organizations?” With local organizations such as TAO in mind, there seem to be a set of questions worthy of consideration for participatory approaches:

(a) As indicated, the check and balance system of government and the assumption of decision-making by democratic means have brought out unintended and undesirable consequences of conflicts. How then are clashes to be minimized? Could TAO as an organization have a built-in mechanism to minimize the negative impacts of participation?

(b) The ratio between the representative and the populace is, in one example shown above, around 1:1,000. It is quite feasible to have an election process in which voters have the necessary knowledge of each candidate so that they can elect people of their choice to TAO. This aspect of participation, to a large extent, can be obtained. However, what should be an appropriate size for people’s involvement in the decision-making process and in work implementation?

(c) As specified in the law the TAO working method is not geared towards participation. However, to bring about people’s participation, the Department of Community Development under the Ministry of Interior has made attempts to plant participatory spirits among the TAO members and the villagers by means of training and working. Certain methods such as A-I-C (Appreciation-Influence-Control) in recent years have become familiar among trainers and trainees. How far the goal can be achieved and for how long remains to be seen.

(d) Against the real as well as imaginary needs, the budgetary cake for the TAO will be too small. And a *tambon* is an administrative entity not a community. People do not identify themselves so much with the *tambon* as with their villages. A village is a primordial entity, whereas the clustering of villages that the state designated could be artificial. Each village tends to consider its own agenda to be on the top of the list of priorities. The greater the size of the village and the greater the participation from the villagers, the larger the slice is. This way of acquisition, which is also akin to the underlying foundation of democracy itself, favours the stronger. It raises concerns not only of altruistic consideration for the *tambon* as a whole, or for that matter even for the larger units, but also of efficiency and competence in decision-making principles and processes.

(e) The participatory principle is premised on the belief that people have the right as well as inclination to take part in public affairs. From accounts of village or anthropological studies, people's participation in rituals and public affairs occur on an occasional basis, whereas on a daily basis people in their respective households generally mind their own concerns first and foremost. Even the TAO members find the management of the TAO cumbersome and have to 'sacrifice' their time and resources. Though they receive a monthly payment as compensation (1,500 baht for a council member, 3,000 baht for a member of the executive committee), they prefer to spend time on their more financially rewarding activities. Hence members' late attendance and absence from TAO meetings are often found recorded in TAO minutes. The rank and file villagers very much regard TAO work the work of their elected representatives. For them it is much preferable to have a system that could make their representatives do their jobs properly. To call for full participation of the people in "conceiving, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating" all of the TAO programmes and projects seems like a wishful dream out of touch with reality. The question then is "is people's participation in development a sustainable form of development?"

(f) Two major issues, originally brought up by Weber and continually discussed ever since, are the importance of bureaucracy and expertise. As described above the bureaucratic characteristics of TAO, which are clearly evident, are strongly in the way of people's participation. The issue of expertise also demands serious consideration if the participatory approaches are actually to take root. In this

technology and information age, technical know-how can be decisive. Works in local areas, though seemingly simple, are no exception. It can be argued that people themselves are experts. This valid statement, however, is not always universal, even in the local context. Well/pond digging, water purification, certain diseases prevention, road construction, bio-gas production, the application of appropriate technology are some of the areas in which knowledge might often not be available locally. The principle of full participation can lead to its logical consequences that experts are marginalized or even ignored. The approach would then be 'bending the stick too far in the other direction'. This is not to advocate the central role of the experts. That would be going back to square one again. The experts are necessary and should be of assistance. They should have the advisory roles and not the roles of the army general. This concern brings up a further important point, namely, the assumption underpinning the implication of the term 'people's participation'. The term originated, inter alia, in response to the monopoly of development work by the state or by the experts. The people were seen as unenlightened and rendered passive. The term was coined to focus on the people as active participants. But being 'participant' implies the status of, at best, being a joiner or, at worst, being a helper. The core actors are still elsewhere. In relation to the roles of experts, should it not be 'expert participation' in place of 'people participation'. For admirable as the latter may sound, it can backfire.

All in all, considering a monolithic state such as Thailand, with all aspects of state power, be it legislative, executive, or judicial concentrated in the capital, Bangkok, the promotion of participatory approaches in a decentralized framework is in itself a novel step. Further steps are necessary in due course to narrow the gap between the noble objectives and the realities of central domination. To reiterate some main points: from section I (part a) it can be seen that the Ministry of Interior can pave the way as well as put up hurdles to TAO. From the administrative viewpoint, TAO can be very much at the mercy of the *amphoe* and provincial administration and ultimately of the central government authorities. In the acting of TAO plays the bureaucrats both at the national and local level are invisible directors. Some of the villagers are elected as players. As for the rank and file, they are among the audiences, active or passive as each case may be. Section II, however, argued that the actors, particularly the creative or manipulative ones, might not act out their roles exactly according to the plot. Although the overall plot, as a metaphor for the legal framework, must

be conformed to, the details can be up to the actors' innovation. Moreover the roles and lines could be played and said in an impromptu fashion. But for a full participation, not just partial, perhaps a different play should be written. With all that said, however, the title of the paper asks whether the place of the people should be in the spotlights or in the auditorium. Perhaps the title might be differently phrased. Do the people really want to be playing on the stage or would they prefer to be in their theatre seats, provided that the actors are worthy of the audiences' expectations?

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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MOUNTAIN ROADS: PROMOTION OF THE “GREEN ROAD” APPROACH IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Considering the serious shortcomings of the conventional techniques, a new approach for the construction of rural roads has been developed in Nepal. This new “green road” approach is environment friendly, participatory in nature, and uses labour based technologies. The approach is based on the recognition that there are many stakeholders in the promotion of rural roads. Each of them is in a position to contribute to road construction in a unique way. While government and parastatals as well as people’s organizations may contribute in terms of planning, designing, financing, and management of the road, people at large would contribute through the sharing of indigenous knowledge in terms of local geology as well as by participation in the actual construction activities. Road construction is not seen as a one-time wage earning opportunity but also as a starting ground for self-help activities. The actual construction technique follows the philosophy of minimum disruption to existing vegetative cover and re-utilization of the excavated materials as construction material. Decentralized implementation, employment of local people, local ownership of the road and maintenance obligations, all contribute to the promotion of local capacity-building and self-help efforts. The economics of green road construction is highly favourable in terms of employment generation and utilization of local resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a mountainous country with an estimated population of 22 million people in 1999, and a total area of 147,000 square kilometres. The mountains are generally rugged and the land feature rises as it goes towards the north to the main Himalayan range. Physiographically the country can be classified into three broad belts. Ranging between 4,880 to 8,848 metres above sea level, are mountains with 35 per cent of the land area and about 7 per cent of the population. Hills between the altitude of 610 to 4,880 metres above sea level have 42 per cent of the land area and 46 per cent of the population. The “Tarai” Gangetic plains with 23 per cent of the land area accommodate 46 per cent of the total population of the country. There is a great diversity in climate, vegetation, farming practices, culture and religion, and the living habits of its people. Up to about 35 years ago forests covered almost 46 per cent of the country but this has declined to about 30 per cent in recent times. The ever-increasing population and the resulting demand for agricultural land is one of the major reasons for forest clearing. The decline of forest cover has serious environmental implications in the mountains and the hills. The rising incidence of land slides in the hills and mountains and floods in the low lying areas are generally associated with the decline in the forest cover.

The population is growing at a rapid rate of about 2.3 per cent a year at present. The dominant trend during the last few decades is that of rapid urbanization as well as migration towards the southern plains. The general level of development measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is less than US\$ 250, which is one of the lowest in the world. The real GDP grew at a rate of less than 3.5 per cent a year during the past 10 years (CBS 1999). The incidence of poverty is extensive. Depending upon different methods used in estimation, the number of people below the poverty line ranges from about 42 per cent to more than 70 per cent of the total population (Kievelitz and others 1998). The incidence of poverty is higher in the rural areas.

Nepal has 13,400 kilometres of roads. Of these 4,186 are black topped, 3,528 are gravelled and 5,686 are fair weather roads. The road network still does not connect the headquarters of 18 out of 75 districts of the country. The country has a road density of roughly 9 kilometres per 100 square kilometres. Poor accessibility not only restricts the movement of people and goods but also of ideas and technologies. This is realized at the policy level as well and there is now emphasis on the

construction of agricultural roads, particularly in the hills and the mountains. The Agriculture Perspective Plan, 1995, estimated that about 6,200 kilometres of rural road need to be constructed within the next 20 years to provide impetus for agriculture led growth (APPROSC and JMA 1995). Of these 1,950 kilometres is to be in the hills and 850 kilometres in the mountains. The Plan estimated that an investment to the tune of US\$ 251 million is required to construct these roads. Given the current level of investment in rural roads, this figure represents a quantum jump.

I. CONSTRUCTING ROADS IN THE MOUNTAINS

The construction of roads in the mountains is a difficult and costly task. The cost is not only financial but also environmental. Building roads in a conventional manner with the use of heavy equipment leads to severe environmental degradation that takes decades for re-stabilization. The Himalayan environment is extremely hostile to road building (Ramsay 1986). This is because of intensive fractures of rock masses, thrust, faults and a number of major discontinuities. The common resulting effects are landslides and slope failures across the whole Himalayan range (Kanungo and others 1993). Additional human activities in the fragile mountain region further degrades the whole ecosystem.

The mass movement and debris flow is another important consideration. An enormous amount of debris flow was observed in the Indian Himalayan highways. This was caused by unsatisfactory road alignment and poor design (Ives and Messerli 1990). It was estimated that in the Indian Himalayas each kilometre of road required the removal of 40,000 to 80,000 cubic metres of debris (Validya 1985, 1987). Similarly, the instability of the road slope after construction produced 550 cubic metres per kilometre of debris a year. Slope instability should be widely recognized as an ever-present danger. Interference on the unstable slope could create problems such as landslides, slips, slumps, mudflows and rockfalls.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, road construction and other development activities can easily create serious environmental hazards. The design of mountain roads is thus a costly and complex task. Geotechnical and hydrological investigations are required before road alignment is decided. These are expensive activities that require skilled manpower. There are instances of massive expenses incurred in

road rehabilitation due to a poor understanding of geomorphology prior to the construction of roads (Deoja 1991). Mountain road failures in Nepal from 1979 to 1993 are estimated to have resulted in a loss of more than 2.5 billion Nepalese rupees (Deoja 1993).

The time taken to complete mountain roads is also fairly long. It is estimated that in Nepal construction of 50 to 60 kilometres of hill/mountain road takes six to eight years. The cost of road construction by the Department of Roads (1998) is estimated to be between 5 million to 8 million rupees per kilometre. If such costly roads have to be rehabilitated again because of slope failures or mass movements then for poor countries such as Nepal having a network of roads in the mountains and the hills becomes only a distant dream. While there is indeed a need to take all precautionary measures from the very inception of a plan, there is also a need to take an alternative approach to road construction in such an environment. The alternative approach should be based on the principle of minimum damage to the environment, should utilize labour based technology and be affordable. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) have supported rural road construction in Nepal during the last decade and a half that embodies these principles. Many useful lessons have been learned in this process. These lessons, which will be discussed in the following sections, need to be incorporated in assessing an appropriate approach to road construction in Nepal.

II. SEARCH FOR AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

The search for an alternative approach to road construction in Nepal began with the realization that the traditional approach was too skill and cost intensive. The traditional technology relied heavily on machines doing most of the work. This required heavy investment in machinery while most of the people to be served by the road remained idle for want of work. The extensiveness of rural poverty further implied that the technology which was not based on the heavy use of labour was unlikely to provide any income and employment opportunities to those who were in most need of it. Further, given the level of economic activity and volume of transaction in the rural areas, costly structural works were not justified. Therefore, the challenge was to identify a road construction approach that was less costly, labour based, and did not contribute to environmental degradation. A first step toward a new

approach was made in 1985, in Palpa district, under the support of SDC and GTZ, when a local road improvement programme was included as a part of a rural development programme. An important and far-reaching decision was made to look at road construction activities as a part of rural development activity with a set of goals to achieve. Prior to this shift, road construction was always seen in isolation even though the purported objective of road construction was to promote development. The new approach recognized the following:

- The road construction should contribute to poverty alleviation
- The road should provide income and employment opportunities to the rural people
- The road should not cause any damage to the environment

Over a period of time more experience was gained regarding local road building in Dhading, Gorkha and Lamjung under GTZ support. These experiences were in the areas of community participation, financing, technical support, management and provision for the operation and maintenance of the completed road. All of these taken together formed a new road construction and management approach that was termed the “Green Road Concept”. A green road is one which is environmentally sound, built using participatory labour based methods, affordable (i.e., low-cost), and technically appropriate. Its goal is to conserve the delicate mountain ecology and in particular protect and further strengthen vegetation as means to prevent excessive soil erosion. As green road construction is labour-based, the local rural population draws direct short-term benefits from the approach through off-farm employment generation. In the mid-term, the improved motorable access to remote areas provides better public and private services as well as reduces the transport costs, which stimulates the rural economy significantly and creates new income-generating opportunities (GTZ and SDC 1999). Thus, while the road/trails are the physical output, the capacity-building of local organizations, promotion of community organizations, promotion of the self-help potential of rural people and enhancement of the skills of the local population are other very important outputs. The green road concept, therefore, goes beyond the creation of infrastructure and encompasses the very fundamentals of the GTZ strategy of support to rural development in Nepal which promotes the organization of the poor, the capacity-building of local

organizations and the promotion of alternative income-generating opportunities.

III. DECENTRALIZED PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE GREEN ROAD

The construction of rural roads using the green road concept requires some sequential activities and planning steps. The first and foremost is the preparation of a district transport master plan. This is an important activity that needs to be taken up in order to prioritize the demand for rural roads. In fixing the priority two main aspects are to be considered. First, the rural road has to be in the overall context of national and district development plans. This would ensure that the infrastructure development does not go in an independent direction and investment made on it will not be wasted for want of complementary investments. Roads alone will not bring in all the expected benefits if complementary investments that exploit the comparative advantage of the area opened by the road do not take place. Second, the master plan has to be endorsed by the District Development Committee which means of the district development authorities must be willing to share responsibilities for the road construction. Since a district development committee plan is required to be endorsed by its District Assembly, it implies acceptance of the road as a district priority by the representatives of the Village Development Committees although the road alignment may not pass through all of their villages. Since, in the Nepalese context, having a road in a village is almost a universal need, the agreement on a district transport master plan not only removes potential friction within the district polity but also ensures continuity of funding for a number of years in the future. Four key actors are involved in the process of preparing a master plan. First, the District Road Coordination Committee, the legislative body of the District Development Committee composed of district development committee executives and representatives of political parties, has the final decision making power with regard to the master plan. Second, an executive body of the District Development Committee composed of representatives of different line agency officials of the central government and the civil servants within the District Development Committee is assigned the responsibility of planning different alternatives to be provided to the District Road Coordination Committee. This executive body has an advisory role. Third, a judicial body of the District Development Committee is charged

with the responsibility of lawful planning and implementation and resolution of conflicts when the situation demands. They could ask support from the district administration if it is so required. Conflict resolution is done out of the judicial process in a court of law. Fourth, the District Road Transport Unit is the implementation unit composed of district development committee engineer, overseers, and sub-overseers. They carry out the preparation of plans. Thus, the preparation of the district transport master plan is a participatory process that leads to consensus in the end.

The participation of the community at each stage is fundamental to the green road approach. The community participates in different forms. At a macro level the community participation is ensured through consultative meetings during the preparation of road/trail alignment. The discussion at the District Assembly is another form of community participation as this body is composed of representatives at the district and village levels. The preparation of a master plan follows a participatory process. Once the master plan is formalized then the next level of participatory consultation begins at the micro level or at village development committee levels. The role of different actors and interest groups are formalized at this level. Since the green road concept does not (at least in theory) provide for the use of contractors, the first step is to socially mobilize people to do the construction of the road. This is usually done through a non-governmental organization (NGO). The NGO follows an approach of self-help promotion in mobilizing people. This means creating a formalized community-based organization that promotes self-help activities such as group based savings and credit operations, promotion of non-traditional farming practices, promotion of off-farm income opportunities, awareness creation about ostentatious consumption practices and encouragement to curtail them, and promotion of healthy community living practices.

Road management committees of different hierarchical level (main committee, subcommittees) comprising representative members of Village Development Committees, coordination committees when necessary, and road user committees composed of user representatives are formed. These committees formulate management policy and assign responsibilities to the different groups. The formation of these committees and the assignment of responsibilities to different grass-roots organizations are done in recognition of the fact that different stakeholders have different vested interests in seeing that the road is

constructed as planned and desired. Therefore, these committees not only facilitate construction but also perform a check and balance function. The Village Development Committees also share some of the financial costs of road construction. The users also share part of the cost either through foregoing a percentage of their wage (for those engaged as labour, it is a direct contribution) or through the paying of road users charges (indirect contribution). The land for the road is usually provided free of cost. But if there are problems it is taken care of by local committees themselves. As the increased access leads to an appreciation in the land prices usually people are not reluctant to provide land for road construction.

Once the planning and management steps are agreed upon then a broader community involvement and participation are sought for the actual construction of the road. The people willing to work as labourers are organized into groups through the partner NGO involved in social mobilization. These groups could be male or female or mixed. But children are not allowed as road workers. These labour groups are given flexible working hours. This is done in order to ensure that the labour time for road construction does not compete with that for agriculture. Payment is according to the volume of work done by each labour group. Another important point to note here is that this approach to a large extent automatically targets the poor. Community participation is also crucial in the maintenance of the green road. To begin with, the green roads are constructed in a manner that minimizes maintenance needs. However, minimum maintenance is always necessary. The responsibility of maintenance in most cases falls with the user committees. Since these committees are composed of local people they mobilize communities for maintenance work. Basically two approaches are used in mobilization. The routine maintenance is done through paid labour groups led by a local supervisor. When a road reopens after the monsoon, paid groups as well as voluntary labour is used to maintain the road. Voluntary labour is sought from the local populace.

The construction of green road requires support in two major areas: technical and social mobilization. Box 1 lists the type of activities required under each support. Not all of this support needs to be provided externally. The district technical team or the NGO partner in social mobilization would be doing most of the activities listed on their own.

Box 1. Type of technical and social mobilization support required

<i>Technical support</i>	<i>Social mobilization support</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation of a district transport master plan <input type="checkbox"/> Road alignment selection <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying, design and report preparation <input type="checkbox"/> Training materials <input type="checkbox"/> Input to district decision-making <input type="checkbox"/> Training to <i>Naikes</i> (foreman), labour groups, masons, supervisors, user committee members etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Arranging local supply and services <input type="checkbox"/> Construction supervision <input type="checkbox"/> Site office and store management <input type="checkbox"/> Work measurement, valuation and certification for labour payment <input type="checkbox"/> Quality certification <input type="checkbox"/> Progress monitoring and reporting <input type="checkbox"/> Preventive maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Initiating dialogues and meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Playing a catalytic role in maintaining political balance and bringing consensus in decision-making <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating with politicians, the user committee and the general population <input type="checkbox"/> Training <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance to the User Committee to mobilize local people <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance to the User Committee to ensure the social welfare of the labours <input type="checkbox"/> Helping to make decisions and other aspects of programme management <input type="checkbox"/> Witnessing labour payment work <input type="checkbox"/> Helping labour groups generate group savings and undertake revolving income-generating activities <input type="checkbox"/> Providing secretarial assistance to UC

Source: German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), 1999, *Green Roads in Nepal* (Kathmandu, Nepal).

IV. ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY AND METHODS

A “green road” is a fair weather rural road constructed for low volume traffic. The basic consideration in the green road technology is that of the preservation of nature while the road is constructed and operated. As described earlier this can happen only when the technology of construction does not go against the natural forces operating in the

Himalayan mountains. Thus avoiding faulty geological formations, maintaining of mass balance within a small cross-section and moving along the natural slope are three basic principles behind the road design. The concept utilizes local knowledge and experience to understand geomorphological features. This helps in avoiding costly surveys but at the same time ensures the avoidance of landslide prone areas in the road alignment.

The selection of the optimum alignment is the first important step designed to minimize the damage to the natural environment as well as to reduce future maintenance costs. After the deciding on road alignment, a detailed survey, design, cost estimation and preparation of the report are done. The report includes the identification of training required, the preparation of all necessary training materials, forms, formats etc.

A typical design should include:

- Longitudinal profile
- Horizontal plan using topographical maps
- Cross sections at a fairly small interval
- Detailed cross-section at critical areas particularly at switchbacks
- Structural work such as retaining walls, water management structures
- Estimate of volume of works and costs, labour requirement – skilled, unskilled
- Quantity of material to be procured from outside and cost estimate
- Quantity of tools and equipment to be procured from outside (wheelbarrows, shovels, crowbars).

The road standards incorporate following features:

- Avoid unnecessary road width to reduce volume of excavation
- Allow natural road surface run-off by allowing 5 per cent outward slope

- ❑ Drainage only when necessary along the mountain side
- ❑ Avoid steep longitudinal gradient, maintain average gradient of 7 per cent
- ❑ Provide water management structure whenever necessary.

Environmental considerations are of prime importance. Thus the construction practice does not allow for cut and throw, nor does it allow for massive cutting at one stretch. Rock blasting is not allowed. The equipment used is wheelbarrow, chisel and hammer. In general, this technology encompasses the following aspects:

Minimal slope cutting and preservation of the vegetative cover. This is attained by restricting on uncontrolled disposal of excavated materials down the hill. Whatever material is extracted is reused for filling (cut and fill). Toe walls are created to withhold the excess materials. Bush clearing is done up to the formation and not beyond it. If trees are on the alignment they are not cut till the road is operational. Planting materials that are suitable for vegetative cover are collected for bioengineering.

Mass balancing. It is the most important consideration and is done through the controlled cut and fill method. Mass balance within a fairly small cross-section is to be done. This will ensure that the cut materials are used for fill on the valley side and not thrown down the slope. Thus the excavated materials are reused as construction material.

Bioengineering. Bioengineering is done to stabilize the slope and reduce soil erosion. It is an important part of green road construction and is a preventive measure. The environment is thus preserved even while the road is being constructed.

Proper water management. Where possible the natural slope is used to disperse water towards the valley in a controlled manner. Generally a 5 per cent outward slope is provided. In cases where water needs to be collected by the mountain side, drains are provided to remove water as soon as possible.

Construction in a phased manner. In the beginning a track of 1 to 1.5 metre width is opened. Then gradually the track is opened to the requisite level by cutting on the hillside and filling on the valley side. Actual road construction is started after the natural compaction of

the track over one monsoon. After the road is constructed bioengineering is done to maintain vegetative cover along the road.

Training. Proper training at different levels is provided. Different types of training are required for different stakeholders. Management related, supervision related, accounting related and construction related training is provided prior to the construction of a green road.

Labour based construction method. The construction is done during the slack agricultural season, usually during October to May. Local people work on the green road. Thus it brings employment opportunities to those who would otherwise migrate to the southern plains or to India in search of work.

Ordinary tools and equipment. Mostly hammer and chisel are used to break rock. Heating or drilling is also done if necessary in breaking rocks. Blasting is not allowed as it causes unnecessary damage to the surrounding environment.

No heavy equipment is used to construct a green road. Material is usually transported by wheelbarrow. When necessary tractors with trailers are, however, used to transport stones or sand over longer distances. As local materials are used as far as possible the transportation of construction materials over a long distance is not required.

Box 2. The green road: its salient features

- It is a fair weather road open to traffic for nine months of the year
- The road is closed during the monsoon and repair work is done during this time
- It is a single lane road with a bypass every 200 metres
- Labour costs account for about 65 per cent of the total construction cost
- The participation of politicians, users, the community at large and technicians is essential
- Heavy equipment is not used, rock blasting is not permitted
- The cut and fill method is used to construct road. In the beginning a track of 1 to 1.5 metres is opened. It is then gradually expanded to the requisite width

V. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Innovative institutional arrangements are required in constructing green roads. Regular government machinery, particularly the Roads Department, does not seem to be the appropriate institution to implement green roads. There are two major reason for this. First, the Roads Department works under a different norm than that required for green roads. If the usual departmental norms are applied then the cost (of the green road) will increase significantly. Second, a decentralized approach with the involvement of different stakeholders is required to implement the green road. The Roads Department does not follow this approach. It rather follows a system with a chain of command within the Department. Therefore, it will find the coordination needs rather taxing. The Nepalese Government has decided to create a separate department, namely, the Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agricultural Roads to implement district level roads (HMIS News 1999). This does not necessarily mean that the district level roads will follow the green roads principle. There is already confusion as to where this department will be housed, with the Ministry of Local Development or the Ministry of Works and Transport.

The institutional structure and involvement of different institutions have changed over time as more experience was gained during the building of green roads. To begin with, in Palpa district the green road was basically implemented through technical consultants. When the green road was implemented in Dhading district the implementation modalities underwent a radical change. The District Development Committee (then District Panchayat) was the responsible institution to mobilize people to work on the road, supervise them, keep the muster roll, make payments to the labourers, manage equipment, and supervise work quality. In other words, apart from technical support which was provided by the GTZ Project Support Unit and later on by private consultants, the district and village level political bodies took all the responsibility of managing the construction work. This was an indication that if given responsibility, the local level institutions were able to meet the challenges. When the green road was implemented in Gorkha district a NGO was responsible for social mobilization and GTZ provided financial resources as well as technical support. In order to speed up, the work was initiated at multiple places along the alignment.

An emerging innovative approach in the road construction programme is the provision of financial assistance through different

sources into a single basket being carried out on a cost-sharing basis. This approach has been introduced in the three green roads being constructed in Lamjung district. The Village Development Committees, District Development Committee and the users are pulling their resources together. They are bearing the responsibility of the construction and maintenance of the roads. The Rural Development Through Self-help Promotion Project (RDSPL/GTZ) provides technical support through local private consultants and social mobilization support through a local NGO.

The resources for the road construction in Lamjung district are collected in a single basket. The different sources contributing to the basket are as follows:

- The Village Development Committees provide funds out of their development grant
- The District Development Committee provides some financial assistance
- The government provides financial assistance through the Ministry of Local Development
- Five days equivalent voluntary labour per household is provided from each and every household located in the influence area of the road
- The RDSPL/GTZ is providing technical support

The Village Development Committees and the District Development Committees have further pledged certain fixed annual amounts of money for maintenance and the beneficiary households will provide one day's voluntary labour per household.

VI. THE ECONOMICS OF GREEN ROADS

One of the major considerations in the green road concept is cost. The construction of roads in the mountains following conventional technology is very costly. The cost of roads constructed by the Department of Roads ranges between 5 million to 8 million rupees per kilometre (ICIMOD 1997). While these are better standard roads, the district level roads constructed by the Department are thought to be in the vicinity of 3 million rupees per kilometre (ICIMOD 1997). However, no officially accepted data are available up to now.

Obviously there are many factors that influence costs. The geological features along the alignment and the number of bridges and structures affect cost estimations very much. Similarly, the choice of construction technology and methods also influence costs. The cost of construction of a single-lane fair weather green road is provided in Box 3.

Box 3. Cost of construction of green road			
<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Construction cost (percentage)</i>	<i>Construction cost</i>	
		<i>Rs. per km</i>	<i>US\$ per km</i>
Labour costs	65	780 000	12 000
Construction material	15	180 000	2 770
Tools and equipment and transport costs	10	120 000	1 850
Construction supervision, social mobilization and overhead	10	120 000	1 850
Construction cost	100	1 200 000	18 470

It is estimated that a labour input of 12,000 person day per kilometre is required to construct a green road. Payment to labour accounts for about 65 per cent of the total cost per kilometre. What is even more important to emphasize here is the fact that the labourers are locals who would have temporarily migrated elsewhere in search of jobs had the green road programme not provided an employment opportunity at their doorstep. The significance of having a job at a place close by goes beyond the mere earning of a wage. They would not incur extra food and lodging costs and would be able to save more. About 60 per cent of the households from which at least one member worked on the road reported a cash income in excess of 10,000 rupees for that year (IMU 1998). In a rural setting this is a significant figure. Additionally, these earnings were used by the households to meet the basic need expenses. Most of the labourers spent their earnings from the road programme in meeting the households' food and other basic needs. The impact on consumption patterns was primarily reflected in four major areas of cereal consumption, increase in protein intake, increase in health related expenditure, and increase in educational expenditure for the children (IMU 1998). This contrasts with the

expenditure pattern of wages earned by road labourers who follow a traditional contractor based construction method. A sizable portion of the wage in these cases is generally used for gambling and alcohol consumption. About 30 per cent of the households reported savings due to an opportunity to work as labourers on the road. In all 35 per cent of the households that participated in the construction programme reported paying an outstanding loan partially or fully either by savings out of the wage earned or by borrowing from their group saving fund (IMU 1998). Thus, employment in road construction and income derived from it had a far-reaching poverty alleviation effect.

The construction cost of 1.2 million rupees excludes training costs at the local level. But they are usually not very high. It is estimated that 5 per cent of the total cost per kilometre will be sufficient to provide different types of training and observation visits.

Regular maintenance of green roads is of crucial importance. As these are fair weather roads the maintenance needs are felt after being used for almost nine months at a stretch. Based on data from Palpa district roads, it is estimated that 187 person-days per kilometre per year is required to maintain the green road. Consequently, the annual maintenance costs required to keep the road in good condition was found to be between 1-2 per cent of the total cost, which matches with international standards (GTZ and SDC 1999).

The economic benefits of green roads have not yet been empirically calculated. However, there are proxy measures that indicate benefits. An estimate that uses methodology from the Department of Roads in their estimation of the Priority Investment Plan comes out with a figure of Rs. 1,297,000/km/yr. as the economic benefit of a green road (GTZ and SDC 1999). The road is assumed to have a lifetime of 20 years. The benefit is estimated in terms of savings in transport cost and producer surplus defined as net value of increased production as a result of increased accessibility.

VII. CONCLUSION

The green road is a fair weather road open to traffic for nine months of a year. The road is closed during the monsoon and repair works are done during this time. These are single-lane roads with a bypass every 200 metres. Labour costs account for about 65 per cent of the total construction cost. The participation of politicians, users, the

community at large and technicians is essential. Heavy equipment is not used and rock blasting is not permitted. The cut and fill method is used to construct the road. In the beginning a track of 1 to 1.5 metres is opened. It is then gradually expanded to the requisite width.

Constructing rural roads following the green road approach offers several benefits over the traditional road construction approach. First and foremost, it is affordable as the construction technique uses local material and people to construct the road. It is participatory as different stakeholders are actively engaged from planning to operation and maintenance of the road. Since it uses local labour it has a immense potential for poverty alleviation. Environmental protection is a key aspect of the green road. It is thus an approach which is suitable for the construction of rural roads in a participatory manner and at low cost.

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REVISITING PARTICIPATION: “WIN-WIN” STRATEGY IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH RAILWAY AUTHORITIES AND SQUATTERS, MUMBAI, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Concomitant with the rapid growth of the Indian city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay) poor migrants established slum dwellings at various locations, including the sides of the railway lines. The presence of these settlements led to reduced operating speeds for commuter trains and prevented the Railways from increasing capacity through the laying of additional tracks.

Every year, discussions were held in an attempt to address the issues. However, no substantive solutions emerged. In 1988 a process was started in which a number of NGOs, the slum dwellers, local government and the Railways joined together to resolve the problem. As a result, some of the slum dwellers have already moved to another area and a model has been established for further relocation of slum dwellers.

As the title suggests, this experience in Mumbai demonstrates that with the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, commuters and the urban poor can both benefit.

Mumbai (formerly Bombay), the commercial hub of India, is the capital of the state of Maharashtra and has a population of over 10 million people. The suburban railway system of the city is crucial to its daily functioning because of the geographical configuration of the city: most offices are in South Mumbai while most of the population lives towards the north of the city. It is estimated that 7.4 million passenger – trips per day are made on the suburban railway at an average distance of 25 kilometres per trip. The vast majority of the city’s commuters use the railways and the rest use buses. The poorest sections

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of the city's population walk to work as they cannot afford public transport. Over the last decade the number of people who travel by car from home to office has increased substantially. This has arisen as much because of the increasing availability of loans for purchasing cars as because of the present state of public transport which has deteriorated steadily and is in urgent need of improvement.

There are three suburban rail lines in Mumbai: Central, Western and Harbour. Each of these has a very large number of people living in slums within 30 feet of the railway track. The Central line from Victoria Terminus to Thane has about 3,900 families living alongside the track, the Western line from Churchgate to Dahisar has 2,800 families and the Harbour line from Victoria Terminus to Mankhurd 11,400 families. These families have been living along the tracks for more than two decades. In some cases, their huts are hardly three feet away from the tracks. One consequence of their location is the number of accidents that take place, particularly affecting young children. Another consequence is that in many places people from the settlements and the nearby vicinity walk across the tracks frequently. The presence of these settlements has a considerable impact on the speed of trains. The Commissioner of Railway Safety has laid down that trains must not travel at more than 15 kilometres per hour when travelling through these densely inhabited sections, when trains normally are capable of running at more than 40 kilometres per hour. This seriously impacts upon the capacity of the railway system and significantly increases passenger transit times. In addition, encroachment has prevented the laying of additional railway tracks which are necessary to increase capacity. As a result, the railway and the slums dwellers along the track are caught in a war of attrition, in which the plight of the households is as distressing as that of commuters.

Like other poor migrants in Mumbai, the people living in the railway slums could not find affordable housing when they came to the city and consequently were forced to make their homes wherever they could find space. Over the years, many of those who managed to find space to settle on government or privately owned land have gradually obtained informal tenure security as well as some basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation from the state government. But those who squatted on land along the railway tracks or on the pavements have obtained neither tenure security nor amenities since they are occupying land intended for public purposes. The rules state that slums on central

government land (such as the railways) cannot be provided with such amenities without the permission of the landowning department.

For years, the Railways have argued that they had no part of the responsibility to shift slum dwellers. This was considered to be the job of the relevant authorities, such as the Municipal Corporation or the State Government Slum Clearance Board. Every few years some discussions were initiated by either the Railways or the state government but, in the eyes of the communities and the NGOs involved, nothing emerged as an outcome. In 1988, however, Maharashtra's Housing Department suggested that the Railways, the State Government and the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) undertake a joint survey to assess the number of households encroaching on Railways land.

Based on the survey, SPARC produced in 1989 a report entitled "Beyond the beaten track". Along with its publication SPARC also organized the residents of these communities into a Railway Slum Dweller's Federation (RSDF). The rationale for the Federation was simple. Unless all the communities developed the capacity to operate as a united group and felt capable of establishing a leadership that could engage in dialogue with the Railways and the state government, they could not expect any changes. SPARC and its two partners, the National Slum Dweller's Federation and Mahila Milan were the main "trainers" in the process. Along with the 1989 report, they also facilitated a dialogue between the Federation and the State Government of Maharashtra in which communities suggested that if given a secure piece of land with infrastructure, they would be willing to move without other compensation.

In 1989, the Railway Slum Dwellers Federation was able to demonstrate its capacity when it worked in collaboration with the state government to assist in relocating a slum of 900 households in order to lay a railway line which linked the city to Vashi or New Bombay. The alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dweller's Federation also helped 181 households who could not afford the government provided tenement to build their own houses at a lower cost. While this remained a valuable milestone in building credibility and confidence, the alliance did not help any more communities in obtaining amenities or securing housing. However despite that, the Federation worked vigorously, helping communities to form "proposed cooperatives" to save money, plan their own housing and build skills

and capability to face a future challenge when they may need to be engaged in negotiations for secure land with the state or Railways.

The opportunity to use these skills emerged in 1995 with the project popularly known as MUTP II. The Mumbai Urban Transport Project II (MUTP II) engages three agencies, Indian Railways, the Municipal Corporation of Mumbai, and the Public Works Department of the Government of Maharashtra. The project is a huge one which envisages the laying of more railway tracks, creating more railway corridors linking up the city, constructing flyovers over train tracks, improving road signals, parking, and optimizing the management of public transport in the city in general.

In view of estimates that 30,000 households, the majority of whom are slum dwellers with unclear security of tenure, would need to be relocated and rehabilitated to undertake the main MUTP II project, the World Bank required the government of Maharashtra state to formulate a resettlement and rehabilitation policy in mid-1995. D.M. Sukthankar, who had earlier been Chief Secretary to the Government of Maharashtra and also Secretary in the Department of Urban Development in the Government of India and the municipal commissioner of Bombay, was appointed chair of a Task Force for this purpose. The Task Force drew upon the assistance of different departments of the state government, NGOs and people's organizations. SPARC and the National Slum Dwellers' Federation were closely associated with the deliberations of the Task Force and its subcommittees. The recommendations of the Task Force were accepted by the state government and formed the basis of the MUTP II resettlement and rehabilitation project. In so far as this was the first time that the government of Maharashtra had a resettlement and rehabilitation policy in an urban area – even if it was only for the MUTP II project in Mumbai – this could be described as a major advance in securing the entitlement of the urban poor. In view of the huge numbers to be rehabilitated, a parallel MUTP II resettlement and rehabilitation project is being planned by the World Bank.

Between 1995 and 1997, the dialogue between the World Bank, the Railways and the state government broke down. However, by that time some of the prerequisite steps needed for the resettlement and rehabilitation project had already begun. These included a baseline survey and initiation of dialogue between the government, World Bank and NGOs. At the time, the state government was facing commuter

fury at deteriorating train journeys and often encountered law and order crises when irate commuters sought to burn stations or beat up the stationmasters. The Railways had funds for many track laying “projects” within their yearly budgets, however, these remained unutilized because the slums could not be removed. On their part, slum dwellers especially the women, after getting organized and planning for housing options were now ready to enter into negotiations. The challenge was who would design the solution and what would it contain.

When SPARC and the communities offered to explore a solution, the general response of the Railways was that “all this is just talk”. To demonstrate how organized communities were, in late 1997, near Borivalli station, where slums were almost 10 feet from the track, the whole settlement moved back 30 feet, build a wall for a boundary and realigned their houses. This initiative was unexpected and increased the confidence of the Urban Development Department, which was negotiating with the World Bank on the one hand and with the Railways on the other, to bring SPARC and the Federation into the discussions. At this time SPARC and its alliance partners made another offer to the state government. It was suggested that if the state government gave land and the Railways paid to bring in all the infrastructure, SPARC and the Federation would manage the project and the communities would build houses at their own cost, thus making this a tripartite agreement in which all stakeholders made contributions and played their role.

The Railways identified the fifth and sixth corridor where they sought to lay one additional track as their priority and which they could undertake without World Bank resources. On their part, the state government located a piece of land measuring 2.28 hectares at Kanjur Marg in a suburb called Ghatkopar which was considered very acceptable to the communities. This was sufficient to relocate 900 of the 1,980 families living along the railway tracks. Land for the balance of 1,000 odd families is in the process of being identified and when it is done, all the families currently on the land needed by the project will be shifted.

In view of the earlier involvement of SPARC and its general credibility, the government of Maharashtra issued an order in March 1998, appointing SPARC as facilitator for the resettlement and rehabilitation operations. Land was to be formally transferred to cooperative housing societies of slum dwellers in whose name they were registered. However, regulations stipulated that the land could only be

conveyed to the slum dwellers after they lived on the site. Since it would take three years to construct formal housing, it was agreed that the momentum of the initiative would be lost if such a delay occurred. At the same time, the Railways had project funds amounting to 13.8 million rupees to contribute to the land development (infrastructure) but could not give it directly to SPARC. This problem was resolved when the Slum Rehabilitation Authority, which is a regulatory body, agreed to supervise and “hold” the money for infrastructure development to facilitate this process. The conveyance issue was also resolved when the slum dwellers interested in obtaining the land, suggested that they develop a two phase rehabilitation strategy. In phase one it was proposed that as soon as the land was filled and water sanitation and drainage brought to the site, the slum dwellers would voluntarily shift to the site and build a transit tenement at their own cost with 120 sq. feet per family so that all 900 families could be accommodated.

This phase was completed between August 1998 and June 1999. The communities are now working on phase two with SPARC to build structures so that each family will get a 225 square foot house. All additional space which is constructed will be sold in the market to cover the costs of their homes. The communities have 21 cooperatives, have flourishing credit programmes, and have started consolidating their occupations in the new areas. A steering committee comprising of NGOs, the community, the Slum Rehabilitation Authority officials and the Railways met fortnightly throughout the nine-month period to handle all issues emerging from the process.

The experience has had a profound impact in several ways:

First, all the participants, regardless of where they were located within the state, the community or the NGO operated as a team. This was something which was unique and special because everyone felt that they had helped create a “miracle”, a win-win solution, which has been able to take care of the needs of all concerned and improve the situation for all – the city, the commuters, the Railways, and the community. The participants also demonstrated that with such partnerships sharing problem-solving, the crisis actually became easier when each other’s needs and aspirations were respected and problems addressed collectively. All the participants became major champions of the process within their own organization and in turn when they had to deal with opposition to the project they contributed to the solution.

Second, the two step relocation strategy is now one which is proposed in a range of venues when relocation is being discussed. Its advantages are several and very obvious. In the past communities never believed in the promise of relocation in which transit accommodation was available elsewhere because people often languished in those transit accommodations for 10-15 years. Often houses constructed for one group of people in transit were allocated to others who jumped the queue because of political and other considerations. In this case, families moved from their railway dwellings of 60-85 sq. ft. to transit tenements of 120 sq. ft. with all amenities. In addition, they were located on the site where their houses were to be built, while owning the land both formally and de facto by their presence. This process increased their housing incrementally, but because they were in the same location, they could build new roots. And because they were all together their social connections were retained.

Third, agencies such as the Railways and municipalities who wanted the land on which the slums were located, could occupy the land almost two years earlier than would otherwise have been the case. To those institutions, the reduced period of waiting to start the project improved the financial calculations. This was a major incentive to work with the communities. Additionally, when communities move by their own choice, there is no crisis of law and order or delays emerging from those situations.

Fourth, the power of the alliance in these negotiations stemmed from its strong presence in the field since the Railway Slum Dwellers Federation is a local people's organization with a membership that covers almost all the families living along the railway tracks. Coupled with a reliable database and links built up with government agencies and senior officials over the years, the credibility of the alliance was of help in solving problems on the ground. When lower-level officials of any department were not forthcoming in their cooperation, senior officials were contacted in order to instruct the field staff to get the job done. Senior officials of the Railway Board in Delhi have visited Kanjur Marg and were impressed by the approach. They have begun discussions with the alliance to replicate this model at other locations in Mumbai.

Fifth, as is its practice with any project in which the alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dweller's Federation is involved, Kanjur Marg became a training site for its local, national and international networks. Pavement dwellers from Mumbai, slum dwellers

living along the railway tracks in other settlements in Mumbai, slum-dwellers living on the land of the Airports Authority in Mumbai, slum-dwellers from other Indian cities as well have been regularly visiting the site. In addition, government officials from different countries, from Cambodia, South Africa, Thailand and Nepal, have also come and seen the model. As a result, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration has accepted the strategy of resettlement at Kanjur Marg to deal with slum-dwellers living under its bridges. The transfer and dissemination of these ideas also takes place rapidly in exchange visits and through the publications of SPARC.

In the midst of these processes, the dialogue between the World Bank and the state began once more. The process of developing the whole project created a “team” of all those associated with it, and the World Bank team was invited to come and see how much this process had actually contributed to the creation of a truly valuable experience in a multiple stakeholder managed rehabilitation process. Addressing sensitive minute issues, solving inter-organizational contradictions, and maintaining the centrality of what communities sought for themselves emerged in every shared experience. As a result of that process several outcomes are emerging as this paper goes to press. One of these is that the two step relocation strategy is now accepted as one of the options within MUTP II, and SPARC has been commissioned to document this process in great depth to help share the process for later projects.

Apart from this project, the Slum Rehabilitation Authority now advocates this strategy for the relocation of slums under its jurisdiction and has proposed a rehabilitation plan for 11,000 households on project affected areas in the city of Mumbai.

The value of the model at Kanjur Marg is in how it optimizes the contributions of communities and the way in which it acts to make the communities central to the solution. In so doing, there has been considerable savings of time and money for the Railways as well as a demonstration that a state government can arbitrate between the interests of the city and its poor. The alliance hopes that the precedent of resettlement in this experiment will be accepted for future Railway operations, whether in Mumbai or elsewhere. If slum dwellers get tenure of land and proper housing, that is the pay-off for the urban poor. The acquisition of information by the community, particularly women, and its use to negotiate practical solutions on the ground by building up the

capacities of people's organizations will allow the replicability of the model.

As for any other project, the critical elements are the legal and policy environments, the cooperation of the bureaucracy and a strong, vibrant community network that takes the initiative, turns a situation to its advantage and offers a developmental alternative that works for the people, the government agencies and the city. In this particular game, all the players emerge as winners since people's organizations, NGOs and the state develop and forge new partnerships. The Kanjur Marg experiment exemplifies voluntary urban resettlement which secures the entitlements of the poor even as it benefits the larger society around.

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[Book]

Skeldon, R., 1997. *Migration and Development: A Global Perspective* (London, Longman).

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[Article in journal]

Wachs, M., 1990. Regulating traffic by controlling land use: the southern California experience, *Transportation*, vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 241-256.

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