

## **Notes on Visit to Tripura State** **July 7-10, 2015**

Arrived at Agartala on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2015 and commenced a review of DoNER programmes in the State funded by NLCPR and NEC. A presentation was made by the Planning Secretary. The delays in execution are attributed to the need to import nearly all inputs for construction from outside the State including coarse sand, aggregates, cement and even workers for more skilled areas that may be needed for larger multistoreyed buildings. Progress in works is found to be generally satisfactory in the context. In one road work, the cost per km for upgradation works out to Rs 3 crores per km which appears to be high and specific remarks may be obtained from the State. On the drinking water supply situation in the State, it was reported that supply to 8122 rural habitations was to be partial at 10 lpcd by August this year. The focus now needed was for quality improvement since the water had excess iron content. The funds provided by Ministry of Drinking Water are stated to be fully used except that lesser funds were provided against demand. A discussion was held on the scope for organic farming in the State with reference to our concept note and discussions held at Guwahati. The scheme was welcomed as the State was already working to promote settled cultivation by erstwhile jhum farmers to whom lands had been given under the FRA. Supplies of chemical fertilisers to the State's farmers were irregular due to logistics. Biofertiliser manufactories had been set up to supply acetobacter, phosphobacter, azospirillum, vermicompost, etc to jhum farmers to enrich their lands. The State has concerns regarding PGS for which they wish Ministry to take into consideration but it was made clear that the current proposals focus on building community capacity, processing, and marketing. A discussion was also held on the plans for animal husbandry especially piggery but deferred till later. The State Government officials complained of delay in release of funds for ongoing projects and later provided a list of such projects for emergent action in the Ministry. The Planning Secretary also requested replacement of two projects approved in 2014-15 for Rs 67.21 cr and Rs 27.50 cr by a flyover project of Rs 272.52 cr with the same level of DoNER funding which is essentially unobjectionable.

A discussion was held on the status of the handloom and handicrafts sector. It was reported that the sector was losing out to the powerlooms. I explained our plans for improving NEHHDC's work but asked for their views on the fact that the critical

constraint facing NEHHDC was inadequate supply since, it appeared that artisans spent only a portion of their spare time for this work. This situation was confirmed by the officials. I explained that our plans were to make payment to normal artisans within a week or ten days of sale in the retail outlet. Software preparation had been delayed and we would ask NIC to expedite matters. I suggested that in the case of experts and award winners, we could even estimate some price and pay 80% or more of the price and then the balance share immediately after sale. The fact of sale should be automatically sms-ed to the artisan concerned by the software. Ministry may expedite this process of software development through NEHHDC. In this and all other matters including for bulk purchases, the NEHHDC would be happy to associate Purbasha including for its exhibitions in a commercial relationship. In regard to the EAP for Joint Forest Management, a presentation had been planned by the PCCF.

Visited the modern ICP at Akhaura and the plans for commissioning.

Agartala-Akhaura Rail Connection: Visited the site where the proposed rail line intersects the NH and then goes west. The railways have modified their plans to have a double lane road and an elevated rail track of 3.31 km out of 5.05 km on the Indian side. With this change, the land to be acquired comes to down to 66.872 acres costing Rs 97.63 crores and project costs of Indian portion is estimated by IRCON at Rs 557 crores while the Bangladesh portion of 10.014 km would cost Rs 350 crores. Necessary requisition has been submitted on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 to the State Government by the Railways. The Railways were asked to formulate proposals for a meeting to be held in DoNER on sourcing the funds needed for the project.

Visited GB Pant Hospital: Project funded in part with Rs 7.40 cr, from NLCPR, NEC's Rs 1.44 cr totalling about 15% of project costs. The project is ready for inauguration. Balance NLCPR funds have been sought.

Visited RK Mission School, Viveknagar & Dhaleswar for which Rs 442.90 lakhs were provided under NLCPR in 2006-07 and works taken up in 2012-13 with State share in cost. The work in Viveknagar was seen and has been completed except for acoustics in the auditorium and a garage. Works in Dhaleswar are pending and may be expedited and the target date August 2015 kept up.

Visited a private College of Nursing: The State faces a considerable shortage of nurses and is encouraging private investors.

NERLP: A discussion was held with Project Director NERLP, State Manager, and Project Director, NRLM (State) with reference to its status and the complaints received on the NGOs appointed and that the programme was being implemented without any relationship or engagement with the State Government. In contrast to the NRLM where the State Agency appointed facilitators at different levels, NERLP took on such field agents at the block level through NGOs without any commitment on their employment after completion of the project. These appointees were then trained by the Support NGO and then assigned tasks in the field.

**8<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

During the forenoon, visited the site for a proposed elevated two lane road (flyover) to decongest the city costing Rs 225 cr of which only a small portion is to be funded by NLCPR. The tenders have been awarded and project work has commenced. It should be possible to provide for intermediate access and exit points for best use of the flyover. Replacement of two projects approved in NLCPR have been proposed to support this project which may be examined immediately in the Ministry including for examination of increased funding, if feasible.

Visited Science City under construction for Rs 27.45 crores with NLCPR support of Rs 24.71 crores. Substantial work has been done from commencement in Jan 2014 and release of funds from DoNER in March 2015.

Visited The Administrative Building of MBB College on 1392 sqm plinth area with four floors for a total project cost of Rs 291.75 lakhs with 90% support by NLCPR which enabled ground floor construction, the rest were constructed using 13<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission funds.

During the afternoon, visited NERLP covered villages in West Tripura district at Abhicharan village and Uttar Champamura. Interacted with 3 SHG members in Abhicharan and 18 groups in the Champamura at the mofussil town's auditorium. The object of the discussion was to ascertain the extent to which NERLP had a role in organising them into groups, the activity within groups and the nature of the opportunities perceived by them to increase their incomes and raise themselves from poverty. A significant aspect seems to be that many of the groups were earlier operating and had become dormant or had no substantial activity in terms of livelihoods. I suspect they may have had benefits from the previous programme which could be as old as DWCRA. The rural areas see animal husbandry as a potential area for investment and this can be accelerated through bank linkage.

However, the monthly contributions of Rs 50 appear to be too low and only a fourth of their MGNREGA wage. Higher contributions can enable better options and more funds from the banks. Along with this step up will arise the need for marketing infrastructure. By a rough estimate, the fattening and sale of two pigs and one or two goats per year may be adequate to take a family beyond the risk of regressing to poverty levels and a suitable plan of action is desirable based on such logic.

**9<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Left for Udaipur and visited the South District Hospital, Gomati District built partly with NLCPR funds of Rs 9.40 crores of the total project cost of Rs13.13 crores. The hospital commenced operations in 2012. A discussion was held with the Director, Health Services and the doctors in the hospital. The hospital is well run and money well spent. The main areas of shortage in the state are in the inadequate supply of nurses. More such hospitals or colleges are difficult for Tripura, it is learnt because of the lack of qualified medical personnel. Yet the provision of health services in the State is a model for the rest of the NER.

A presentation was made by PCCF on the State's proposed EAP on biodiversity. This follows on the two previous JFM development projects. The project is being justified on the basis of the water shortages felt by the State and drying of springs due to deforestation attributed to jhumming. This is sought to be remedied by improving forest cover, soil and water conservation treatments of higher order streams located within the forests, NTFP type planting to discourage jhumming practice, landscape management for eco-tourism, creation of a separate Landscape Development Authority, staff infrastructure, provision of support for RoFRA patta holders. The project needs careful review on the following aspects:

- a) Improving forest cover is sought to be done by teak planting. Typically, the approach to biodiversity should focus on local native species and the keystone species of the area so that natural succession takes place early. This is to be coupled to exclusion and natural gap filling. The exclusion should have occurred during the JFM exercise and particularly after FR pattas were given. Can it be presumed that the JFM exercise failed to achieve its objective of keeping the local people out of the middle and high crown density areas and thereby achieve natural recovery? It is reported that in the past, rubber plantations were proposed for forest cover but now the choices were changed. In that case, it needs to be examined how teak is consistent with the

objective of biodiversity improvement. In the case of an extremely popular cash crop like teak, the reasons for depletion, despite 15 years of JFM efforts and engendering the cooperation of villagers through entry point works, VFC funds, and Savings operations, need to be determined and programmatic failures corrected, if possible.

- b) Funds are proposed for the JFM groups but they were funded under the earlier programme and a repetition is not advisable since bank linkage is now the only reasonable option and should have been commenced in JFM. The claimed need for such incentives suggests that the programme has not incorporated an understanding that the objective in such funding is to prevent poverty regress. In any case, NRLM and NERLP are in operation in all districts.
- c) The competence of the Forest department to advise jhum farmers on settled cultivation is unclear and this is the province of the Agriculture department. Even that department may be inadequate unless local adaptive research involving farmers and the KVK is strongly associated. Naturally, a strong University linkage is necessary.
- d) A new type of silt detention using vegetation as found in North USA is contemplated and I suppose the difference in ecology, rainfall patterns, pattern of snow melts yielding perennial springs will be borne in mind. In any case, the State has an Agriculture Engineering department which should be developing expertise in such matters.
- e) Quarters are planned to be constructed under this programme which seems quite inappropriate. The overall staff component needs careful estimation.
- f) On an overall view, it appears that the Forest Department is entering into new areas of competence by creating a Landscape Development Authority with overlapping functions of other departments. This may lead to confusion, poor documenting of knowledge for use by other departments, or worse to subtract from programme objectives apart from empire building by the forest department.

In my view, the Forest department should have tried a pilot using the funds of the JFM programme in one sample sector before proposing such a large project. Even now, the JICA could be asked to look at this option through a technical grant.

Visited the 726.2 MW CCGT power station set up by a JV of ONGC, IL&FS, and Govt of Tripura. The project gained from the permission obtained from the Govt of Bangladesh under the MOA to bring Over Dimensioned Cargo (ODC) to Tripura by sea and road.

Later, inspected the proposed road to be taken up under NESRIP from Udaipur to Melaghar and also visited the scenic tourist spot of New Udaipur Palace located in the middle of a lake. The palace is being renovated.

Returned to Agartala and called on the Hon'ble Chief Minister at his office. I briefed him on my tour of the State and of our perspectives and plans on development of agriculture and animal husbandry and the criticality of field research by agricultural scientists in the areas of agriculture and for animal herd management. He mentioned that the State had suggested establishment of an agricultural university in the State but it had not been accepted since it could be established only with Central funds. Also briefed the Chief Secretary on my tour observations.

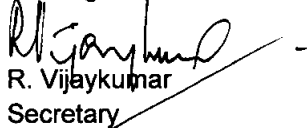
**10<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Visit to Transmission Project in three parts at Surjamaninagar for receiving and transmitting power from the Palatana project and to manage the power needs of the State. Balance fund needs have been sought from NLCPR.

Visited the State Museum located in the Ujjayanta palace.

Conducted a meeting with officers of the State Government along with the Chief Secretary. The plans for Organic Farming and the differences in land holding patterns of the State as compared to other States in the North East were discussed. The plans for Animal Husbandry development and herd management were also discussed and views taken. The Secretary, Rural Development emphasised the need for better coordination between the NERLP and the State administration and suggested a structure similar to that prevailing in NRLM.

As the Hon. Home Minister had called a meeting with Chief Ministers of the NER on security issues and development matters at Guwahati, left in the afternoon for Guwahati and attended the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and thereafter, returned that evening to New Delhi.

  
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Secretary

Ministry of DoNER, New Delhi