

DISCUSSION PAPER

(First Draft)

A TASK GROUP APPROACH ?

Panchayat Secretaries

and

Technical Collaboration

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Mobile Training Scheme

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With the intention of strengthening the Panchayat System and releasing the potential of the people by participation in development at the village level, HMG's policy in the next Five-Year Plan includes the establishment of a new Panchayat Village Secretary.

The policy intention is for this Secretary to play a key role not merely as an administrator and book-keeper, etc., but as multi-purpose worker, as the skilled agent of the Panchayat in formulating and implementing village level planning, and as a coordinator.

The Training Institute and the members of the M.T.S. have begun the process of examining the functions of this new functionary - the Panchayat Village Secretary - stating his job description (derived from the policy statements) and have attempted to spell out in detail what at the operational level the Secretary is expected to do, and how, given the realities of village life, he might actually be able to do it. This work of the Training Institute is the task of constructing a Role Analysis. The Role Analysis is the item by item statement of activity upon which the content and methods of training will be worked out. It operationalises the policy intentions so as to realistically list activity related to conditions and problems at the village level. The role analysis is drawn up by a process of examining past experience at the village level; by creatively anticipating and thinking through what might be done; and then by trying out various tasks in the villages and closely following them; etc. etc.

In the course of this process the Training Institute has run into a number of problems. To be discussed in this paper are these problems :

1) The multi-purpose function requires the Secretary to be involved in many technical processes. For example, he is expected to play a part in Agriculture, Health, Construction, etc. What, then, realistically is the nature of this involvement?

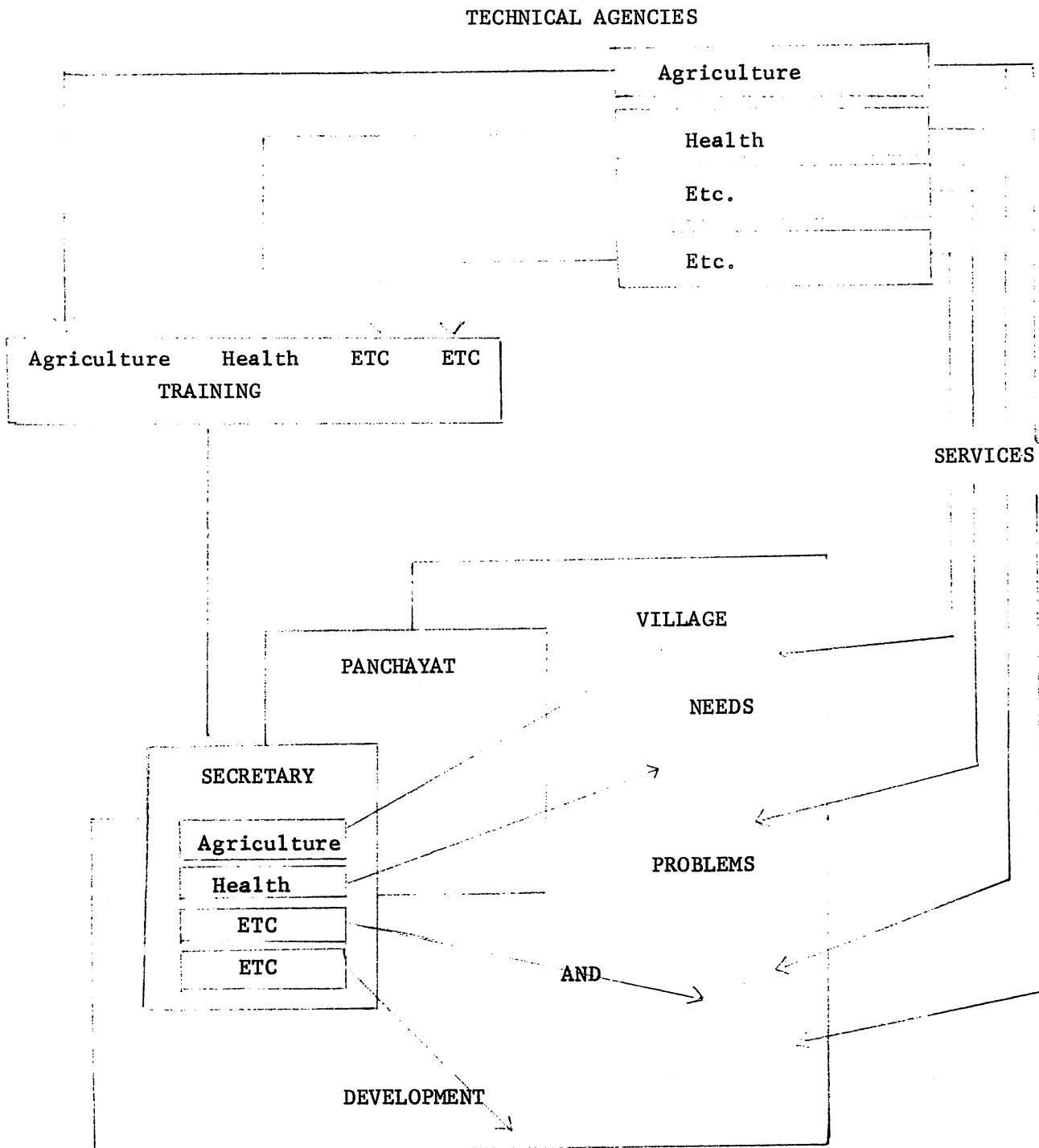
2) how will he effectively plan the use of his time in fulfilling all these functions?

3) what will he need to know and what will he need to do in these various technical fields?

It has been usual for trainees to be taught (usually lectured about) the "basic content or subjects of ..." Agriculture, Health, etc. It is clear from what we have been told from many quarters that though such matters have been "covered", the "delivery of service" at the village level has been ineffective - even, we are told, ineffective when workers are technicians within one speciality only.* / How, then, could and should a multi-purpose worker operate?

*/"Given this situation the complete removal of field staff would not significantly affect the development of the districts."

If we list all the activities of all the multi-purposes as each technical agency currently thinks about them, the list is overwhelming. Consequently the range and length of training becomes unworkable as a practical proposition. Given the status, proposed salary, career prospects, educational background and conditions of work in the villages, the ability of the multi-purpose worker to perform adequately is highly unlikely, even if the most extensive training could be provided. Diagrammatically the situation might be expressed thus:



PRESENT SITUATION

The relationship between the Village Secretary and the field service agents, JTAs, Health Workers, etc. would need to be worked out effectively. Discussions began in this direction.

However, in the light of our thinking regarding the overwhelming range of tasks and the problems posed for training, our first modification of the Secretary's role was to see him as an "enabler". This meant that he was to know about what might be available in terms of technical services, help interest the village in such matters and motivate them to want such activities, thus paving the way for and making arrangements for technical inputs into the village. He would also have to keep up with the changes in techniques and programmes in the technical agencies. Such a role would lighten the training programme but still would leave the Secretary with many activities and responsibilities. (Leaving aside the question of whether the technical agencies could in fact provide service whenever the Secretary let them know the village was ready), even this enabling role soon seemed to us unsatisfactory. This became particularly obvious when we began to think about how the Secretary would perform his planning and coordinating responsibilities. How would he set about finding out about the present conditions of Agriculture, Health, etc., what resources the village might provide in this regard, and what might be requested or was available from outside? Wouldn't farmers in the village be more knowledgeable than he in agriculture? Wouldn't whoever cared for the sick, the injured and the pregnant women know more about health conditions, and so on?

Such questions have led us to a different approach:

How might it be if:

1) Those who were particularly able and willing in their own daily occupations were organised into "task groups" or "resource committees" (or whatever name is appropriate) responsible for considering present conditions and future possibilities, and what was happening as new programmes were formulated from the technical agencies?

2) These task groups would be appointed by, and responsible to, the Panchayat itself - possibly with a Member as chairman or convenor and would report at Panchayat meetings and annually at the village assembly?

3) These task groups consisting of villagers would potentially be more on-going, and accumulators of information and wisdom of local conditions than the Secretary, whose career might take him elsewhere, or the Pradhan Panch who is always likely to change at elections.

4) It would be the Secretary's role in such a situation to involve himself in the administrative and social task of servicing the groups and encouraging their vitality, leaving the technical aspects to those whose everyday work involved them in these anyway.

5) The training of the Secretary could then concentrate much more on the human relations and planning aspects of his work. The task groups would be actively involved, with his guidance, in the collecting of information and deliberating on what could be done and what they thought most desirable, thus contributing their section of a village plan.

6) Training in the technical areas instead of being piled on to the Secretary would be concentrated upon members of the task group; a member of the task group would be officially nominated as the trainee sent by the village and responsible for using his training through the task group to all the villagers.

7) Technicians would also have the task groups as their target population and this would facilitate the spread of technical inputs, which apparently is not always the case.* /

Diagrammatically this suggested approach might look like this:

(See page 5)

SUGGESTED SITUATION

Such an arrangement has many other advantages, the chief of which is that village people are actively engaged in the planning process, technical training, the disseminating of information and techniques - all of which is participation of the best kind (both for themselves and others) and it also will effectively strengthen the Panchayat at the village level by differentiating tasks and creating a formal structure within which they are to be carried out, and through which planning and services from down-up and up-down can be channelled.

The implications are many:

1) The "task group" structure should be tried out in few Panchayats to begin with. This will involve a community development approach.

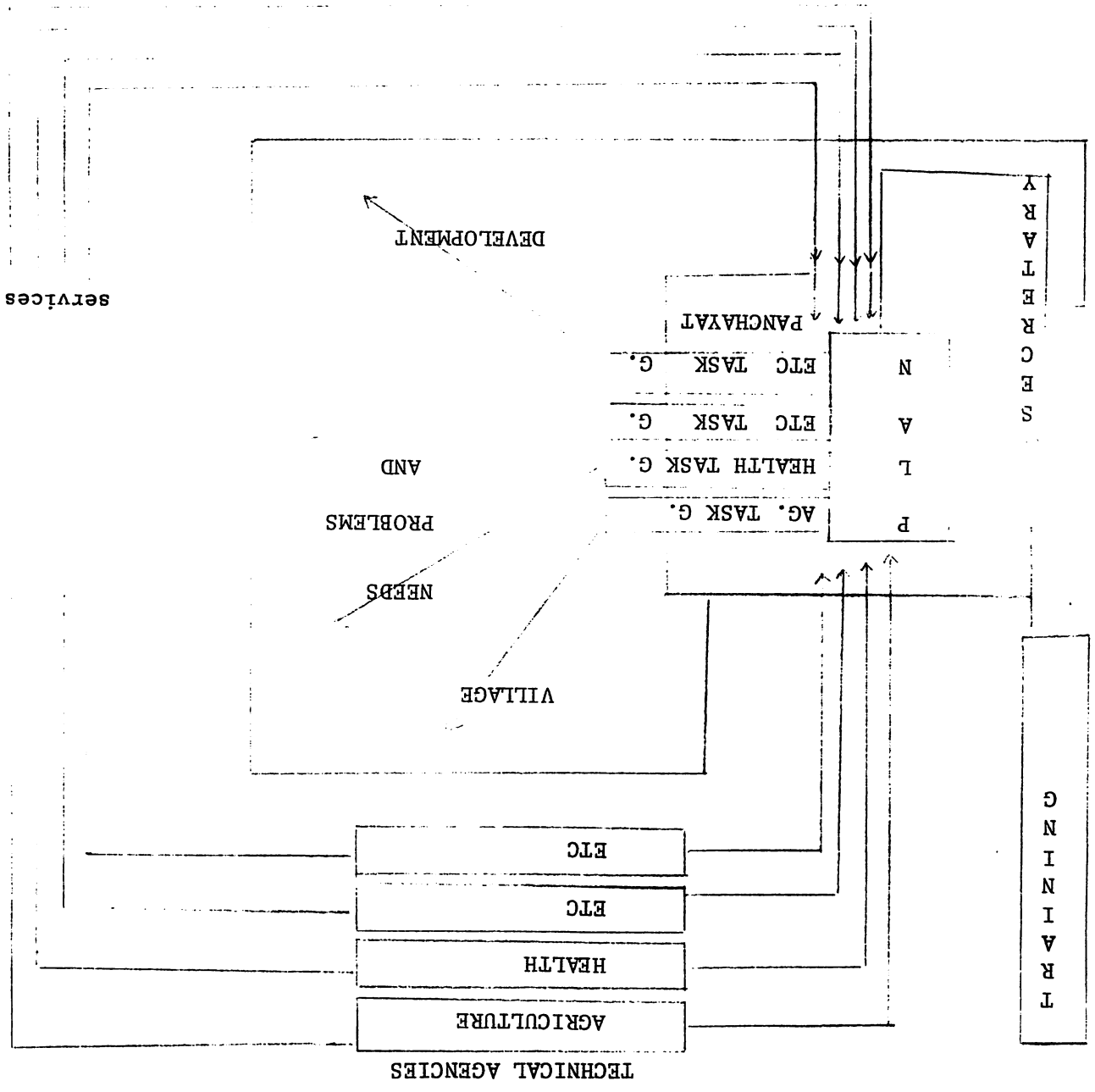
2) A detailed plan and exercise in technical collaboration should be worked out with the interested technical agencies.

etc., etc.

For example, in Agriculture:

a) For an experimental period could a few JTAs be linked with a few of our trainee secretaries in the selected "task group" villages?

b) How to set up the task group would be worked out jointly.



Diagrammatically this suggested approach might look like this:

- c) The terms of reference of the task group would be drawn up.
- d) How to get a "survey yourself" activity in agriculture started would be undertaken, leading to a village plan for agriculture.
- e) The manner in which effective relationships between Secretary, JTAs and task group members should be set up and managed would be worked out.
- f) The training components for Secretaries, JTAs and task group members would be identified.

etc., etc.

The result of such an experimental approach tied in with the present M.T.S. work would lead to reaping the fruits of a practical demonstration and the lessons learned from it, in terms of providing material for the reworking of social policy and its implications for technical inputs, and would most certainly inform and enrich the whole future of training in this very important area.