

Action Research for Successful Implementation of Social Sector Programmes and Policies (On the basis of the Karaikhowa-Sakalani project of Jal Jeevan Mission)

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ABSTRACT:

Both the State and the Central Govt. in India are running several social sector policies . Some of them have been continuing for several years but have failed to fulfill the target. The main problem associated with these policies is that modalities of these policies are same for all the regions but every region has some area-specific problems which put obstacles in the proper implementation of the policies. In order to ensure proper implementation of the policies while keeping the area –specific problems at their minimum, action research methodology can be followed. Action research provides a valuable methodology for action based collaborative investigation. The Public Health Engineering Department of the Govt. of Assam has entrusted the Dept. of Economics, DCB Girls' College with the responsibility of doing action research in Karaikhowa-Sakalani project area and thereby to find and remove all the obstacles with the participation of the stakeholders so that all the households get safe drinking water supplied by PHE as per the rules of JJM. The Karaikhowa- Sakalani project covers total 337no. of households of which 119 no. of households have been selected randomly for the survey. On the basis of the result of the survey, the action research has been undertaken with the active participation of all the stakeholders . The methodology followed is a mixture of participatory action research and practical action research . This paper is based on the experience of this research project. So, our study is based on the primary data.

Key Word: social sector, action research, randomly ,participatory action research, JJM

Introduction :

In our country several schemes, policies and mission have been running in social sector, some of them are state's and some are centre's. The scope of such policies is very wide in India due to the existence of poverty, inequality, illiteracy and unemployment. Some policies that are running today are mere repetition of earlier policies with little differences. This is due to the inability of the Govt. to achieve the target in time. But given the diversity and complexity of the country, it is very difficult to ensure effective implementation of the policies. Moreover, Govt . policies are formulated assuming that one size will fit all .So, area- specific problems are not brought into consideration. But it is the area- specific problems that put obstacles to proper implementation of the policies which remain outside the purview of the implementers. There is no clear mechanism for monitoring policy implementation and to change it accordingly if need for modification arises .Our existing system does not involve any kind of research by the immediate implementers leading to the effective implementation of policies. Due to the extreme fragmentation in the structure of the policies, research and action both must move together . The existing system is to collect data , analyse and arrive at the conclusion. This is done by the concerned dept. or a third party employed by the

Govt. So, only the situation is judged and what has been noticed is recorded. If any action is taken it will be after a long official procedure. So, policies fail to solve problems for which they are formulated. In this respect action research can be considered. Action research refers to research carried out during the course of an activity to improve the method, or approach used so that goals can be achieved. In this kind of research, the researcher will have to be engaged in multiple cycles of observation, reflection and action before arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. Action research is of two types-participatory action research and practical action research. In participatory action research members of the community under study become the participants and thereby perform both the roles of researcher and respondents. It is their experience that forms the basis of investigation. In case of practical action research the focus is on the way of conducting action research. It is designed in such a way that the specific problem under study gets solved. In simple words, action research conducts research and takes action at the same time. Today's pressing political, social, environmental and economic crises urgently ask for effective policy responses. A policy will be effective if it is verified and improved accordingly. Of course, the capacity to respond to the existing situation and take necessary action should not be constrained by the fragmented administrative structure. In this study we will concentrate on drinking water mission from the perspective of action research.

Objective:

The objective our study is to examine the effectiveness of action research towards successful implementation of programmes and missions.

Statement of the problem:

In 1972 the Central Government started the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme to assist the states in providing rural water supply. In 2009 it was renamed as the National Rural Drinking Water Programme. In 2013, the NRDWP guidelines were updated. The focus then came to piped water supply, increasing household tap connections besides raising the norms of drinking water supply. It wants to enable all households to have access to and use safe and adequate drinking water within premises to the extent possible. It wants to achieve the goal by 2030. Then in 2019 Govt. restructured NRDWP into Jal Jeevan Mission to provide functional household tap connection to every rural household. Under Jal Jeevan Mission, one of the works is retrofitting of completed and ongoing piped water supply schemes to provide FHTC and raise the service level. Karaikhowa -Sakalani project covers a part of Dakhin Parbatia Gaon Panchayat of Jorhat, Assam. There are 337 households in the project area where the PHE Department of the Govt. of Assam has to provide tap water connection to every household. It is 18km away from Jorhat town. Most of the residents of the area are tea garden labourers. As retrofitting is permitted under the JJM, so, PHE office, Jorhat started it in 2019 to ensure household tap water connection to all. As per the MoU signed with the JJM, Assam, Dept. of Economics, DCB Girls' College was given the responsibility to improve the efficiency of the Karaikhowa-Sakalani project of Jal Jeevan Mission.

Hypothesis:

Action research improves the efficiency of implementation of policies and thereby leads to its success.

Methodology:

It is a primary data-based analytical study. We adopted a methodology which was a mixture of both participatory and practical action research. Besides the villagers, PHE officials, GP members, SHG members and students of the Dept. of Economics were co-researchers. Our approach was practical as we wanted to ensure availability of piped water to all the households through household connection.

Analysis:

Field-survey is the foremost requirement for doing an action research. So, The Dept. of Economics, DCB Girls' College (to which this writer belongs) conducted a field survey in Karaikhowa-Sakalani project area (PHE Dept., Assam Govt.). On the very first day of the survey undertaken in that area it was found that the village did not have 369 households as was told by the PHE, Jorhat at the time of preparing MoU with JJM, Assam. The size of the population was 337. Out of these 337 no. of households, 119 no. of households (35.31%) were selected randomly for direct personal enquiry. The survey was done in the following habitations-

- Hospital line
- Tekela line
- Staff line
- Pabna Basti
- Karaikhowa
- Dakhin parbatia line

Though Dakhin Parbatia was not mentioned by the PHE Jorhat and there was no line named Dakhin Parbatia, yet the pump operator named a line as Dakhin Parbatia where water supply was going on under the same project so, we had to accept the same name. It ,of course, proved the ignorance of Gram Mitra or Pump Operator.

Table1
Findings of The Survey

Name of the line	Total no. of household surveyed	Pipes installed	Functioning piped water connection	Pipes not installed	Broken pipes	Does not want tape connection
Hospital line	24	23	08	01	01	
Staff line	21	10	05	11	-	
Tekela Line	30	28	27	02	01	01
Pabna basti	14	09	01			
Koraikhowa	20	03	0	17	03	
Dakhin Parbattia	10	08	03			02
Total	119		36			

Action Research -Step 1

- As a first step towards action research, data verification was done. It was found that data and information supplied by PHE, Jorhat did not match with the results of the survey.
- The house connection as available on the Govt. web site(01/04/2023) and provided by PHE, Jorhat did not match with the data collected from the field. For example, while the data provided by the PHE office showed that all the households of Tekela Line(51), Staff line(37),Pabna basti(88),Hospital line(37),Karaikhowa(124) got tap water connection , yet the survey did not find 100 percentage connection.
- It was found that only 36.97% of the households surveyed have functioning water supply connection. Of course, the quality of filtered water supplied to the households is good. Arsenic –contamination was also not detected.
- When it was asked why wrong data were shown in Govt. web site (MIS data) then the present staff of PHE, Jorhat expressed their ignorance regarding that.
- But the PHE, Jorhat could not reply why they had not informed the higher authority regarding the discrepancy in data. So, it was accepted that the present staff were not ready to take the responsibility of the mistakes done earlier by someone of the Dept.
- So, the first action would be to inform the higher authority about the real situation and to request them to take proper action to increase coverage of connection.

Action Research-Step 2

- In the form of interim report findings of the survey were sent to the Office of the Managing Director ,JJM citing the data discrepancy.
- MD, JJM took the matter seriously and asked PHE , Jorhat to take necessary action.
- Due to this the PHE Department had to install new pipes for household connection in the uncovered area.

- The Dept. of Economics again assessed the new installation and found almost 90 percent completion of the new target .
- Installation of new pipes is considered as the success of our action research.

Action Research-Step 3

- Now the Dept. of Economics has to verify the regularity and quantity of water supply.
- It was found that the water was supplied one time in a day instead of two times and it was not regular. Sometimes unfiltered water was also supplied.
- The PHE, Jorhat was contacted and they were ignorant of it. It was found through observation and interaction that the pump operator sometimes supplied water after 7 am while all the tea garden workers of that area left home before 7am..
- Again, the capacity of the existing water reservoir is 50,000 litres while its capacity should be 74,140 litres for supplying water to 337 families. In order to make up the shortage sometimes some households are alternatively not supplied water. Again due to the presence of some high areas, it becomes difficult to supply water to those areas.
- The above problems were communicated to the PHE Office, Jorhat. It was felt that due to the ineffective Water Users' Committee, pump operator was not working properly. So, our focus is shifted to water users committee and a meeting was called.
- So, in the third stage we realized the need of an active Water Users' Committee.

Action Research-Step 4

- In the meeting with the residents, it was found that residents were ignorant about the activities of the water users committee. Existing Water Committee did not meet even for once. Among 195 no.s of ladies attending the meeting only 3 ladies had some ideas regarding the responsibility of Water Users' Committee. They did not know whom to approach for any kind of irregularity in supply. Therefore they only complained to the pump operator. But that helpless guy can not do anything. They even complained that till that date no meeting had been called by PHE Jorhat office or Panchayat to inform them about the role of the Water Users' Committee. As most of the residents are tea garden labourers with little academic qualification, so, they themselves were not interested to know about the policy modalities. This area-specific problem was ignored by the PHE, Jorhat. A few residents were not ready to pay for piped water, they wanted it free from the Govt. In this meeting some households complained of pipes not going to their homes.
- Three women expressed their willingness to be active members of the Water users' Committee and to take the responsibility of collecting fees.
- Women in the project area suggested to form a sub committee of women under the existing water users' committee and to entrust the responsibility of collecting fees and convincing people to pay fees. Except 10 women all the other women became ready to pay a minimum fee of Rs.1 per day.
- Everything was communicated to the PHE, Jorhat.

Action Research –Step 5

.Then PHE became compelled to engage a third party, an NGO to ensure smooth functioning of Water Users Committee. A Public meeting was organised where all the stakeholders were present. A new committee was formed. Old committee could not give the reliable proof of one meeting they claimed was held since its formation in 2019. Even if the claim is accepted, during 4 year periods from 2019 to 2023, the committee met only once.

.People were asked to pay only Rs. 1 for a day. It was decided that pump operator would be paid and strictly watched by the Water Users' Committee.

Result and Conclusion:

- Now the scheme is functioning well covering almost 70 percentage of the project area. It proves our hypothesis true. Through action research problems were identified and actions were taken for their solution. Inactive Water Users' Committee was ultimately identified as the main hindrance. PHE was compelled to take the help of an NGO for continuous monitoring of the water Users' Committee and the result is satisfactory. Now the implementers are also happy with the result.
- For remaining 30% area, proposals for two new projects were taken by the PHE and sent to the Higher Authority. For one of them they have been given a plot of land.

- From the research work it was found that if the Water User's Committee, set up in 2019, could have played an active role from the beginning, all the problems would not have arisen. Interestingly water Users' Committee is not a new concept introduced by JJM. Water Users' Committee was a component of previous policy named National Drinking water programme and was entrusted with the responsibility of Operation and Maintenance of Public Water Supply Schemes. If the matter was taken seriously at the time of previous policy then WUS related problems would not have arisen now. It points towards the mismanagement and inefficient implementation of earlier programmes too.
- It is seen that continuous action research has ultimately led to the main problem. Now the project is at the hands of the people. So long as people do not take the responsibility of social sector policies, particularly of water, sanitation and education those will not be successful. Real goals or targets of policies/schemes or mission become casualties when local problems hindering the implementation are ignored and beneficiaries do not feel the need of the particular public goods provided by the Government.
- Most of the policies in India fail to deliver results due to delay in taking action. In this case, on getting the interim report, MD, JJM, Assam immediately took necessary action.

Recommendations:

- As the research is on a real-world issue, any solution derived can be integrated straightway. So, prompt improvements can be expected. Our problems require effective and time consistent solution. The existing system of implementation compels us to continue the same policies in the same way for several years leading to wastage of public money. So, action research will save the wastage of public money.
- Action research has flexibility. Researchers can try alternative strategies if needed. The action research created a sense of ownership among the participants which compels the participants or victims to behave responsibly. This form of research offers a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand and thereby contribute to more practical policy formulation.
- The most pertinent question is who will conduct action research. Obviously, it must be by the ultimate implementing agency-the immediate authority. If there arises the question of integrity and honesty of the concerned implementer then the service of a third party can be hired. Of course, the ultimate implementing agency must coordinate with them.

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