

# **Influence of Administrative and Political Authorities' Decisions on the Construction of Community Development Projects in India**

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## **Abstract:**

Construction of community development projects, particularly in rural areas of India is a challenge. Administrative and political authority decisions play a major role on the construction of these projects. Therefore, the objectives of the investigation are (1) to explore how and to what extent the administrative and political decisions influence the executive agencies at the local level, and (2) to examine the various project parameters that get influenced by such decisions. The investigation was conducted by using the case study of two Community Development Blocks in Odisha State of India and by employing a survey research method. Findings suggest that the decisions influence the construction of projects both positively and negatively. The decisions are found to facilitate funding of projects, administrative and technical approval of projects and build confidence among the contractors and beneficiaries; however concurrently some of the decisions negatively influence the local executive agencies like Block and Village panchayat authorities, technical personnel, design of projects and quality of work, and also engender conflict among the stakeholders, thus influencing the execution of the projects adversely. Besides, the major implications of the negative influences of the administrative and political decisions are setting up of unrealistic target for completion of projects, pressure on spending of funds within unrealistic period of time, poor quality of work, delay in project execution, delay in delivery of projects, poor design of projects, unrealistic estimated project duration, unrealistic project estimate, and conflict in project planning and allocation.

## **Keywords:**

Administrative decisions, Community Development Projects, Construction, Execution, Quality of work, Stakeholders

## **1 Introduction**

In recent years Community Development Programmes have been initiated by the governments both at national level and state (provincial) level of India to undertake different socio-economic welfare and reconstruction programmes. Particularly, their importance in the rural areas has been emphasized. For, example, according to the Planning Commission of India, community development is an attempt to bring about a social and economic transformation of village life through the efforts of the people themselves (Mondal, 2015). Under this community development programmes, a number of construction projects particularly in rural areas of India have been taken up over the years under different schemes. Some of the schemes are Prime Minister's Gramya Sadak Yojna ((PMGSY) (*Prime Minister's Rural Road Plan*), Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY) (*Jawahar Employment Scheme*), Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLAD), Members of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development Scheme (MLALAD), Indira Awas Yojna (IAY), etc. These schemes/programmes are usually

used to create social infrastructure in rural areas of the country. A number of community development construction projects such as road construction in rural areas, building of community centres, and schools, construction of low cost houses, construction of minor irrigation projects, etc., are being taken up under these programs. These programmes/schemes are generally sponsored and financed by the Central Government, and State Governments separately or by both jointly. The implementation and execution of these projects are usually done by the executive agencies such as District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) and Community Development Blocks or Gramya (village) Panchayats (councils at village level) at the local level.

However, the local governments at the Block level and District level remain pivotal in the decision making regarding the planning, sanctioning and execution of these projects. The local political leaders at the District level, Block level and Village panchayat level play a major role in the planning, construction and delivery of the projects. Similarly, the onus of the management, execution and administration of these projects remain with the administrative officers both at the District, and Block level, who essentially work under the policy and advices of the Central Government and State Governments. So, decisions regarding the administrative sanctioning, implementation, execution and completion of the projects rest largely with the administrative authorities and political leaders (executives) at the local, District and State level. Many times it is observed that the fate of a programme or scheme and consequent development construction works depends of the decisions and actions of these administrative authorities and political leaders. For example, according to World Bank (2004), public projects are often found to be of poor quality and remain uncompleted or undelivered undermining the welfare of the people (Banerjee *et al.*, 2007; World Bank, 2007).

Similarly, political leader and bureaucrats are often found to be the two important agents who are responsible for the execution, and delivery of these projects (Rogers, 2014). Besides, according to stakeholders and community, the administrative and political decisions and implementation actions are often taken in isolation without much consultation and concurrence with the stakeholders such as technical personnel and community beneficiaries who have direct stake in these projects, which cause challenges in the execution and completion of the projects in time within the limited resources (Chapman, 2015; Lucas and Pangbourne, 2012). Although, this is one of the critical aspects with regards to the success of construction of community development projects, studies on it are found to be scarce. So, the objectives of the investigation are (1) to explore how and to what extent the administrative and political decisions influence the executive agencies at the local level, and (2) to examine the various project parameters that get influenced by- and implications of such decisions. The study was conducted by using the case study of two Community Development Blocks in Odisha State of India. A survey research method was followed for this purpose. Findings suggest that the important decisions that are usually taken by the administrative and political authorities at the district and local level on priority include decisions relating to project allocation, fund allocation to projects, selection of beneficiaries, and administrative approval of the projects for execution.

However, decisions relating to the use of construction methods and technology, review and renewal of projects, staff allocation and deployment, and completion and delivery of projects receive lower priorities. The decisions influence the construction of projects both positively and negatively. The decisions are found to facilitate funding of projects, administrative and technical approval of projects and build confidence among the contractors and beneficiaries; however concurrently they negatively influence the local executive agencies like Block and Village panchayat authorities, technical personnel, design of projects and quality of work and

also engender conflict among the stakeholders, thus influencing the execution of the projects negatively. Besides, the major implications of the negative influences of the administrative and political decisions are setting up of unrealistic target for completion of projects, pressure on spending of funds, poor quality of work, delay in project execution, delay in delivery of projects, poor design of projects, unrealistic estimated project duration, unrealistic project estimate, and conflict in project planning and allocation.

The paper contributes to understand the implications of political and administrative decisions on the technical personnel, local executive agencies and stakeholders on the construction of community development projects based on which remedial measures can be taken to improve the construction process and alleviate the impediments in the construction of community development projects.

## 2 Research Methodology

### 2.1 Case Study and Profile of Projects

Two community development blocks such as Balipatna (Block 1) and Baliana (Block 2) of Khurda district of Odisha state of India were taken as the case study areas. The investigation was conducted by considering three types of community development projects, such as primary schools, roads and minor irrigation projects in the two mentioned Community Development Blocks of. Table 1 presents the profile of projects in the study areas. The projects constitute construction and repair of 26 primary schools, 18 rural roads, and 11 minor irrigation projects. The estimated duration of the projects varies between 6 and 18 months although projects are usually expected to be completed within one financial year. The projects were mostly funded by either State Government or Central Government. The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) headed by a project director under the district collector is the nodal implementing and supervising authority at the district level and Block Development Offices are the executive agencies at the local level. However, the Zillaprisad (Elected District council) at District level and Panchayat Samiti (elected council at the Community Development Block level) at the local level are the decision making agencies with regards to the planning, implementation and execution of the projects. Also, Gramya Panchyats (elected village level councils) are implementation and executive agencies at the Village panchayat level.

Table 1. Profile of projects

Project characteristics			Total	Estimated project cost (USD) range	Estimated project duration (months)	Executive agency
Type of projects	Block 1	Block 2				
Schools projects	15	11	26	3500-5000	12-18	Community Development Blocks
Roads	11	7	18	3000-4000	6-12	Community Development Blocks
Minor irrigation projects	11	6	5	2500-3500	6-12	Community Development Blocks

Source: Researcher

### 2.2 Survey, Data and Analysis

Project profiles and status of the projects were collected from archival records of the executive agencies located at the block level and through physical survey. A stakeholders' survey was conducted to collect primary data by using pre-tested questionnaires to find out to what extent and how administrative decisions influence the construction projects as well as to explore the parameters that get influenced by such decisions. The survey was administered by employing random sampling process. The stakeholders surveyed include administrative personnel, local leaders, contractors, engineers, school authorities/teachers, NGOs officials, and common citizens of the villages and direct and indirect beneficiaries. The questionnaire include type of administrative and policy decisions, parameters and challenges with respect to project implementation and execution, project parameters influenced by these decisions, roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, parameters relating to finance availability, cost of projects, contractor selection process, beneficiary selection, duration of projects, issues relating to materials, equipment, execution and project management issues, reviewing process, and general challenges encountered in the projects. A sample size of totalling to 160 (90 from Block 1, 70 from Block 2) was used. Besides, informal meetings were conducted by inviting stakeholders and engaging them in discussions to understand the powers, roles and responsibilities of the administrative and political leaders in the projects and their influence thereof on the success or failure of the projects. The stakeholders' discussion and engagement was conducted through semi-structured interviews and informal group discussions.

Quantitative descriptive statistics analysis and Cronbach's alpha test of the data collected were conducted to observe the reliability of the data. An index based on average index method and significance test (t test for  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for 95% confidence level were conducted to observe the relationship among the variables. The index was calculated by considering the weighted average of the perceptions of stakeholders assigned by the respondents on a particular variable in a five-point scale ranging between -2 and +2 (-2 indicating highly negative influence, 0 indicating neutral and +2 indicating highly positive influence) was used to evaluate the perceptive level of influence. The formula used for calculating perception index is given in Equation (Eq.1).

$$\text{Perception index} = \text{PI} = \frac{\sum W_i * N_i}{\sum N_i} \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq. (1)}$$

$N_i$  = number of respondents assigning a particular index value

$w_i$  = index values assigned by respondents.

Followed by descriptive statistics analysis and significance tests were conducted to examine the influence of administrative and political decisions on various project parameters.

### 3 Findings and Discussion

The results were analysed under three aspects to understand the influence of the administrative and political decisions on community development construction projects. The three aspects on which the analyses were made are (1) the important decisions that are taken by administrative and political authorities with regards to community development projects, (2) influence of the decisions on different project parameters and (3) implication of the negative influence of the decisions on various project attributes. Before analysing the data reliability test was conducted by using Chronbach  $\alpha$  and the high Chronbach  $\alpha$  (0.84) indicates that the data is reliable and suitable for analysis.

Table 2 presents the various important decisions that are generally taken by the administrative and political authorities and their relative priorities with regards to community development projects at the District and local Block level. There are about 12 types of decisions that are usually taken. The most important and prioritise decisions are related to project allocation (86.3%), fund allocation to projects (82.0%), selection of beneficiaries (81.4%) and administrative approval of the projects for execution (77.0%). The next set of important decisions are implementation of Government policies (74.2%), selection of contractors (72.3%), use of labour intensive methods of construction (71.2%), and modes of execution of projects (67.1%). However, decisions which receive lower priorities with respect to projects include use of construction methods and technology (64.1%), review and renewal of projects (62.5%), staff allocation and deployment (59.0%), and completion and delivery of projects (57.3%). Thus, it is found that while the authorities are more concerned about taking decisions with regards project allocation, fund allocation and selection of beneficiaries, review and renewal of projects, staff allocation and deployment and completion and delivery of projects are highly undermined.

Table 2. Important decisions taken by administrative and political authorities

Decision	N	Agreed by % of stakeholders	Priority of the decisions
Project allocation	160	86.3	1
Administrative approval of the projects	148	77.0	4
Fund allocation	144	82.0	2
Staff allocation and deployment	151	59.0	11
Implementation of Government policies	155	74.2	5
Completion and delivery of projects	157	57.3	12
Modes of execution	143	67.1	8
Use of construction methods and technology	145	64.1	9
Use of labour intensive methods of construction	146	71.2	7
Selection of beneficiaries	156	81.4	3
Selection of contractors	148	72.3	6
Review and renewal of projects	152	62.5	10

Source: Researcher

Table 3 presents the relative influence of administrative and political decisions on different project parameters. Findings suggest that the decisions have highly positive influence on funding of projects (PI= 1.40), administrative approval (PI= 1.25), and technical approval of projects (PI=1.10). Similarly, estimated cost of projects, estimated duration of projects, beneficiaries and contractors are fairly positively influenced by the decisions. However, on the contrary, the decisions have very high negative influence on local executive agencies (PI= -1.30) and technical personnel (PI= -1.05). Similarly, the decisions also cause conflict among stakeholders (-0.95), fairly negatively influence design (PI=-0.90), quality of work (PI=-0.82) and completion of the projects (PI=-0.75). Thus, it is evident that the administrative and political decisions have both positive and negative influences on important project parameters. In other words, while the decisions facilitate funding of projects, administrative and technical approval of projects and build confidence among the contractors and beneficiaries, they have highly negative influence on the local executive agencies like Block and Village panchayat authorities, technical personnel, design of projects and quality of work. The decisions also engender conflict among the stakeholders, thus influencing the execution of the projects negatively.

Table 3 Relative influence of administrative and political decisions on different project parameters

Parameter	N	Perceptive level of influence (PI)	Standard deviation (SD)
Administrative approval	160	1.25	0.19
Technical approval	155	1.10	0.12
Funding of projects	160	1.40	0.22
Estimated cost	145	0.55	0.06
Estimated duration	155	0.45	0.08
Influence of local executive agencies	154	-1.30	0.24
Influence on contractors	148	0.25	0.05
Influence of beneficiaries	156	0.35	0.04
Influence of completion of projects	156	-0.75	0.26
Design of projects	148	-0.90	0.15
Quality of work	155	-0.82	0.12
Conflict among stakeholders	158	-0.95	0.08
Influence on Technical personnel	152	-1.05	0.05

(Note: Chronbach  $\alpha$ = 0.84,  $p^* < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $p^{**} < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  
\*: one tailed, \*\*: two tailed)

Furthermore, an assessment on the implications of the three most important negative influences revealed that the negative influence on local executive agencies cause unrealistic target for completion of the projects, and pressure on spending the funds allotted within a unrealistic specified period of time ( $p^* < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $p^{**} < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ) (Table 4). This happens in order to comply with the targets set by the State Government and Central Government authorities. Similarly, Table 4 also suggests that the negative influence on technical personnel leads to poor quality of work, delay in delivery of projects, unrealistic estimated project duration, unrealistic project estimate, and poor design of the projects. Such scenarios occur because of the pressure on the technical personnel to comply to the administrative and political decisions, completion of the activities within unrealistic time frame as well as poor communication and coordination among administrative and technical personnel, and moreover, the technical personnel are not adequately consulted while taking decisions with regards to the projects ( $p^* < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $p^{**} < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the other negative influence- conflict among stakeholders' cause delay in project execution and conflict in project allocation and project planning, which also usually adversely influence the project execution ( $p^* < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $p^{**} < 0.05$  for  $\alpha < 0.05$ ). Thus, the major implications of negative influence of administrative and political decisions include setting up of unrealistic target for completion of projects, pressure on spending of funds within unrealistic period of time, poor quality of work, delay in project execution, delay in delivery of projects, poor design of projects, unrealistic estimated project duration, unrealistic project estimate, and conflict in project planning and allocation.

Table 4. Implications of negative influence of the decisions on project attributes

Cause	Implication	T values	P*	P**
Influence of local executive agencies	Unrealistic target for completion of projects	2.7	0.0035	0.007
	Pressure on spending of funds	3.8	0.000095	0.00019
Influence of technical personnel	Poor quality of work	3.1	0.0011	0.0022
	Delay in delivery of projects	4.3	0.0000013	0.0000027
	Poor design of projects	5.6	0.00000005	0.0000001
	Unrealistic estimated project duration	3.9	0.00014	0.00029

	Unrealistic project estimate	2.8	0.0036	0.0073
Conflict among stakeholders	Delay in project execution	5.9	1.77E-08	3.44E-08
	Conflict in project planning and allocation	7.6	3.61E-12	7.23E-12

Source: Researcher

## 4 Conclusion and Further Research

Decision-making is an important aspect in the construction of community development projects in India. Usually the major decisions regarding to the policy, planning and execution of projects are taken up by the administrative and political authorities at different level such as at the Central Government, State Government, District and Block levels. The decisions have profound impact on the local executive agency level, which influence the construction of the projects. Although, understandably this forms a significant aspect of community development and construction management of community development projects, much study has not been conducted to understand the various challenges, parameters influenced by the decisions and implication of the decisions on different project attributes. Therefore, the objectives of the paper were to explore how and to what extent the administrative and political decisions influence the executive agencies at the local level, and to examine the various project parameters that get influenced by such decisions. A survey research method and case study approach were resorted to realise the aims of the study. The study revealed that of the 12 types of decisions are usually taken by the administrative and political authorities at the district and local level decisions relating to project allocation, fund allocation to projects, selection of beneficiaries, and administrative approval of the projects for execution are the prioritised ones. However, decisions relating to the use of construction methods and technology, review and renewal of projects, staff allocation and deployment, and completion and delivery of projects receive lower priorities.

The administrative and political decisions have both positive and negative influences on the project parameters. Findings suggest that decisions facilitate funding of projects, administrative and technical approval of projects and build confidence among the contractors and beneficiaries; however concurrently they have highly negative influence on the local executive agencies like Block and Village panchayat authorities, technical personnel, design of projects and quality of work and also engender conflict among the stakeholders, thus influencing the execution of the projects negatively. Besides, it is also found that the negative influences have profound implication on various project attributes. The major implications of negative influence of the administrative and political decisions are setting up of unrealistic target for completion of projects, pressure on spending of funds, poor quality of work, delay in project execution, delay in delivery of projects, poor design of projects, unrealistic estimated project duration, unrealistic project estimate, and conflict in project planning and allocation.

The paper contributes to understand the implications of political and administrative decisions on the technical personnel, local executive agencies and stakeholders on the construction of community development projects. The outcomes of the study are relevant to understand the challenges and issues that are caused by the administrative and political decisions and their impact on the construction projects so that remedial measures can be taken up by the concerned authorities to improve the process of construction- and delivery of the community development projects in India.

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