

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Development practitioners: invisible leaders of change.

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Development practitioners are the channels through which one can reach the grass root level people. They play a crucial role in changing the lifestyle of the people. They act as change agents, inventing new approaches and creating new solutions to change society for the better. Today they have to practice development management with a professional approach. There are many challenges in front of them so they have to be competent to face those challenges and are required to be indigenously trained. The present study aimed at studying the perceptions of the development practitioners regarding various aspects of development practice through a survey method using purposive sampling method delimiting it to Gujarat state only. The findings revealed that the development practitioners held various meanings for development term. The areas like literacy, health, poverty alleviation, gender empowerment, water and sanitation were perceived as priority areas of most concern for development. They perceived that the competencies like communication skills, ability to lead the group, ability to work with the team, problem solving ability, confidence in carrying out development work as well as participatory approach, development support communication approach and localized approach were perceived to a great extent as a basis for planning development programs by the development practitioners.

**Keywords:** development practitioners, areas of concern, approaches, competencies, challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

Development is the goal of every nation on the globe and various strategies are have been/are being planned to achieve development encompassing all spheres of life – political, economic, social and spiritual. Today it is more than ever the common goal of mankind. Its purpose is to build an enabling environment so that people can enjoy a long, healthy and creative life.

Since development is viewed as social change, Rogers (1976), an influential scholar described development as “a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment” (cited in Murthy, 2006).

Development has become global “civil religion” during the past more than 40 years – a battle cry for all nations – rich or poor, strong or weak. It is a complex revolutionary process – more a process of social change

rather than merely generation and accumulation of economic resources. Development thinking has evolved into a broad spectrum realization that it must move beyond economic growth to include important social goals – reduced poverty, improved quality of life, and enhanced opportunities for better education and health and more.

Development has been defined in various ways. Indian Institute of Mass Communication defined development as – the removal of poverty, the lessening of disparity between regions and classes, the building up of technological infrastructure, disparity between regions and classes, the building up of technological infrastructure, modernization of society through shedding feudalism, tribalism and superstitions, and the gradual achievement of economic self-reliance” (cited in Joshi, 2001).

Development management is more about dealing with the messiness of intervening for change, with the

importance of feelings and intuitions, with uncertainty and risk taking, with handling conflict and diversity with mutual respect, with what is not said and is not visible that it is about establishing concrete facts and objectively verifiable indicators, quantifying achievements or seeking to put reality, into neat packages labeled 'projects'. It aims at creating responsible, self-reliant and resource based communities capable for developing and implementing activities in a manner consistent with the principles of people empowerment where the development practitioners play a vital role.

Development practitioners are the channels through which one can reach the grass root level people. They play a crucial role in changing the lifestyle of the people. They act as change agents, inventing new approaches and creating new solutions to change society for the better. It is very difficult to bring about a social change than any other kind of change because it involves new orientation to the habits, customs, traditions, values and motivation of individuals and alternations in several social institutions. The development practitioners are the key persons who can bring change in attitudes and behavior of the people.

Today they have to practice development management with a professional approach. There are many challenges in front of them so they have to be competent to face those challenges and are required to be indigenously trained. They are expected to be professional, experienced in planning, implementing and managing development programmes at various levels. Today their work is not just restricted to planning, executing and supervising development programmes, but they are required to document the reports. Thus, they are required to have various competencies to solve the problems of the people and face the challenges that come in the way. They are expected to play facilitative role in development. They are motivated by the belief that their skills are best used to help overcome a wide range of critical social problems, from literacy, health, poverty and physical abuse of women to hunger and population problems. Their role has become far more challenging and complicated now. They have no aversions to long hours on the job, uncomfortable and inconvenience. Thus social development and social consciousness is certainly a rising priority for career choices.

### Statement of the problem

In the light of the above discussion, the following questions aroused:

- How development practitioners perceive development in the present context?
- What problems and challenges do they face in practicing development?
- What are the thrust areas in practicing development?
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- What are the competencies required by development practitioners to carry out development work?
- Are development practitioners able to utilize the present indicators and approaches for development?

To seek answers to these questions it was decided to take up a study on the perceptions of development practitioners regarding the selected aspects of development.

### Objectives of the study

1. To study the perceptions of development practitioners regarding the following selected aspects of development:
  - a. Concept of development
  - b. Priority areas of concern for development
  - c. Approaches to development
  - d. Competencies required by development practitioners
  - e. Problems in development work.
  - f. Challenges for development practitioners in relation to their age, sex, educational qualification, type of development organization, length of experience in development work.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Sample of the study

The sample of the study comprised of eighty development practitioners from government, non-government organizations and corporate sector. Population of development practitioners is relatively smaller, so it was decided to use the purposive sampling technique for the selection of the sample.

#### Construction of research tool

A structured questionnaire was prepared to study the perceptions of the development practitioners regarding the selected aspects of development. The questionnaire consisted of equal appearing interval scale. The investigator personally collected the data by contacting the development practitioners of Gujarat at an International Conference on Education for Sustainable Development held at Center for Environment Education (CEE), Ahmedabad. The organizations from which data were collected were as followed:

- ☆ Government Organizations:
- ☆ Non Government Organizations:
- ☆ Corporate Sectors:

### MAJOR FINDINGS

#### Profile of the development practitioners (table 1)

1. Majority of the development practitioners were

**Table 1:** Variable Wise Percentage Distribution of Development Practitioners = 80

Sr. No.	Variables	Percentage
1.	Age group: Younger	62.50
	Older	37.50
2.	Sex: Male	55.00
	Female	45.00
3.	Educational Qualification: Average level	32.50
	High level	67.50
4.	Type of Development Organization: Government	26.25
	Non-Government	50.00
	Corporate	23.75
5.	Length of experience in development work: Less	48.75
	Moderate	30.00
	More	21.25

younger.

2. Majority of the development practitioners were males.
3. Majority of the development practitioners had higher level of educational qualification.
4. Majority of the development practitioners belonged to non – government organizations
5. Nearly fifty percent of the development practitioners had less experience in development work.

#### Other characteristics

6. High majority of the development practitioners were married.
7. Nearly forty percent of the development practitioners were coordinators and consultants.
8. Majority of the development practitioners underwent specialized training for working as development practitioners.
9. Family members of high majority of the development practitioners were not involved in development work.
10. Majority of the development practitioners considered health, water and sanitation as the main focus areas of development programmes.
11. High majority of the development practitioners had women as their target group.
12. Seventy percent of the development practitioners worked in rural areas.
13. Majority of the development practitioners were involved in report writing and documentation of development work in their organization.
14. Nearly sixty percent of the development practitioners reported that stated government provided funds for their projects.

#### Meanings of development perceived to a great extent by the development practitioners

15. The following meanings for development were perceived by the development practitioners to a great

extent:

- Building up an enabling environment for people to enjoy a long, healthy and creative life
- Fulfilling basic needs of people
- Improving people's lifestyles through better education
- Developing positive attitudes and values of life amongst people

#### Meanings of development perceived to some extent by the development practitioners

15. The following meanings for development were perceived by the development practitioners to some extent:

- Economic growth / increase in per capita income
- Change in popular attitudes (such as attitudes towards gender, poor people, minorities, etc.)
- Improving human relations in society
- Sustained growth of individuals to cope with the continuous changes
- Removal of poverty

#### Priority areas of most concern for development as perceived by the development practitioners

16. The priority areas of more concern for development perceived by the development practitioners were:

- Literacy
- Health education
- Poverty alleviation
- Gender empowerment
- Water and sanitation

**Table 2:** Percentages and Item Wise Intensity Indices Showing Perceptions of Development Practitioners Regarding Competencies Required in their Work N = 80

Sr. No.	Competencies	GE (%)	SE (%)	LE (%)	I.I.
1.	Communication skills	91.25	6.25	2.50	2.89
2.	Ability to lead the group	90.00	8.75	1.25	2.89
3.	Ability to work with the team	87.50	11.25	1.25	2.86
4.	Problem solving ability	86.25	10.00	3.75	2.83
5.	Confidence in carrying out development work	81.25	16.25	2.50	2.79
6.	Ability to judge the situation for immediate action	78.75	21.25	-	2.79
7.	Ability to analyze the situation	76.25	23.75	-	2.76
8.	Organizational and planning skills	80.00	15.00	5.00	2.75
9.	Tactful handling of critical situations in development work	77.50	18.75	3.75	2.74
10.	Commitment for the cause, dedication to the work and sensitivity to stakeholders.	76.25	21.25	2.50	2.74
11.	Futuristic vision for development	76.25	20.00	3.75	2.73
12.	Ability to take initiative for development work	76.25	18.75	5.00	2.71
13.	Ability to create work culture where each member in team can find his/her own niche and give their best.	73.25	22.50	3.75	2.70
14.	Ability to evaluate development programme	71.25	23.75	5.00	2.66
15.	Managerial skills	70.00	26.25	3.75	2.66
16.	Skill to create learning environment.	65.00	35.00	-	2.65
17.	Ability to mobilize resources for development programme.	67.50	28.75	3.75	2.64
18.	Flexibility to adjust to changes required in development.	66.25	30.00	3.75	2.63
19.	Ability to resolve conflicts	65.00	32.50	2.50	2.63
20.	Documentation skills	67.50	26.25	6.25	2.61
21.	Ability of networking at various levels.	65.00	31.25	3.75	2.61
22.	Alertness in identifying the needs and problems of community	65.00	31.25	3.75	2.61
23.	Ability to cope with stress / pressure in development programme	68.75	22.50	8.75	2.60
24.	Ability to generate human resources in development programme	67.50	25.00	7.50	2.60
25.	Persuasive skills	63.75	32.50	3.75	2.60
26.	Managing development practice related information.	61.25	32.50	6.25	2.55
27.	Indepth knowledge and expertise of subject matter.	73.75	6.25	20.00	2.54
28.	Ability to monitor development programme	58.75	36.25	5.00	2.54
29.	Ability to judge and keep right balance of physical targets and desirable developmental process.	56.25	35.00	8.75	2.48
30.	Ability to utilize non-human resources in development programme.	52.50	37.50	10.00	2.42
31.	Indepth knowledge and expertise of development process.	65.00	7.50	27.50	2.38
32.	Indepth knowledge and expertise of Human psychology / relations.	60.00	8.75	31.25	2.29

### Priority areas of less concern for development as perceived by the development practitioners

17. The priority areas of more concern for development perceived by the development practitioners were:

- Personality development
- Social forestry
- Spiritual development
- Political empowerment

### Competencies required in development work as perceived by the development practitioners to a great extent (Table 2)

18. The following were the competencies required

for carrying out development work perceived to a great extent by the development practitioners:

- Communication skills
- Ability to lead the group
- Ability to work with the team
- Problem solving ability
- Confidence in carrying out development work

### Competencies required in development work as perceived by the development practitioners to some extent

19. The following were the competencies required for carrying out development work perceived to some extent by the development practitioners:

- Managing development practice related information

**Table 3:** Percentages and Item Wise Intensity Indices Showing Perceptions of Development Practitioners Regarding Approaches to be used as Basis for Planning Development Programmes, N = 80

Sr. No.	Approaches	GE (%)	SE (%)	LE (%)	I.I.
1.	Participatory approach which focuses on involvement of target group in all stages of the development process.	83.75	13.75	2.20	2.81
2.	Development support communication approach which stresses on grass root level development and participating in using small media as support in communication.	77.50	18.75	3.75	2.74
3.	Localized approach which stresses on use of local resources to fulfill local needs.	77.50	16.25	6.25	2.71
4.	Multidimensional approach which focuses on multiple concept for development rather than focusing on one single issue.	65.00	30.00	5.00	2.59
5.	Diffusion of Innovation which focuses on assessing the needs of target group and help people to fulfill their needs by adoption of innovations.	61.25	36.25	2.50	2.58
6.	Mass media and modernization approach which stresses on use of mass media in adopting the innovations.	48.75	46.25	5.00	2.44
7.	Top down approach which focuses on the programmes and policies planned by higher authorities in government, planning commissions, universities, etc.	30.00	35.00	35.00	1.95
8.	Linear approach which stresses on only one aspect at time.	23.75	47.50	28.75	1.95

- Indepth knowledge and expertise of subject matter
- Ability to monitor development programme
- Ability to judge and keep right balance of physical targets and the desirable developmental process
- Ability to utilize non – human resources in development programme

#### **Development approaches perceived by the development practitioners to a great extent as a basis for planning development programmes (Table 3)**

20. The approaches to be used as a basis for planning development programmes perceived to a great extent by the development practitioners were:

- Participatory approach
- Development support communication approach
- Localized approach

#### **Development approaches perceived by the development practitioners to some extent as a basis for planning development programmes**

21. The approaches to be used as a basis for planning development programmes perceived to some extent by the development practitioners were:

- Multidimensional approach
- Diffusion of innovation approach
- Top down approach
- Linear approach

#### **Problems in development work perceived to some extent by the development practitioners**

22. The problems in development work perceived to some extent by the development practitioners were:

- Existence of poverty in the society
- Existence of illiteracy in the society
- Lack of job security for development practitioner
- People's indifferent attitude towards development work
- People's unawareness about development programme
- Local leader's dominance in development work

#### **Challenges in doing development work perceived to some extent the development practitioners (Table 4)**

23. The challenges perceived to some extent by the development practitioners were:

- Bringing a desirable change in the lives of the people
- Encouraging more and more women to take benefits of development programmes
- Collecting funds for development programmes
- Working with the downtrodden groups
- Planning need based programmes

**Table 4:** Perceptions Regarding Challenges that Development Practitioners face in doing Development Work. **N = 80**

Sr. No.	Challenges	GE (%)	SE (%)	LE (%)	I.I.
1.	Bringing a desirable change in the lives of the people such as improving their health status, educational status, living condition, etc.	51.25	41.25	7.50	2.44
2.	Encouraging more and more women to take benefits of development programme.	50.00	40.00	10.00	2.40
3.	Encouraging people to participate in development programme such as involving them in planning, organizing, implementing programme.	47.50	41.25	11.25	2.38
4.	Collecting funds for development programmes.	43.75	46.25	10.00	2.34
5.	Working with the downtrodden groups such as rural women, farmers, truck drivers, etc.	51.25	30.00	18.75	2.33
6.	Planning need based programmes such as income generation, HIV/AIDS awareness, immunization, literacy, etc.	51.25	30.00	18.75	2.33
7.	Developing better approach for a successful programme.	45.00	40.00	15.00	2.30
8.	Utilizing resources like human, raw materials at optimum level for an effective development programme.	36.25	51.25	12.50	2.24
9.	Working in harsh conditions such as climatic changes rains and natural calamities.	37.50	42.50	20.00	2.17
10.	Using innovative communication strategies involving various media such as fold, multimedia, radio, and TV graphics and so on.	38.75	36.25	25.00	2.14

24. There were no significant differences in the overall perceptions of the development practitioners regarding the problems in development work in relation to their:

- Age
- Sex
- Educational qualification
- Type of development organization
- Length of experience in development work.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study revealed that the development practitioners held various meanings for development term. They perceived that the competencies like communication skills, ability to lead the group, ability to work with the team, problem solving ability, confidence in carrying out development work are required to a great extent.

The findings also revealed that participatory approach, development support communication approach and localized approach were perceived to a great extent as a basis for planning development programmes by the development practitioners. The problems like existence of poverty and illiteracy in the society, lack of job security for the development practitioners, people's lack of awareness about development programmes and local leader's dominance in development work were perceived to be faced by the development practitioners to some extent. They perceived that the challenges like bringing a desirable change in the lives of the people, encouraging more women to take benefits of

development programmes, collecting funds for development programmes, working with the downtrodden groups are faced by the development practitioners to some extent.

It is very encouraging and interesting to note that the development practitioners perceived the challenges and problems to some extent only. In spite of problems and challenges, the development sector is growing as a lucrative career opportunity and young people are opting it as career. Development practice is a diverse and complex field. Today many university graduates forgo the high pay and perks of the corporate world to work in a development sector which is also known as non-for-profit business, where the priority is helping people in need rather than earning big bucks. This shows that the future of development sector is bright with the development practitioners ready to take up challenges and face problems.

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