

The practical activities of Panchayat raj in terms of rural development in India: Operational case of a village in Ladakh

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Abstract: For many years, Indian government has introduced devolution policy called “Panchayat raj system” in remote areas while the role of local governments in rural developments becoming increasingly more important. Based on the villages which are the fundamental unit of local self-government, various activities including those of independent NGOs are going on. In this paper, the current situation of management and problems of those activities are investigated through hearing survey on officials of Panchayat and NGOs in the village Ladakh region, India. Results revealed that the rural developments are managed more adequately when candidates with rich experiences and knowledge of local activities are elected in Panchayat raj. External support communicate with villagers are useful for improving their livelihood and local activities. Common clear target are useful for maintaining the motivation of rural development.

Key words: Rural development, Panchayat raj, Ladakh, Financial support, Human resource.

Introduction

Rural development has a fundamental role for villagers in many countries. Related policies have contributed to the productive activities and life of the people especially at less industrialized area. Development economics stated administrative policies are necessary to implement the improvement of various villagers’ conditions (Maheshwari, 1985). Some villages didn’t get into action of the people and it is therefore, important for governmental sector to take the initiative of the rural development. However, some officials and staffs of governmental sector get involved in corruption without listening to the opinion of villagers. It resulted in the failure of governmental policy operation and decline of the positive feeling for the future.

In India, as a developmental stage, the rate of GDP has maintained around 6.0 percent since 1991 at the beginning of liberalization after the crisis of economy (Ahluwalia, 2002). The government has allocated GDP to administrative investment about 6.0 percent in 1950s and around 10.0 percent since 1970s (Reserve Bank of India, 2012). As a result, the amount of administrative investment increased from 140 billion Rs in 1950-51 to 3,993 billion Rs in 2008-09 at constant price (Fig.1). Total development or plan expenditure of Central Government in 2000-01 accounted 881 billion Rs whereas State Governments allocated 2,083 billion Rs at that time (Machiraju, 2002). Though it is old information about development expenditure, State Government had fatal role for its adequate distribution on public finance.

The trends in serious consideration on local government at administrative sector became popular recently in Japan, and the relationship between central and local government changed by abolishing the assigned functions owing to the revision of Local Autonomy Law (Yamazaki, 2010). In some Asian countries, the devolution policy on environment widely accepted to the people, and the decision making entrusted to the local body in terms of establishment of policies (Tyler, 2006). People participation and consensus building of forest conservation have discussed among experts since 1990s, and the opinion of local people and community members was taken into consideration at forest management (Poffenberger, 2006). However, confined situation confronted though forest owner, forestry staff and some other stakeholders made a great effort on resource management (Konohira, 2010). Though conference for civil participation and call for public comment implemented recently at various sectors, some stakeholders didn’t willing to have motivation by unclear results. On the other hands, grass root organizations played fundamental role for rural development in India, many NGOs conducted actively (Kapoor, 2005). The simple comparison between Japan and India was difficult, and the actual situation of both countries was different from each sector, respectively.

Methods and Objectives

The rural development that fits needs of local people generally seeks for the consideration from macroscopic as well as microscopic aspects. Initial political leaders in India such as Gandhi and Nehru thought the democracy based on the grassroots level of local government (Jodhka, 2002). This local government called “Panchayat” originally implied the five persons “Pamch” and meeting “Yat”, and it was traditional government organization at village (Goodall, 1957). Modern local government in village established at British period, and the government resolution provided for local boards consisting of a large majority of elected non-official members (Mahesh, 2011). Inoue (1998) reviewed the Panchayat raj system both before and after independence in 1947, referred the five year plan, and described the reform of the system with related to revision of the constitution. Oommen and Datta (1995) discussed about the present situation and prospect of revenue and expenditure of Panchayat, and analyzed the taxation system. John (1998) pointed out that the financial

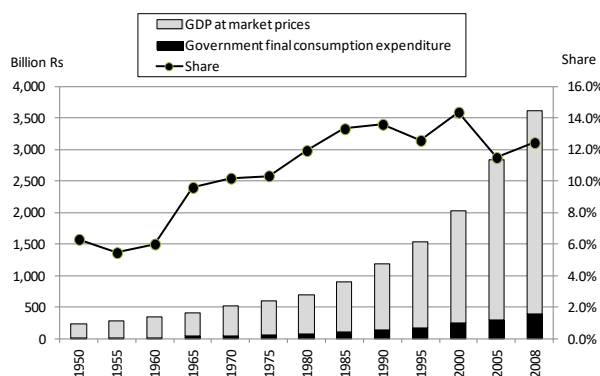


Fig. 1. Trends in GDP and government expenditure, Source: Reserve Bank of India, 2012

resources of the Panchayat raj institutions are necessary to be reinforced as the actual resources are not enough to carry out their responsibilities (John, 1998). In addition to previous studies, Panchayat raj affected the relationship between political leaders and pauper in West Bengal (Mori, 1997), the comparative questionnaire study both

Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu on reliability for Panchayat and tax collection (Sasaki, 2007), and the study about administrative construction, poverty alleviation, and evaluation of Panchayat raj in Uttar Pradesh from the aspect of villagers (Kondo, 2009).

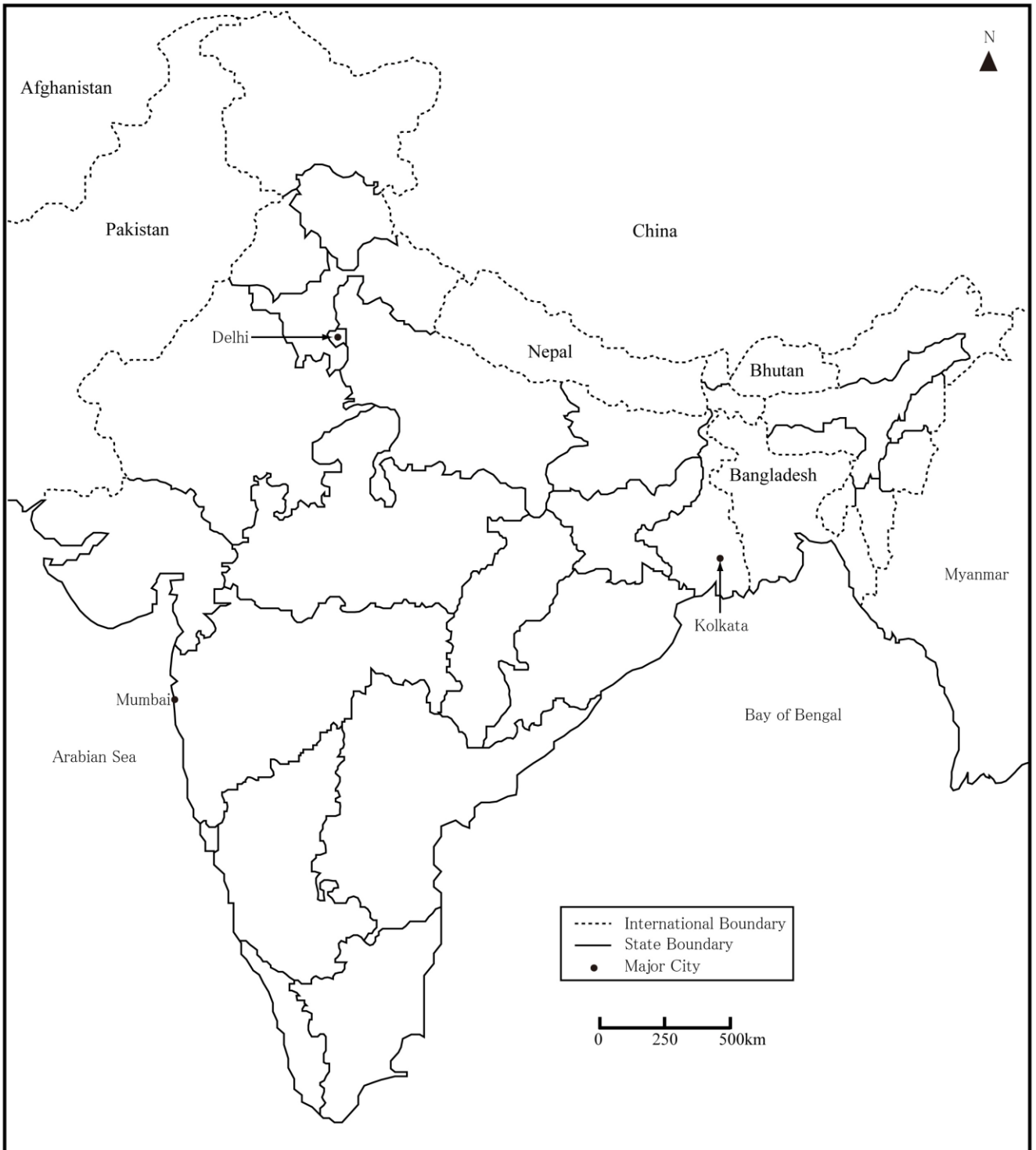


Fig. 2. Location of research site in India, Source: Modify the data of “Map of India”.

Sheth and Sethi (1991) described the historical context of NGO development in India and drew out emerging issues towards a future prospect. There were 1.5 million NGOs in

India, and among these about there were 55 thousand religious institution and many other sports associations, festival groups, and hospitals registered as NGO (Inoue,

2011). Using the Participatory Rural Appraisal, introduced the activities about the common resource management both watershed and forest and resulted in the establishment of sustainable policies. In Ladakh region, Kagawa (2011) analyzed the spread of residential solar cooker by Indian NGO “Julay Ladakh” whose secretariat located in Japan. According to the study, influential effects resulted in the decrease of fertilizer and sales of harvests to the visitors by lecture the villagers.

In this way, some researchers investigated the various activities with related to Panchayat as well as NGO from the grass root level. The activities in India had long history and were rich in contents, consequently they had continued earlier than western countries. However, some local area didn’t construct the infrastructure, education and medical institutions so much, thus many stakeholders are trying to find out the future problems and developmental direction. It is important to indicate the countermeasures by applying local area study that sought the amenity with hearing the opinion of villagers relating to local situation in aging rural area (Suzuki, 2009). The target and method of investigation is needed to understand the actual situation under the various surroundings and villagers. According to the previous studies, researchers focused on macroscopic aspect of Panchayat and case study of NGO activities. Local government and Self Help Group (SHG) conducted the developmental work in rural village, and Panchayat is one of the fundamental elements for local administration. Every organization also made an effort for improving the environment in the village even though different objects and methods applied.

This study established the research site at Domkhar in Ladakh, northern part of India (Fig. 2). The hearing survey conducted from 20th to 24th July 2012 in order to collect the information about activities and problems of Panchayat and SHG in Domkhar. Target of the survey was Sarpanch who is representative of the village Panchayat. The case study of Panchayat and SHG activities implemented only one village, and this paper consequently was written by less information. This study is first step for finding out the future prospects with same scope of villagers even though the information isn’t enough for analyzing.

Characteristics of Panchayat

Administrative structure of India consists of three-layer that are Union, State and Local government, there are two kind of system in urban and rural area among local government (Arora and Goyal, 1996) as shown in Fig.3. Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (2008) described the average number of 10 block and 395 village Panchayats per one district. Former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao submitted the modified 72nd and 73rd Amendment in 1991 (Inoue, 1998). The amendment came into force in 1993 and compulsory provisions were as follows; (a) organization of gram sabhas, (b) creation of a three-tier panchayat raj structure at the zila, block and village levels, (c) all post at all levels (with two exceptions) to be filled by direct elections, (d) the minimum age for contesting elections to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) to be 21 years, (e) indirect elections to the post of chairman at the intermediate and apex tiers, (f) reservation of seats for SC/ST, in panchayats (chairman

and members), in proportion to their population, (g) reservation for women, in panchayats (chairman and members) up to 1/3rd seats, (h) creation of State Elections Commission to conduct elections to PRIs, (i) tenure of PRIs fixed at five years and if dissolved earlier, fresh elections to be held within six months, and (j) in order to review the financial position of the PRIs, each state to set up a State Finance Commission every five years (Arora and Goyal, 1996).

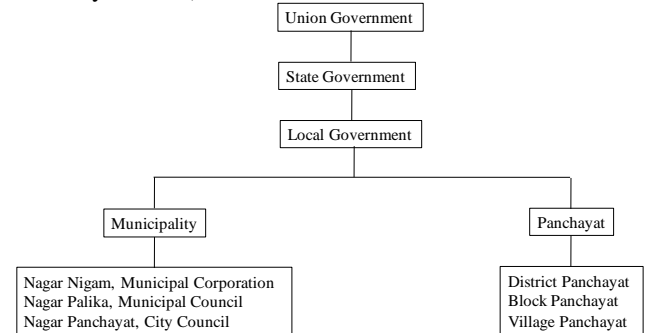


Fig. 3. Administrative structure in India, Source: Arora and Goyal, 1996

The provisions of panchayat contains various item of socio-economic developments both urban and rural area (Table 1). However, the actual role of local government left to state government, and the relationship between local and state had differential phases (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, 2008). Advanced “grassroot” state governments such as Kerala and West Bengal began to change the attitude before independence in 1947, and it resulted in job creation and sufficient basic needs of villagers though the situations differ from each areas especially in Kerala (Isaac and Franke, 2002). Devolution of power to Panchayat by state law had different stage, and there was no information about Jammu & Kashmir state on the table in 2006 (Ministry of Panchayat Raj, 2006).

Operational case study in the village

Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act enacted by the Jammu & Kashmir State in 1989, and the operation of

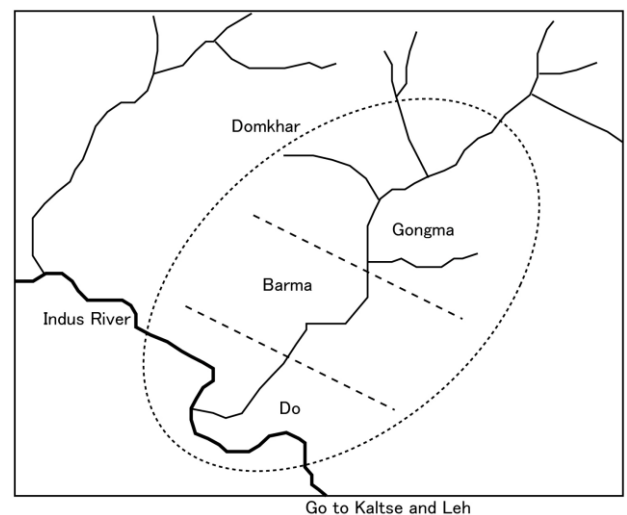


Fig. 4. Schematic map of Domkhar Ladakh, Note: Solid line indicates river and dotted line covers the boundary of village. Each hamlet called Gongma, Barma and Do.

Panchayat in the village didn't function at that time because of insufficient election conducted once in 2001. However, The Government of Jammu & Kashmir conducted Panchayat elections taken up with the Registrar General and from 13th April to 27th June 2011 (Ministry of Panchayat Raj, 2012). In Domkhar, two persons living in upper part elected and five persons nominated in order to become Panch among villagers (Fig. 4). According to Constitutional Amendment, one-third reservation of seats of Panchayats for women, and two persons selected from upper and middle part of Domkhar. Panch's term of office was five years. They don't receive the salary and work voluntary for the moment.

One of the operations conducted by Panchayat was Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty Scheme (MGNREGS) which started as National Rural Employment Guaranty Programme in 2005 (Shariff, 2009). The scheme guaranteed 100 days of wage work on demand, and the seeking of paid employment on the volition of at least one family member from any household in rural works. The competent authority of this scheme is Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. State-wise performance of the MGNREGS analyzed its impact on various streams of agriculture based on the administrative expenditure and wage accruals (Rengasamy and Kumar, 2011), and many studies implemented for evaluation.

Table 1. Jurisdiction matter of Municipality and Panchayat

1. Urban planning including town planning.	1. Agriculture, including agricultural extension.
2. Regulation of land-use and construction of buildings.	2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation.
3. Planning for economic and social development.	3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development.
4. Roads and bridges.	4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry.
5. Water supply for domestic, industrial and commercial purposes.	5. Fisheries.
6. Public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management.	6. Social forestry and farm forestry.
7. Fire services.	7. Minor forest produce.
8. Urban forestry, protection of the environment and promotion of ecological aspects.	8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries.
9. Safeguarding the interests of weaker sections of society, including the handicapped and mentally retarded.	9. Khadi, village and cottage industries.
10. Slum improvement and upgradation.	10. Rural housing.
11. Urban poverty alleviation.	11. Drinking water.
12. Provision of urban amenities and facilities such as parks, gardens, playgrounds.	12. Fuel and fodder.
13. Promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects.	13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication.
14. Burials and burial grounds; cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums.	14. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity.
15. Cattle pounds; prevention of cruelty to animals.	15. Non-conventional energy sources.
16. Vital statistics including registration of births and deaths.	16. Poverty alleviation programme.
17. Public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops and public conveniences.	17. Education, including primary and secondary schools.
18. Regulation of slaughter houses and tanneries.	18. Technical training and vocational education.
	19. Adult and non-formal education.
	20. Libraries.
	21. Cultural activities.
	22. Markets and fairs.
	23. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centres and dispensaries.
	24. Family welfare.
	25. Women and child development.
	26. Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded.
	27. Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
	28. Public distribution system.
	29. Maintenance of community assets.

Source: The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, Article 243W, 243G

As this scheme was a perspective of distribution policy and wages allocated to food expenditure, it resulted in the inflation of food price (Patidar and Gupta, 2012). A job card gave one household after verification and, the scheme guaranteed the wage of 140 Rs per day in Domkhar. Every

job card holders have a bank account in nearby financial institutions and they don't receive the cash through the governmental sector. It means this scheme formally allocate the fund directly to the villagers. The budget divided into two categories of wage and no wage. The

former was wage of villagers and the latter spends for materials such as roads and buildings. Main operational works are rural connectivity, micro-irrigation, flood control, land development and water conservation. According to the hearing survey, Sarpanch always made decision for the allocation of each work, and consulted with Panch of hamlet about that issue. Ladakh Autonomous Hill Council (LAHDC) also has the responsibility for rural development and constructed infrastructure in the village. Local demands for greater autonomy in the field of development LAHDC established in 1995. Implementation and administration with regard to development were transferred from Central and State authorities to a local district level LAHDC. In order to avoid the overlap of the road construction scheme such as “Border Area Development Programme”, Sarpanch discussed with the staff of LAHDC.

Apart from MGNREGS, subsidy of 1.5 lakh Rs gave Sarpanch a free hand to implement the work in 2012 (Fig. 5). This fund made a payment via Joint Bank Account of VLW and Sarpanch open with a Village Level Worker under Block Development Officer (BDO). The expenditure of subsidy applied to improvement of road and establishment of fence avoiding harmful animals requested by villagers. When Sarpanch draw out from bank account, it is necessary to make the document with signature and certification of VLW in order to check the misappropriation of fund. This kind of monetary flow called Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) that is commonly adopted various activities in rural area. It is true delay in payment and incorrect payments are one of common problems under NREGA, and this delay can be from several weeks to sometimes months (Patidar and Gupta, 2012). However, the fund is important revenue for relatively poor villagers.

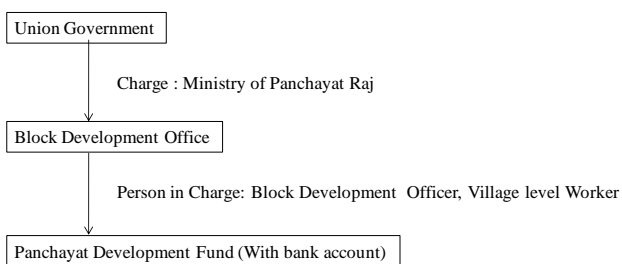


Fig.5. Monetary flow of Panchayat raj, Source: Hearing survey in 2012.

Sarpanch in Domkhar was born in 1982, and he attended the self help group called “Social Welfare Society of Domkhar Gongma”. The group established in 1992 to implement the activities such as conservation of local culture and tradition, support of weak persons, improvement of community welfare. Sarpanch took part in the group in 2003 and took the post of president from 2005 to 2009. The group is acquired “Registered Society” officially and are able to get the subsidy from the government. He also attends the activities of NGO called “Health Environment and Literacy in Himalaya in cooperation with local people” (Health Inc) from Canada. This NGO conducted the supportive work such as

education for handicap children and technical advice for agricultural cultivation. Through the communication with villagers, some are now introducing green house at their cultivation field. The NGO also invited the Canadian coach of ice hockey in winter and teach the skill to the school students. Formerly Sarpanch went to the university and majored history, geography and political science outside of Jammu & Kashmir. After graduated from the university, he learned the journalism for one year at graduate school in Delhi and worked at publishing company related to environmental issues. Based on these kinds of local activities and individual experiences, he conducted the developmental Panchayat work with much confidence in villagers.

Conclusions

In this paper, the rural development analyzed by hearing survey of Panchayat and SHG in Ladakh, India from the aspect of management staff. The results of this paper are as follows;

At first, the operation of MGNREGA goes well in case management person is rich in related knowledge and experience based on local activities. Otherwise, if Sarpanch or Panch elected by ties of obligation in the village, it will have possibility to bios few beneficiaries of the project.

Secondary, the external support was important for villagers to expand the point of view and exchange the information of agriculture. Foreign NGO members inspired Panchayat members and villagers to propose the idea of rural development through the communication.

Thirdly, villagers shared the common target “the pursuit of materialistic richness”, and it resulted in better situation toward rural development. Though the depopulation had been widespread gradually in rural area, relative younger villagers were willing to take action with positive mind. They continued to implement the activities in cooperate with villagers who had enough motivation.

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