



## BASIC DEMOCRACIES SYSTEM

### Introduction

The system of Basic Democracies was introduced in the country in 1959 during Ayub regime. The system was designed to achieve developmental objectives with the maximum participation of people in the development process. Rauf (1970), observed that decentralization of authority and delegation of responsibility to lower levels were the main features of the new system. He considered that the rural development program under this system was to originate in the villages and move up-wards.

A review of the Basic Democracies order (1959) shows that the designers of this system were fully convinced of the fact that the ineffectiveness of our previous rural development programs was mainly attributable to the development agencies' failure in obtaining people's active participation in development activities. Hence, adequate provision to rectify this drawback was made in the new system.

### Objectives

The Basic Democracies order indicated the following objectives of Basic Democracies system:-

1. To use the basic democracies institutions as an electoral college for the election of members of the provincial and National assemblies and the President of the country.
2. To decentralize governmental administration and to widen the scope for people's participation in development activities
3. To try out a new experiment in local government suited to the genius and the needs of people.

### Four Tiers of Basic Democracies System

The four tiers of the Basic Democracies System comprised union council, tehsil council, district council and divisional council. A brief description of each tier is given in the following pages.



1. Union Council

The Union Council was the basic tier of the Basic Democracies System. This council, as compared to other councils, was the closest to the village level. A union council covered a group of villages with a total population of 10,000 to 15,000 people.

The number of members varied from union to union, depending upon the population of the union concerned. A union council, on an average, represented a population of ten thousand, scattered over a number of villages constituting the union.

Each union council had two types of members. The first category was of those members who were elected on adult franchise basis. Each elected member represented a group of 1,000 to 1,500 persons. The second category consisted of nominated non-official members representing special interests. The number of nominated members was not more than one-half of the elected members.

The union council held office for five years. Each union council elected its own chairman. Each union council was provided with a secretary who acted as an advisor to the union council. The secretary was a government official, usually trained in community development, budgeting, taxation etc. The secretary was mainly responsible for arranging the routine office work of the union, in consultation with the chairman. The office of the union council was constructed in a centrally-located village.

The union council was a multi-purpose institution. It covered almost all aspects of rural life such as economic, social, educational etc. The union council, thus, had a number of administrative, civic, police, revenue and development functions. Of all these development functions of the union council included provision and maintenance of public streets and buildings, regulation of sanitation and building construction, recording of vital statistics, agricultural and industrial development.

The union council was empowered to levy taxes and collect fees to finance its development programs. The government grants as well as grants from district council were another source of income of the union council. The union council prepared its budget in the beginning of each financial year to enable it to raise funds and incur expenditure on its activities.

The Union council was supervised by the deputy commissioner in West Pakistan and by the sub-divisional officers in East Pakistan. These officers had the power to countermand council decisions, quash proceedings, suspend execution of resolutions and prohibit actions.

*Handwritten notes:*  
DC (West) & SDO (East)  
(5 years) elected  
20 Non-elected 1/2  
Chairman  
Govt. official - Sec. (adviser)

Non-Compliance Failure

They were also authorized to direct the council to undertake specific tasks. In case of non-compliance, the above officers could appoint another council or person to do the job. The supervising officers could report disagreements. The council could appeal against the actions of the supervising officers to the higher authority.

2. Tehsil Council

The tier above the union council was the tehsil council. This council was composed of the chairmen of the constituent union councils town and union committees. There was no direct election of members to tehsil council. The chairmen of union councils, town and union committees served ex-officio as representative members. The sub-divisional officer or the tehsildar who acted as chairman of this body, appointed not more than an equal number of additional members from the tehsil officers of the nation building departments.

The tehsil council was not charged with the developmental responsibilities. Consequently, it was not authorized to levy any taxes and fees. Primarily, it performed co-ordinative and supervisory functions. Supervision and coordination of the activities of the union councils in the tehsil was the major assignment of this tier. It also provided a forum for the discussion of problems pin-pointed by the unions councils in the tehsil. In addition, it carried out responsibilities assigned to it by the district council from time-to-time

3. District Council

official and non official members.

The third tier was the district council. This tier was next in importance to the Union Council. It consisted of nominated official members selected from the district level officers of the development & non-official members. The non-official members, under no circumstances, were less in number than the nominated official members. At least, one-half were chosen from amongst the chairmen of the Union Councils, town & union committees in the district. The nominated official members serving on it included chairmen of the thesil councils & municipal bodies & Vice-presidents of contonement boards & senior-most officers representing such departments as specified by the Government. The deputy commissioner of the district acted as the chairman of this body & had executive & administrative powers.

The sphere of work of the District Council was divided into two parts. The first part included functions which this body had to under-take compulsorily.

Tehsildar  
or SDO  
Chairman  
(U.C.)

DC  
Chairman  
(U.C.)

1 - UC

1/2 Ten 21  
2 Can VC

Sam MBD

The second part consisted of those functions which could be performed by this body voluntarily. The compulsory functions of the district council included provision & maintenance of primary schools, libraries & reading rooms, provision & maintenance of hospitals & dispensaries, roads & public buildings, regulation of sanitation & traffic; relief measures, Agricultural, industrial & community development.

#### 4. The Divisional Council

At the apex of the tier was the divisional council. It was constituted on the pattern of the district council. The divisional commissioner used to act as its chairman, like the thesil council, it had supervisory & co-ordinative role.

It supervised & coordinated the activities of the district councils in the division. It also made recommendations to the Provincial Government.

#### CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the union & district councils were charged with the responsibility of initiating activities, aiming at an over-all development of the union & districts. In addition to the area of their municipal functions, these councils formulated annual development plans & projects to accelerate economic development in the area of their jurisdiction. To perform their development functions effectively, these bodies divisional councils, on the other hand, were primarily supervising & coordinating bodies. These units were mainly responsible for providing leadership & guidance to the lower in their respective areas.

#### Training Program

The preceding paragraph have clearly shown that the Basic Democracies institutions had a variety of function to perform. The efficient performance of these functions was naturally dependent on the proper understanding of the philosophy, objectives & working of the B.d. system by basic democrats as well as functionaries of the Basic Democracies Department. Consequently, a comprehensive training program was under taken to equip the Basic Democrats & the functionaries of the department, with the necessary technical know-how to run the system efficiently & effectively.

The V-AID Training Institutes at Lala Musa & Tando Jam in West Pakistan were redesignated as Basic Democracies Training Institutes to design & conduct training programs for the officers, chairmen, secretaries & members of various councils. Necessary facilities in the form of staff, equipment etc. were provided for the proper functioning of these institutes.

The training content included subjects like laws of local Government, office procedure, budgeting, taxation, development planning, rural works programming, conciliation courts ordinance, muslim family laws ordinance & public administration. Short courses in rules & regulations, accounting, taxation etc. were also organized for Basic Democracies personnel, at the district, thesil & union levels. The Academy for Rural Development at Peshawar also arranged in service training courses in local Government & in public administration for various categories of higher officers mainly responsible for rural development.

In addition to the regular training programs at the above institutions, due importance was also attached to the holding of occasional seminars, conferences, workshops, conventions, etc.

### Weaknesses of the system

The Basic Democracies System had certain inherent weaknesses which ultimately resulted in its un-popularity & abolishment. Some of the oft-repeated weakness are summarized as under.

1. It was basically a system of restricted democracy. Appointive system was operative at all levels. This created lot of difficulties in the proper functioning of the Basic Democracies institutions.
2. The people were deprived of their right of exercising their vote for election of members of the Provincial & National Assemblies & the President of the country. The intelligentsia, particularly, reached very strongly against this provision in the Basic Democracies order of 1959.
3. The antagonists of the system alleged that a new class of corrupt bureaucrats & unscrupulous politicians flourished under this system.
4. Most of the Basic Democracies were either illiterate or semi-illiterate persons. After assuming their new status, they generally failed to provide necessary leadership & guidance to the rural masses.
5. A number of unpleasant incidents like scuffles, murders etc. occurred during Basic Democracies elections. Consequently rival groups emerged. The rivalry between these groups created hurdles in the realization of taxes as well as execution of development projects in many union councils.



6. Most of the benefits went to the basic democrats & the general condition of the vast majority of the rural population remained miserable. The system was, therefore, abolished in 1971. /