



District Development Plan: Methods and Focus

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Available online at: www.isca.in

Received 18th June 2012, revised 29th June 2012, accepted 2nd July 2012

Abstract

District planning process in India has gained importance through the 74th constitutional act. Unfortunately the entire process of planning process is centrally biased and focused on macro issues. The concept of grass root level planning is a recent addition to the strategies of micro planning for development. It might be considered as a logical extension of the national planning scheme promoted by most countries. The local self-government institutions having an effective strategy for preparing micro planning, with focus on mobilization of target people for effective participation in the process of planning at the grass root level, to attain greater success in the field of rural development.

Key Word: Planning, decentralized planning

Introduction

The concept of grass root level planning is a recent addition to the strategies of micro planning for development. It might be considered as a logical extension of the national planning scheme promoted by most countries. An alternative explanation of its emergence, however, might be traced to the failure of both the national and regional plans to adequately respond to the needs of the people at the grass root level. After the community development programme was launched in 1952, it was realized that without an agency at the village level "which could represent the entire community, assume responsibility and provide the necessary leadership for implementing Development programmes", real progress in rural Development could not take place¹. In India grass-root planning has received much attention after effective enforcement of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of the Indian constitution in relation to empowering of local bodies. Frequently, the conditions necessary for the success of such planning are not well understood as can be seen from several attempts made in this respect in our country. The local self government institutions having an effective strategy for preparing micro planning, with focus on mobilization of target people for effective participation in the process of planning at the grass root level, to attain greater success in the field of rural development. Any strategy of planning should rely on the availability of local resources to attain sustainable development. This paper at the beginning gives details on conceptualization of the new approach called resource based grass root planning approach.

Procedure for Preparation of Draft District Plan:

Decentralized planning is a process of preparing an integrated plan for the region taking into account available natural, human and financial resources and covering the sectoral activities and schemes assigned to the unit at district level and below and

those implemented through local governments in a state. The document that embodies this statement of resources and their allocation for various purposes is known as the decentralized plan².

Aspects of decentralized Planning³: i. Plan to be prepared by the rural and urban local bodies accordance with their own resources for the activities assigned to them and the national/state schemes implemented by them and, ii. Physical integration of the plans of rural and urban local bodies with the elements of the state plan that are physically implemented within the geographic confines of that unit.

Objectives of Decentralized Plan: The objective of decentralized planning is to arrive at an integrated, participatory coordinated idea of development of a local area. An essential step in this direction is to ensure that each panchayat at any level or Municipality is treated as a planning unit and the 'district plan' is built up through consolidation and integration of these plans as well as by considering the development of the district as a whole. It is a two-way interactive exercise, the district being viewed as a convenient local area.

Building a Vision: The vision would be primarily articulated in terms of goals and outcomes and would address basically, three aspects of development, namely, human development indicators, infrastructure development and development in the productive sector. The articulation of a vision is best done in each planning unit, right down to the Gram Panchayat level, stating with respect to each area what the needs and potential are, what the attainable levels are and what the goals to be reached could be. A basic requirement is that the preparation of the vision is not conditioned by schemes and programmes. Visioning exercise is an collective dream about a region being participative nature, it would build a spirit of teamwork.

Building a vision for basic human development indicators would essentially cover all the aspects of human life like health, education, women and child welfare, social justice and availability of basic minimum services. Each Panchayat could propose, in its envisioning exercise, that they will achieve the levels specified for each such aspect within a particular period of time⁴. For instance, in regions which are below the national average in literacy, the first step would be to reach the average level and the next would be to attain the desirable level. Similar envisioning could be undertaken in respect of attainments regarding education, health, water supply and sanitation etc. where attention has to be given in gender integration and downtrodden in the participatory process in order enable them to share their views and opportunities to fulfill their needs through integrated plan. The process of visioning process starts with constituting planning committees in each gram panchayat, each block and district level. The secretary of the GP all sectoral heads of the GP, NGO, CBO, SHG representatives, retired resource persons, and other interested persons. The planning committee would be chaired by the elected head of the respective unit of GP, IP and ZP. At each level visioning exercise to be carried for developing vision, identifying problems and needs. The Ward and Gram Sabhas will have to be involved fully in the preparation of the district vision. Undertaking participative citizen survey is itself a good way of starting the process, through giving every citizen surveyed an opportunity to voice his or her needs and vision. The district vision document should be given wide publicity. There are several means by which DPCs could ensure wide dissemination of the vision, one of them being to progressively cover all Intermediate Panchayats and Gram Panchayats on a block wise basis through a series of workshops for all panchayat leaders for creating awareness. Copies and brief abstract of the same should also be made available to the people.

Data Requirement for Decentralized Planning: While doing envisioning process, a stock-taking exercise has to be conducted for assessing the human condition in the district, and to know the availability of natural, social and financial resources and infrastructure in that region. The data base prepared would be an invaluable resource for the stocktaking exercise. Planning at district level require a careful study of human and natural resources along with field realities for optimum utilization and responsive planning. Varieties of data on physical resources, human and economic aspects are the pre-requisites for preparing an integrated plan for the district. The data required to prepare profile of the areas are discussed below⁵.

Topography: It is much essential to understand the nature of topography, major physical divisions, drainage system, soil type and texture in order to quantify the resource base of a region.

Technology adoption: Level of technology adopted in agriculture and allied sectors are also to be ascertained. Technology status on infrastructure such as road network,

communication facilities, power supply, financial institutions are to be identified.

Agriculture: In order to understand the agriculture status in the region, the data relating to area under cultivation, land use pattern, cropping pattern, crop cycle, nature and quality of soil, sources and adequacy of irrigation, types of farming, ownership of land, size of land holdings and the system of tenure, production and productivity are to be collected at village level.

Resource Inventory: Identification of various resources available in the region like physical and natural resources to be carried out in a proper way. Data on quantum and quality availability of local resources, their utilization level and possibility of usage for various purposes have to be collected and verification to be done through from different sources. The data required for Decentralized planning can be broadly grouped into the following categories:

Natural Resources Database: i. Water resources: type of sources, quantity and quality, water availability and scarcity period etc., ii. soil: type, quality, soil problems, causes, iii. Flora and Fauna: species availability, uses, iv. Land use pattern: different uses of land in the planning region, v. Livestock: nature, quantity, production and productivity, vi. Cropping pattern (season-wise), vii. Climate: variation subject to season and suitability for various options⁶, viii. Rainfall: rainfall rate over a period of time, temperature variations and weather conditions are to be properly assessed.

Participative Citizen Surveys and Manpower Planning: Data regarding demography of the region like male-female ratio, child population, education, employment status, caste system, land holdings, land-man ratio, wage rate, size of agricultural laborers and their migration, etc; to be collected to understand the sociological aspects while formulating a plan. Human resources are as important as physical resources. One of the reasons for the failure is under-utilization of the human resources. Therefore, the plan should clearly state the details of human resources that are available in their region. The planning team has to collect the demographical data like total population, sex, age, educational status, occupational status and skill availability. If the region has inadequate skilled laborers, then, the plan should suggest the ways to train the people to equip them with some suitable skills. If the local region has surplus labour, the plan should find ways to utilize the surplus laborers by providing suitable employment. Information is a basic tool for planning, but information relevant to each area and its population is rarely available. A citizen survey leading to a database for each Gram Panchayat to know more about them, developed in a participative manner, is a desirable pre-requisite for participatory planning⁷. The process of data collection on citizens could be so dealt with that Gram Panchayats see in it, their own empowerment. This also builds a climate of participation even before the actual planning process starts. Data to be collected on the following heads.

Availability of Infrastructure Facilities: In India, still some of the remote areas and villages are not provided with adequate infrastructural facilities, to enable faster development and growth infrastructures are inevitable. Facilities like roads, communication, power supply, marketing channels, etc., are inadequate or low standard in the rural areas. Growth and development of a region or sector directly related with its quantum and quality availability of resources and infrastructure. Hence, the planning team has to collect information about the availability and requirement of infrastructural facilities. It will help the planner to prepare a suitable plan to fill up the gap before initiating implementation of any programme.

Data required on Infrastructure - Economic & Social⁸:

Economic infrastructure: i. Markets: types, availability, needed and location appropriateness, ii. Banks/Financial Institutions: numbers, area of operation, performance, etc., iii. Roads /Transport/Communication/Electricity: available, working, not working, iv. Agri input Centers, Agri. Extn. Officers: seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, Govt./private, v. Veterinary Centers : numbers and services

Social Infrastructure Availability and their Utility: i. Schools/Colleges/Educational Institutions, ii. Hospitals/Health institutions, iii. Community Centre /Libraries/etc, iv. Placement of entertainment centers, v. Drinking water /sanitation.

Trade and Industry: i. Mining and quarrying, ii. Small Scale Industries, iii. Household /Cottage Industries, iv. Handicrafts, v. Forest, Agro based industries, vi. Wholesale/ Retail trade

Availability of Financial Resources and flow: Finance is the first and foremost criteria for putting any plan into action. Success of a plan depends on the financial provisions and its timely flow, whether a short term or long term plan; it is shaped by the fund availability. The decision regarding, when plan is to be started and to be completed, the type of machineries to be used, personnel to be employed and other related matters can be finalized only on the basis of the financial availability⁹. The details on various sources to be ascertained, like i. Grants received from the State/Central Govt., ii. Credit from the banking at financial institutions, iii. Local bodies general fund, iv. Peoples Contribution, v. Loan from the financial institutions

Identification of Problems and Needs of the people:

The next important step in planning process is identification of problems and needs of the local people. For this purpose, the planning region has to be surveyed and the data must be collected from all households and discussion to be carried with resource persons and general public. Planning team has to understand the nature and acuteness of various problems through observation in that particular region. Particulars on educational status, income and expenditure, level of poverty, consumption pattern of people, living standard and life styles have to be collected. The proposed plan should be given focus on solving the identified problems through satisfying the needs of people¹⁰.

Prioritization of problems: In rural areas, problems are multi-dimensional nature and prevail at various levels. These problems cannot be solved at one go. Certain problems may take a few years to solve and some other within a few days or months. Some problems like epidemics and other health related problems are very serious which would need the urgent attention. Whereas some others like provision of transport and communication facilities can be given next priority. Plan should prioritize and develop programmes depending upon the urgency of problems.

Identification of skills, opportunities and technological options:

Development opportunities in the planning area have to be identified. If an area is facing acute unemployment problem, it has to be tackled by generating adequate employment opportunities in that area. But, where employment can be created? Whether in agriculture and allied sector? or in industrial sector? or in services sector?. Answers to these questions will help to prepare a suitable plan. Then, it is essential to find out the availability of skilled persons in that particular region. Technology is another important factor in planning. Technologies adopted in agriculture and allied sector and also in industrial sector have to be identified in order to avoid overlapping of technologies. Therefore, better understanding of available opportunities, skills and technological gap is essential and linking them in a systematic way to utilize these three factors at an optimum level for better development¹¹.

Review of Earlier and Current Programmes and Projects:

Another important task of planning is, before starting into the planning process, it is necessary to review the earlier and current programmes and projects implemented by the governmental and non-governmental organizations in the region. Information regarding what kind of programmes were implemented, targets, achievements and causes of failures, level of people's participation, suitability, feasibility, type of organization, staffing pattern and source of finance have to be analyzed. Further, this information will help the planner to avoid repetition of programmes and get away from the failures. Study of ongoing programmes and strategies will help to set the targets of the proposed plan in achievable manner.

Concern on Environmental Sustainability: Planning at the grass root or state or at the national level should aim at sustainability in development. Instead of planning for adhoc solutions, striving towards arriving permanent solutions create much impact on the development scenario in the region. For example, if a region is having problems of unemployment and poverty, the plan should pave the ways and means to provide permanent employment opportunities, either farm or off-farm, in government or non-government organizations or by self-employment¹². The programmes like providing wage employment through various government schemes may satisfy the immediate requirement but will not solve the problems permanently. Therefore, planners have to do maximum efforts to solve the problems through sustainable way by alternate

mechanisms with suitable strategies. At the same time, the proposed industrial or business activities should not degrade the environment.

Formulation of Objectives: Formulation of objectives is one of the major tasks of planning. The important points to be considered during formulation are: it should be formulated towards solving the problems of the local people and regional prosperity. The planner should concentrate on the peculiar problems for immediate solution. The objectives should be achievable focusing on optimum utilization of locally available resources.

Designing of Strategies, Programmes and Targets: After identification of the problems and finalizing the objectives and priorities, the team has to concentrate on preparation of proper strategies depending upon the problems encountered and objectives enunciated by involving people and acknowledging the people concerns. The strategies have to be prepared in order to deliver benefits to the local people within the stipulated time. Setting of targets is an important function in development planning¹³. To fulfill the objectives, the targets are to be fixed in specific terms with a time frame and should be based on the availability of resources, ability of services, and capacity of the implementing mechanism and state policies.

Resource Allocation and Project Implementation: It is another important stage in the planning exercise. Resources in the form of men, material, money and energy, their proper distribution, timely delivery and steady flow of resources and finances are the vital factors contributing to the success of any plan. If any one of these resources is not available or scarcely available that will lead to delay in achieving the fixed targets. Therefore, the resources are to be properly distributed among various activities spelt out in the plan in such a way that their optimum utilization must pave the way for achieving the specified objectives. The local government component of the plan would emerge out of the resource envelope containing the following sources of funds¹⁴:- i. Own resources available for development, ii. Transfers by State Finance Commission for development purposes, iii. Twelfth Finance Commission grants passed on by the State Government, iv. Untied grants for local planning, v. Grants in respect of Centrally Sponsored, vi. schemes that have been assigned to the local bodies for the purposes of implementation, vii. Grants for State Plan schemes assigned for implementation through Local Governments, viii. Grants for Externally supported schemes assigned for implementation through Local Governments, ix. Estimated contribution by the communities themselves.

Matching of resources to the plan: Ideally speaking, each gram panchayat should be free to allocate resources in accordance with the assessed needs. However, at this stage of our development, the local planning exercise has to take into account the diversity of sources of funds. The attempts should be to put them to best possible use. Therefore, once the order of

resources for the plan are known, it is best to place them into a matrix that is divided into three categories, namely, purely untied funds, partly untied funds and tied funds. Such a matrix would give each Panchayat an idea of how it can slot its priorities into the conditionality's associated with funding. This would ensure that funds, which are inescapably tied, should be first used and then untied funds are applied. Once needs are assessed at the Panchayat level, a process of linking each need to the source of funding can be adopted, through the steps detailed below:

Step 1: Classifying each need into a matrix: Discussions with people would throw up several needs, such as housing, sending children to schools, nutrition, roads, health care etc. Each of these will need to be classified under broad headings irrespective of the source of funds.

Step 2: Assigning specific purpose grants: Having classified the needs, the next step would be to identify the specific purpose grants that address such needs and match these resources to each need.

Step 3: Assigning part-untied funds: Part-untied funds are available for certain purposes and allow for a certain measure of convergence with other schemes. Examples are funds from award of Central and State Finance Commission. These funds can be used for gap filling within limits.

Step 4: Assigning fully untied funds: The final step is the placement of fully untied funds. These are typically own sources of revenue, general or untied State Plan Grants, SFC grants. In this connection, it would also be very useful to consider the assignment of non-monetary contributions, such as voluntary labour, as fully or partly untied resources.

Sequencing of planning: The planning exercise ought to lead to a five-year plan for the period corresponding with the national plan period, and annual plans that define and prioritize areas and schemes from such a plan. The longer term plans would capture the overall picture of the Panchayat and allow people to understand what planning and governmental funding could hold out for them. Once a five year plan is prepared, the annual plan can be drawn out from it. Considering the size and availability of personnel of gram panchayats, it is obvious that they would need assistance and help in the preparation of projects and schemes, but the decision should be that of the gram sabha. Development Meets/Workshops at gram sabha level would be necessary leading to the emergence of a draft plan, with schemes and projects listed in priority.

Planning at different levels:

Gram Panchayat plan: A basic point to be stressed is that everybody should be able to understand the plan, more so the people of the village and the Gram Panchayat members. The Gram Panchayat level plan could follow a broad and simple

pattern Drawn from best practices, given below is a possible framework: i. The Vision, ii. Citizens' Profile, iii. Natural Resources & Infrastructure Profile, iv. The Financial Resources Profile, v. The Anti Poverty Programme, vi. The Gender Justice Programme, vii. The Special Component and Tribal Programmes, viii. Programmes for Social Security, ix. Implementation, x. Monitoring and Evaluation

The planning process at the Intermediate Panchayat: The process and format of the Intermediate Panchayat plan will be largely the same as that suggested for the Gram Panchayats. However, the actual components would be dependent on the Activity Mapping for the Block Panchayat and the vision envisaged by the Intermediate panchayat. An important role of this level of panchayat is to act as a facilitator in the various steps of planning at the gram panchayat level. The tasks of the Intermediate Panchayat as regards planning would be: i. Prepare five year and annual plans in accordance with activity mapping and covering inter village-panchayat issues, through a participatory process following the steps listed in the case of gram panchayats (as appropriate), ii. Maintain multidisciplinary technical teams (which could include NGOs) for assisting Gram Panchayats in planning and implementation. This would especially synergize inter-tier coordination for watershed development and Rural Business Hub initiatives. There is urgent need to equip each Intermediate Panchayat with a planning support unit, iii. Maintain and manage multi-panchayat cadres, such as teachers, engineers, watershed managers, social forestry supervisors, anganwadi supervisors, and intermediate level health supervisory workers, iv. Feedback from Gram Panchayats regarding works outside their purview, such as inter-village road formation and multi panchayat irrigation structures could be included in Intermediate Panchayat Plans.

The Planning Process at the District level: As regards district Panchayats, the role would be one of preparing plans in accordance with activity mapping and overall coordination in planning, providing capacity building and technical support, to lower levels of panchayats. The formulation of district development plan involves integration of area plans prepared by the rural and urban local bodies with development plans of the sectoral departments in the districts and credit plans prepared by the Lead Bank of the district. The planning methodology involves, the following stages viz., i. Formulation of objectives and strategies, ii. Collection of data, iii. Preparing a District Profile, iv. Analysis of data, which includes (1) Situation analysis (2) Sectoral analysis (3) Spatial analysis, v. Preparation of area plans by the local and urban local bodies, vi. Integration of area plans and departmental plans and credit plans, vii. Putting together all the plan proposals and formulating a draft district plan, viii. Approval of the District Plan and forwarding to District Planning, ix. Committee/State Planning Commission, x. In addition to the above, the development plan formulation at each stage requires to ensure, Linkage within the three tiers of Panchayats and urban local bodies, Removal of overlapping/duplications, Preparation of estimates, Estimation

of likely employment generation and possible poverty reduction, Environmental check of the impact on the carrying capacity of the resources Thus the districts planning exercise involves and pose a tremendous challenges at district level.

Issues to be noted while Preparing Perspective Planning: Reinforcing Administration and Planning through delegation of powers, setting up an effective grievance redressal system, and creation of necessary infrastructure, service conditions, and facilities for all personnel working in these areas would also need to be specifically addressed in the District Plan. There is need to ensure close collaboration between levels of Panchayats, without converting the relationship into either a hierarchical or an effort-duplicating one. The principle of financial subsidiarity will need to be followed, by which even if a higher level of Panchayat, such as a District or Intermediate Panchayat sanctions a work of a value less than a prescribed floor limit, it transfers the money allocated for that work to the Gram Panchayat concerned for implementation. This will lead to a clear understanding and separation of who implements what, regardless of who sanctions it. In addition, just as district and intermediate levels of panchayats would be mandated to delegate implementation of schemes below a certain outlay ceiling to the level below, it ought also be open to lower levels of panchayats to recommend to the immediate higher level such schemes that ought to be undertaken at the higher level. In addition, there is a need to enable clustering of Gram Panchayats for the purpose of building a sufficient scale for efficient planning.

Some of the ground rules for planning at the intermediate level would include mandating prior consultation with Gram Panchayats. It is suggested that Intermediate and District Panchayats ought to hold meetings of all elected local government members of the levels of panchayat within its jurisdiction and carry out a detailed consultation exercise. In the case of District Panchayats a meeting of all Village Panchayat Presidents along with all elected members of the District and Block Panchayats may be held, in order to ensure a structured consultation.

Conclusion

The recent measures taken by the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to activate the process of planning from below in a participatory manner are indeed laudable. This is more so given the fact that even after 15 years since the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts decentralized governance is yet to be realized in the country Attempts have been made to remove the constraints through the Constitution 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992 and the Panchayats Act of 1996. The provision has been made for the constitution of a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and municipalities and prepare an integrated development plan for the district as a whole. The concept of the district-level planning is based on the principle of local level

planning. It also assumes that success of the planning needs greater mobilization and utilization of local resources. Below the state, district occupies a pivotal position in planning because of its location and administrative advantages. Not only it has sufficient administrative and technical expertise and good source of data and information to carry out plan programmes but has well-knit system to involve people's participation and make the gains of planning to reach to the grass-root level. Although the importance of district-level planning was realized, in which emphasis was laid on the district -level planning to remove inter-district and intra-district disparities and make optimum utilization of natural and human resources at district level. The District Development planning should rely on the availability of local resources to attain sustainable development.

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