



Decentralization and Participative in Rural Development

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Abstract

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Introduction

Long-term improvements in rural living conditions. it involves provisions of jobs and income opportunities while maintaining and protecting the environment of rural areas¹.

Rural development has been one of the important objectives of planning in India since independence. Intervention of the government in rural development is considered necessary in view of the fact that a sizeable population continues to reside in rural areas despite growing urbanization. it also required as the market forces are not always able to improve the welfare of the rural masses because of certain structural rigidities and institutional deficiencies existing in these areas. As a result, there is a danger of large sections of the rural population to remain outside the ambit of market driven growth processes. to enable the poorer sections of the rural population to participate more effectively in the economic activities has therefore, remained the prime objective of Indian planning and the basic underlying theme of rural development programmes².

India got its independence carrying a legacy of around 90% of its population living in rural areas, with around 15% of the people literate, more than 80% of the population dependent on traditional farming with massive poverty, under development and backwardness. Bringing such a society to the level of development of the west was really a hypothetical proposition, because development demands the availability of HR (human resource) potentials, technological knowledge, effective manpower training and availability of resource. Unfortunately India had none of them, but had the desire to go for development that too in the shortest period. But given these condition the question was as to what should be the approach and shape of our development expedition, development of whom and in what sense, which development model to follow and what instrument to use bring about the desired development³.

Apart from what we had inherited from 200 years of British rule desirable or un desirable we also had our own history and culture, our own models of achieving what we thought was

desirable and to say the least our own indigenous socio-cultural structure of which some of the Indians were proud and some of them were apologetic⁴.

Our indigenous ways had been there since time immemorial and were subject to evolution under the impact of diverse influence in ideology and culture⁵.

Moreover these indigenous ways were both diverse and identical coming out from the same monolith and exuding the fragrance which every Indian though living in different corners of the country could identify with. However these streams of unity and identity became so subterranean during the period of foreign rule that to reintroduce Indians to themselves and strike a consensus of values within them was an even bigger challenge confronting our country, in all sphere of life, including politics, governance and society. And the job of dealing with this challenge remains unfinished till date.

Leaders of independent India, mostly educated in the west, saw within its rural population hungry, ignorant, illiterate and helpless masses which could not develop themselves without support. So leader took to themselves the task of defining the direction and shape of the development expedition Development was defined in terms of factors like productivity, per capita income, and access to modern health education etc. consequently the goals were set at improving the productivity and of land and other means of income, ensuring accessibility, affordability and availability of modern health and education facilities to the rural population. The model was to be conceived by the government and was to be implemented by the professional and competent bureaucracy. Thus was born the centralized model of development. This model however could not be termed as purely centralized because it had elements like community development programmes (CDP), land reforms, PRIs, etc.

Injected into it because of towering influence of figures like Gandhi and Tagore and these experiences which the other leaders had during the freedom struggle

Nevertheless these elements only had symbolic significance in which was otherwise a government conceived exercise implemented by the mostly from the headquarters⁶.

Under the CDP which were started from the first five year plan village was made the unit of development. Development of the village was linked to the development of agriculture as it was that as majority of the population was dependent on agriculture so development of agriculture and allied activities was the key to the development of the village. Different development grants were released by the state⁷.

Activities like support to farmers, expansion of horticulture, animal husbandry, fishing, cottage industries etc, large scale leveling of land, land reforms, expansion of irrigation facilities in the villages, extension and repair of village roads, etc were carried out.

However these policies were found to be largely ineffective in achieving the set goals of development in the rural areas because of the following reasons:

Rural India was largely ridden by caste system in which some castes held sway over majority of means production. the same castes which are otherwise called the 'dominant' castes by the leftists were the ones who were mostly benefitted by the asset improvement programmes of the government as they had control over the majority of the means of production ,despite land reforms. Besides benefitting directly from these governmental programmes these dominant castes were the ones who ensured that the power structures within the rural institutions worked to their benefit. For example satyadev in his study of rural cooperatives demonstrate how the local village dominant castes occupied various posts of the cooperatives and used the loans of the cooperatives to hijack the subsidy benefits accrued to them, to appropriate to themselves, otherwise meant for the rural poor. Thus the social structure of rural India got the better of government's vision⁸.

Thus it was realized that the roots of development originated from the social structure of which ideology was an integral part and that social equity could hardly be divorced from economic equality.

Further there was an acceptance to the fact that geographical condition and social settings were not similar across the length and breadth of the country, so instead of adopting a wide extensive approach the gears were shifted to follow a selective intensive approach suiting the geographical and social setting of a region. Thus we see an appreciation of the factors in some degree penetrating the approach of development marked by an acknowledgement and the necessity to account for the particular social and geographical setting. Moreover at this stage problems of governmental corruption were not taken seriously.

Thus the advent of the second phase of rural development in India took place which continued roughly from the 3rd five year plan to the 8th five year plan. Area development programmes based on selective based on selective intensive targeted approach were the important feature of this phase of which green revolution in Punjab and Haryana area was also a part. Green revolution was sought to be implemented in the Punjab and Haryana region because of the proximity of region to the five perennial rivers of the Himalayas which made the land very productive and fertile.

Secondly, this region has a relatively less rigid caste system particularly because of the influence of Sikhism and the earlier activities of the arya region earned the epithet of the granary of India. Green revolution was an area development programme and it was succeeded by other area development programmes such as drought prone area programme (DPAP), hill area development programme (HADP), and command area development programme (CADP)⁹. Under DAPA emphasis was given to identification of drought areas, work in areas of water logging during rainy season, storage of natural water and diversion of this water for agricultural purposes, keeping in mind the ecological conditions of the area. CADP emphasized upon control of salinization of soil, land consolidation, introduction of small and minor irrigation projects to increase agricultural production.

HADP dealt with use of appropriate technology to bring irrigation facilities in hill parts of non hilly states of the country based on the idea of bringing even more unproductive land under the plough. Special component plans during this period included the plan for marginalized farmers, to whom subsidy from credit was extended by nationalized banks and the rural cooperatives to ensure that they are not subjected to debt trap, when natural disaster took place leading to crop failure. Food for work scheme was introduced to generate employment and ensure food security.

However, results or even this stage were well short of the expectations and the important lessons drawn out of this were, i. Most of the component plans did not have any follow up programme as a result of which gains of one stage were neutralized in the next stage. In the absence of any definite feedback mechanism proper control cannot be exercised. ii. Identification of beneficiaries was a major setback as the power equations within the village in collusion with the corrupt bureaucracy ensured that government funds were directed to their own coffers rather than the beneficiaries. iii. The overreach of rural development programmes was also a major concern as it was observed that most of the programmes were introduced with much fanfare either before elections or after the new govt. assumed office and gradually their intensity faded out with time, thus poverty perpetuated despite increased sanction from the government exchequer. iv. In those areas where the effects of corruption and political opportunism were diluted, the beneficiaries were found to carry the attitude that subsidized

food and government subsidies were a matter of right rather than a matter of temporary support to help them stand on their own feet. Thus the need for privileges with responsibility was increasingly being realized. v. In the project development related matters, too much centralization resulted in an uncooperative and apathetic reaction from the same people for whom the development project was envisioned. At other places this uncooperative attitude turned into resentment not only against the govt. but against the entire governmental concept of development which is reflected in the birth of the naxal movement in eastern India which is largely attributed to the failure of land reforms and the disillusionment of the hitherto disadvantaged sections from the very idea of India independence. This resentment developed into two types on which was not at all satisfied with the approach and performance of the govt. and the other which was not satisfied by the nature and shape of the results delivered to them. The former could be exemplified as the extremist violent naxal movement and the latter could be exemplified with the moderate movements of demanding separate statehood, sub caste movements feminist movements, tribal movements etc which joined the political stream to voice their concerns. vi. The urgent need for a multipronged approach was felt in which the focus was envisaged to be shifted from merely agriculture and allied activities as the money earner to include industries and services as well. The govt. led employment generation programmes had to be supplemented by self employment programmes. vii. The success and sustenance of green revolution brought another problem of environmental sustainability to limelight it was found that in the green revolution areas due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides the soil was getting depleted of its productive capacity. Land pollution and soil degradation emerged as important issues along with dangers of toxicity entering the human. viii. Food chain through the crops exposed to excessive chemical fertilizers.

All these issues were crying for answers and there were no quick fix or readymade answers to these questions. Also these problems which looked to be different were not isolated issues in themselves rather they were in fact all related to each other by a single thread i.e. they all in a way indicated the failure of successive governments of independent India to stand up to the expectations of its masses. The masses were not pleased by the delivery offered to them and found it insufficient, alien and unfit to their intellect and capacities. Thus the stage was all set for something revolutionary to happen which would be a turning point in the history of independent India and which would break it free from its past. Something, which would grant intelligence and respect to its enormous diversity, creativity and infinite capacities

And this step was the passing of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts 1993-94. This was a landmark event as this placed the action and power of shaping the direction and approach of development into the hands of the people

themselves. Now the government receded into a role of the facilitator and it was left to the people to decide as to what are the answers of their questions on their own development. The people were to decide on the means and also the goals of change which they could call development¹⁰.

This was the advent of the participatory model of governance and development which is the most path breaking concept of our times.

The 73rd amendment act basically sought to address the socio-political aspect of the developmental question. For example, the provision of reservation for the disadvantaged section and women seek to address the bearings of social structure on the impact of development and tried to vest political power into the hands of the disadvantaged sections so as to bridge the developmental deficit created by power differentials. The provision of the gram panchayat being vested with the powers of initiating developmental projects for the region managing of funds identification of beneficiaries overseeing implementation, seek to address the reasons for dissatisfaction of the people from the deliveries of government conceived programmes. Now the people had the freedom to design projects tailor cut to their needs and back it up with consensus and responsibility¹¹.

The role of sarpanch in the DPC, DRAD, DIC, and other bodies involved in the development process ensured that the village and access and support of the state machinery as and when required.

The impact of the participatory model of development is visible in almost all the programmes from that period onwards till date as almost all the major issues are sought to be addressed in some form or the other in subsequent programmes. A new paradigm has evolved since then, the government now sees its role in partnership with the community playing a very much more influential role. The focus is now on all rounds sustainable development in consonance with the ecology of the region and driven by technological support from the information communication, technology bio technology, nanotechnology etc. now capacity building of villagers is an important aspect of any programme and every Initiative is clubbed with a systematic programme monitoring and evaluation set up for regular feedback.

Decentralization and participatory planning for rural development

The term decentralization is the process whereby authority is restructured between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels with power and functions transferred to the lowest institutional or social level that is capable of completing them¹².

It involves devolving political power, defining people's role in the decision making, transfer of functions, devolution of funds,

making administrative arrangement for planning and implementation of taxing powers and financial autonomy and so on. It has been felt that decentralization of power to the local units of governance and management is one of the best ways of empowering people, promoting public participation, increasing efficiency and transparency.

Decentralization is linked to rural development in many ways.

The proximity of policy implementers to the target groups reduces information and transaction cost of identifying the poor and helps in designing potentially successful capacity improving and safety net policies. Decentralized provision of the public services can also help to link revenue expenditure decisions at the margin. This can improve both efficiency and accountability in the provision of such services. Governments that are closer to the people should in principle, be able to provide services more efficiently and effectively than a remote, centralized authority.

In India, panchayati raj system is identified as prime instrument of decentralization through which democracy becomes truly representative and responsive. The panchayati raj institutions are considered as local self government meant for providing basic infrastructure facilities, empowering weaker sections of the society and initiate the development process at the grass roots level of rural India, where the sole of India lives. The need for decentralization was realized long back but the recent effort to give constitutional back-up to rural local governments is significant.

With the passage of 73rd amendment act, in 1992 people's participation in the process of planning, decision making implementation and delivery system in rural India has been recognized.

Need for participatory planning

People's participation implies active participation of people in decision making process viz. planning, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and in sharing their benefits. Thus, participation does not mean only to involve the people physically in various rural development activities such as construction of village infrastructure but also can be in the form of attendance in the meetings, interaction, involvement in tapping the benefits, and participation in the decision making process the participatory approach helps us to reduce development cost, increase perceived and actual benefits and increase awareness among the people and help in the mobilization of local resources, facilitates smooth and easy project implementation. It further enables people to have access and control over the resources and ensures that the benefits reach to the legitimate claimants¹³.

It also creates sustainability aspect and gradually empowers the socially and economically disadvantaged people.

Devolution of powers and functions to rural governments

The 73rd constitutional amendment act has created three tier panchayati raj institutions in the rural areas across the country viz. i. gram panchayats at the village level. ii. Panchayats samithi at the intermediate level. iii. Zilla parishad at the district level with allocation of specific subjects. Presently, in India rural local government comprise 2,33,606 village panchayats, 6,094 intermediate panchayats, and 543 district panchayats, making a total of 2,40,243 at all the three levels. Total numbers of elected representative of panchayats at various levels are more than 28 lakh, of these nearly 37 percent are women, 19 percent belong to SCs and 12 percent belong to STs. All these figures are truly impressive, unmatched by any other country in the world. According to article 243 (G) of the 73rd constitutional amendment act, the states are required to devolve adequate powers and responsibilities on the PRIs to make them effective institutions of local self government.

The responsibilities for preparation of plans for economic development and social justice and its implementation in relation to 29 subjects listed in the XI schedule have also been assigned to panchayats.

As a result, village panchayats have been given more powers, functions and functionaries such as public facilities, roads, housing, drinking, water, electrification, a sanitation along with social culture, women and child development and family welfare due to their direct and close proximity to the people especially were peoples initiative support and participation would play a crucial role

Fiscal devolution to rural governments

Fiscal decentralization to rural local government in india is meaningful only

When the panchayats have adequate untied funds to provide public services assigned to them which requires assignment of tax powers to them. The fiscal decentralization envisaged in the constitutional amendment has the potential to significantly improve the efficiency of public services delivery in the country. The resources of the panchayats broadly comprise internal revenue mobilized by themselves through the exercise of tax and non tax powers, and resources received from the state in the form of devolution and grant from both the state and the union governments. There are essentially three type of taxes which devolve on panchayats; own taxes the levy collection and use of which vests in the panchayats by statute; assigned taxes the levy and collection of which vests in state but its use vests in the panchayats and shared taxes, the levy and collection of which vests in the state government but shared with local bodies.

The non tax sources for PRIs consists of revenues from license fees, fines and penalties, rent/leases on governmental properties. But the taxes, duties, tolls and fees to be levied b them and assigned to them and the grant in aid to be given to them are left to the discretion of the state governments. therefore the fiscal mismatch not only between own revenue and total expenditure but also between total revenue and total expenditure of panchayats present very interesting picture and demonstrates that panchayats are facing a huge deficit and their own resources are meager to meet out the emerging fiscal needs and even the meeting out the committed liabilities. These institutions should not only have the power to raise resources but also the right to use the funds as per their need and priorities¹⁴.

Issues and challenges

As per the implementable rules of fiscal decentralization, finances should follow functional assignments. But PRIs are marked by their poor internal revenue effort and high dependence on grants-in-aid and assigned revenues from both central and state governments. Improving own resources strengthen the link between revenue and expenditure decisions of the rural local bodies at the margin, which is extremely important to promote both efficiency and accountability in the provision of services. But the resource mobilization by the PRIs is limited as the taxes like land revenue, house tax etc transferred to them by the state governments are less buoyant in nature. For local governments to fully deliver the potential benefits of decentralization they need to be fiscally empowered.

There is considerable need to rationalized governments to raise revenues and incur expenditure according to the preference of their citizens. Expenditure functions remain non transparent and very little expenditure autonomy has been given it is important to specify expenditure responsibilities to enhance accountability, reduce unproductive overlap, duplication of authority and legal challenges. It is believed that more local control over expenditure decisions can make things better and improve service delivery. As state governments themselves are faced with several resource constraints, the revenue accruals to the local bodies are not adequate to enable them to effectively deliver the required standards of public services. An effective institutional mechanism is required for facilitating fiscal decentralization, for enabling the state to monitor the fiscal performance of local governments, identify those in financial difficulties as well as those exerting weak revenue mobilization efforts. It is also important to monitor the success of central government instruments (transfers, subsidies, local taxes) on a periodic basis.

As far as the programmes of rural development are concerned there is some involvement of the panchayats in the implementation, monitoring and review of these programmes. However in respect of centrally sponsored scheme implemented by other central ministries or departments, the involvement of panchayats is either nonexistent or minimum. It is important to

more that effective implementation of rural development policies depends upon the responsiveness and capacity of local government institutions. Involvement of local people can enhance accountability and quality implementation, but local performance depends on the institutional and political environments in which the decentralization process works.

Conclusion

Decentralization in planning an implementation of programmes, based on the principle of subsidiary, is an essential supplement to enhance resource flow in achieving balanced regional development and participation and empowerment of the poor. Pursuing a participatory growth strategy not only makes the ensuring growth acceptable at the grass roots level it fosters capacity building for sustainable growth at different tiers of local self governments¹⁵.

The success of decentralized programme implementation depends on effective transfer of function, functionaries and finances to local self governments. This has not happened to the necessary extent.

Fiscal decentralization, in terms of resource mobilization and strengthening the revenue expenditure link remains weak. Panchayats as a term have been narrowly confined to inter governmental flows excluding the massive annual developmental expenditure flows from the central government to rural areas. These direct expenditures in rural areas by the central government compel out attention because their utilization rates suggest ineffective use in a context where the targeted objectives, ranging from rural infrastructure through employment schemes to rural sanitation, remain largely unmet. Merely routing funds to panchayats will not achieve result without physical monitoring of outcomes. However there is need to take up capacity building exercise on a massive scale for the panchayati raj functionaries and strengthen the accounting and audit system for the local bodies.

Demands for introducing transparency in the functioning of the panchayats holding rural election and meeting of the gram sabha and making public details regarding schemes undertaken and funds received and spent by the panchayats and being voiced.

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