



DECENTRALISED PLANNING:DECENTRALISATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Sindhu. K.S

Research Scholar,D.B. College,Sasthamcottah.

Abstract

The decentralised planning begins with a special Grama Sabha for understanding the felt needs of the peoples and also for identifying the potential areas of intervention. In Kerala voters in an electoral constituency (ward) of a Panchayat/Municipality constitute a Grama Sabha/Ward Sabha.What is suggested is a system of multilevel planning,where the lowest unit is allowed to plan and implement everything that can be performed most effectively at that level and only the residual is left to the higher levels.

Keywords: Decentralised Planning, Constituency, Gramasabha.

Introduction

Ensuring democracy at the grass root level is at the core of the devolution of powers. The institution and functioning of Ward and Gram Sabha are the expression of a strong local democracy. This should not be changed. The preoccupation is how to increase the awareness of citizens-voters and the responsibility / accountability of elected Gram / Zilla Panchayats. Village planning is an attempt to translate into practice the concept of planning from below so that the specific problems each area faces can be assessed and solutions found on the basis of local decisions and mobilisation of local resources human and material.'

Local government is extension of the democratic; process from the centre to ground. The purpose is that people and their representatives at local levels can participate more intimately and with greater initiative in development of their local potential to meet local needs as determined by them. The growing interest in decentralised planning and administration is attributable to the realization that development is a complex and uncertain process that cannot be easily planned and controlled from the centre.

Almost all stages of the planning and budgeting process there are opportunities for participation. As noted earlier, basically the process began by Ward Sabha/Committee wherein all voters in a Ward are getting the opportunity to participate. The following aspects are included in the process.

- Assessment of the performance of last year;
- Determination of priorities for the current year;
- Taking preliminary decisions about the activities to be undertaken; and
- Validation of the list of poor people.

Decentralisation Process

Decentralisation process got a fillip in the country with the 73rd Amendment providing the Constitutional mandate to the rural local bodies. Effective functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions depends largely on ensuring that the system is accountable to the people. Several state governments have initiated measures to ensure that the Gram Sabhas are the only means to realize this. Best practices in this field are noticed across the country in the areas of decentralized planning, social audit, identification of beneficiaries, supervision and monitoring of accounts etc.

Decentralization has occurred in three ways. Firstly the three rural tiers of district, block, and Gram Panchayats (the all-India term for village councils) have been brought directly under control of the locally elected bodies. Secondly, 40 percent of all developmental expenditures have been allocated directly to LSGI (Local Self-Governing Institutions). Thirdly, political power has been decentralized, allowing for elected local representatives to have the authority to design, fund, and implement a full range of development policies and projects.

Decentralised planning is a system through which planning process is brought close to the people, who are the ultimate target for the development. It is a multilevel planning system in which planning is attempted at different political, administrative and executive levels. So that there is greater integration between the development needs and priorities of smaller areas and different socio-economic classes with the regional, state and district level. Decentralisation involves planning for all sectors or types of activity within a geographical area. It lays emphasis not only on decentralisation of the decision making process but also on increasing participation by the people at all stages of planning. These would enable full utilisation of resources according to the needs of the local people by making them actively involved in the formulation as well as execution of plans at the grass root level. Decentralisation implies a movement away from the centre. It implies an even distribution of

power among all agents in the social, political and economic spheres. It facilitates the articulation of people's needs and demand. Through decentralisation, a state move towards the avowed goals of development principal among which is an addition to the entitlement of the deprived.

Objectives And Methodology:The main objective of this paper is to analyse the importance of decentralization in developmental planning. The present study is based on secondary data and is obtained from available published sources.

Decentralisation Planning In Kerala

In Kerala, decentralized planning that followed the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and enabling enactments in the State in 1994 started off as the People's Plan Campaign and progressed with institutionalization at different levels. The important landmarks during the 9th Five Year Plan (since 1995) include:

- Transfer of powers, functions, institutions and staff to local governments initiated in October 1995 and completed by July 2000; the transferred officials were given a dual responsibility and accountability to both the PRIs and the line Departments for execution of their respective plan programs;
- Adoption of a separate budget document exclusively for Local Self Governments (LSGs) {since February 1996} and the introduction of a formula for allocation of Plan funds (Grants in aid) among LSGs.
- Decision to devolve 35 to 40% of the plan funds to local governments announced in July 1996; around 90% of this was devolved with the condition that at least 30% should be spent on Productive sectors, not more than 30% should be invested on Infrastructure and at least 10% should be earmarked for Development programs for Women;
- Launching of the People's plan Campaign in August 1996 with multi-pronged socio-political mobilization and sensitization of people with effective participation of organizations like Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP); this was being associated with institution-building at different tiers and levels.
- Restructuring of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and the Kerala Municipality Act in 1999, based on the recommendations of the Committee on Decentralization of Powers (known as Sen Committee)
- Submission of First and Second State Finance Commission Reports in February 1996 and January 2001 respectively, reviewing the financial position of Local Self Governments and making recommendations therein.

Local rural governments in India have enjoyed very limited powers and citizens have been afforded very few opportunities to shape local development. The 73rd Constitutional amendment passed in 1993 aimed to remedy this democratic deficit by granting local rural governments new powers and making them more accountable to citizens. The state of Kerala was the first to put the most determined effort into the democratic decentralization.

Kerala's People's Participation has a purpose of promoting people's participation to increase awareness and maximize the direct involvement of citizens in planning and budgeting. The difficulties in promoting direct participation is particularly heightened in contexts where the authority of the modern, rational-legal state is in conflict with various forms of social power. Under such conditions, even when representative democratic institutions are well established, basic rights of association are distorted by pervasive vertical dependencies (clientelistic relationships), routinized forms of social exclusion (e.g., the caste system, purdah) and the unevenness and at times complete failure of public legality. Kerala's repeated goal of decentralizing began since the first democratically elected CPI ministry of 1957, and is still continuing to work towards decentralization through the people's participation.

Grama Sabha And Participatory Planning

Rural progress depends entirely on the existence of an active organisation like Gram Sabha in the village which can bring all the people together including the weaker sections to plan and implement common programmes. As part of this experiment, the Gram Sabha, the base of the Panchayati Raj system, should function as a vital institution and should be able to exert its influence on the Gram panchayat.

The GS was designed as the most prominent deliberative body in people's planning. Special GSs/WSs were conducted at times as part of people's planning. Identification of development needs of the people was an initial step in the decentralized planning exercise. So the felt needs, priorities and development perceptions of the people in every locality were gathered in the meetings of GS/WS. The needs articulated in the GS/WS meetings were recorded, processed, prioritized and harmonized into a development plan for the local government. The maximum participation of people, especially women and other weaker sections of the society, was ensured in the initial years of people's planning.

During the conduct of meetings, the GSs/WSs were broken into groups of 25-50, one for each development sector in addition to a cross cutting group for SC/ST development and another for women's development. The sector-wise group discussion is designed to make the participation of people in the deliberations meaningful. In some areas in the state, squads of volunteers were instructed to visit households so as to build awareness on the potential of people's planning and the need for involving in it. Preparatory meetings of stakeholders were held before GS/WS.

Around one lakh resource persons at the local level were mobilized, trained and engaged to act as facilitators in the discussion groups. Nearly 2.5 million persons participated in these GS/WS conventions in the initial phase of People's Plan Campaign (PPC) in 1997. About 27 per cent of the participants were women.

One key achievement of the People's Plan Campaign, as its manager's claim, has been "the dispelling of general skepticism towards the conduct of GS". It was generally feared that – because of the evenly distributed settlement pattern, absence of strong tradition of village assembly and large size of an average GS/WS in the State - the effective functioning of them as instruments of participatory planning would be not possible. But the widespread enthusiasm and organizational strategy of the first phase of the Campaign, proved the viability of the GS/WS in practice, according to the political managers of the Peoples Planning. But this was the story during the campaign phase. Once the euphoria was over the GS/WS meetings become a mere ritual where almost no one from the middle and upper classes cares to attend. Local governments are to constitute Working Groups for converting the ideas of the people in respective areas into the form of an implementable project. The following are the mandatory working groups in every local body.

1. Watershed Management
2. Local Economic Development
3. Poverty Reduction including Housing
4. Development of Scheduled Castes
5. Development of Women and Children
6. Health
7. Water Supply and Sanitation including Solid Waste
8. Education, Culture, Sports and Youth
9. Infrastructure
10. Social Security including the care of the aged and disabled
11. Energy
12. Governance Plan.

The organizational structure of the Working Groups is such a manner as to ensure social justice by means of providing representation to the marginalized groups in the society. Each Working Group is headed by an elected member and the Working Group on Development of Scheduled Castes is headed by the SC member and WG for Women and Children by a lady member.

The projects prepared by the WG are presented in Development Seminar organized at the level of the local body and people are actively participating in it by making suggestions for improvement. Again, after the decision of the local body on the identified projects, the WG rework and prepare detailed projects. The projects then are submitted to the District Planning Committee for its approval. The approved projects are implemented by

1. Beneficiary Committees
2. Accredited agencies by the State
3. Local Body themselves
4. contractors. In the implementation all projects are monitored by a Monitoring Committee. The completion of the project requires a Completion Certificate from the Monitoring Committee. In sum, at all stages, from conceptualization to implementation and monitoring people have an important role. In sum, at all stages, from conceptualization to implementation and monitoring people have an important role.

Advantages of Decentralisation

Decentralization, which is best manifested in strong, autonomous and vibrant systems of local government, offers numerous benefits or advantages as a model of governance/public administration which is able to address the many challenges and trends which presently confront Caribbean states, and which are enumerated above. The advantages/benefits of decentralization which are listed below assumes that decentralization takes the form of a strong, autonomous and participatory model of local governance, which enjoys extensive and real powers for local self-management, and for spearheading the local sustainable development process.



Decentralization facilitates greater popular participation in governance, as illustrated by the following.

- It brings government closer to the people, and thus enables citizens to be better informed and to better understand the conduct of public business. This facilitates the forging of a strong relationship between the governors and the governed and identification of the people with their government, which helps to reduce alienation from the political process. It also serves to reduce disruptive/anti-social behaviour by citizens in seeking to get their concerns addressed, or taken into consideration.
- Placing responsibility for managing local affairs and for local sustainable development at the local level rather than central government will afford citizens greater access to, and ability to influence, the policy/ decision-making process. Civil society will now consider local government to be worthwhile partners, as they will be easily accessible, and will have the resources and authority to respond to representations.
- It provides a conducive environment for creation of a civic culture of cooperation, tolerance and trust among the various groups/elements which comprise the local society.
- Communities will find it easier to pursue their development objectives, and obtain support from local government, by their participation as a full partner in the local governance process.
- It facilitates/stimulates the growth/empowerment of civil society institutions and networks, as citizens perceive the benefits of working in collaboration with local government, to advance their interests. They will therefore organize themselves into appropriate organizational forms, to pursue that objective.

Conclusion

For any process of decentralization to succeed, there must be a strong centre. What is required is a redefinition of roles and relationships between the centre and sub-national entities. In fact, if decentralization is to be successful and not lead to chaos and other dysfunctional developments, it is essential for certain central functions to be significantly enhanced. These 14 include the development of a comprehensive national policy framework which, while allowing adequate scope for local governments to adopt strategies which reflect local conditions and preferences, will also ensure broad coherence and direction in respect to national development. Other central functions which also need to be strengthened include coordination, monitoring and evaluation, setting national standards and specifications, research.

Referances

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