

Management of Participative Approach to Planning for Rural Development

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This paper attempts to bring out the need for making a special management drive and institutional arrangement with a view to enable people to participate in decentralized planning for rural development. It focuses attention on making such an arrangement in the reform era. Both the new opportunities favourable for participatory approach to planning for rural development as also challenges that confront us are considered for pinpointing the needed future course of action with a specific management perspective. The basic principles of management, particularly participative style of management, need to be incorporated in any planning for rural development with emphasis on their operability at the village level where the poor should constitute the target group. The crucial assumption underlying the participative style of management is that irrespective of position in the organization, every individual has a potential to contribute and this needs to be channelized in an organized and planned way.

Anil Bhat and Arya Kumar have succinctly conveyed out the fact that the Japanese success during the post war economic growth is basically the result of participation of all members within the organization to focus on development to improve operational productivity and efficiency.¹ It was participative approach to management that brought in involvement and commitment of employees of the organization to contribute their best to the process of realizing the goals of that organization. Interestingly enough what happened in the industrial sector, happened in the Japanese agricultural sector also in the period following the World War II. Japan has the credit of implementing during this period a revolutionary land reform programme by forming land commissions at various levels through conducting nationwide elections so much

so that rural communities there were democratized through land reforms.² The mass participation approach which the Japanese Government initiated subsequently became a model for the Government of Taiwan which also carried out land reforms during the post war years. To put it differently, the management of participative approach to planning for rural development has a good support of empirical evidences which fact serves as an instrument for managing the similar approach in emerging economies like India where rural development in the sense of upliftment of weaker sections of the village society has yet to become a reality.

The four functions of management viz planning and strategizing, organizing, controlling and leading and developing employees necessitate decentralization which is expected to increase responsibility and accountability among the very people who are the stakeholders in management. Drucker points out that participative approach can be a technique for reducing resistance to change.³ It is argued in this paper that the advantages which are normally available in participative approach in modern industrial enterprises can be secured in a broad based planning for rural development with India as a case study.

Pre-Reform Situation in India:

Even before the commencement of the reform era the need for participation of the people in altering power structure was recognized. J.D.Sethi wrote in 1990 that "we might end up with a situation in which peoples power will become the watchdog of the state's activity"⁴ In 1984 K.N.Raj threw enough light on a number of preconditions that must be present or fulfilled for the successful operation of decentralized planning in rural India. One of the conditions is the

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political mobilization of the weak against the rural elite by enabling the former to enjoy decision-making powers.⁵ Dantwala expressed the fear that in the initial stage, decentralized planning would even create an opportunity for the educated and the moneyed class to ride over the uneducated rural poor. He cautioned: "...while people's participation, involvement and control in local level planning must remain the objective in the evolution of planning methodology, a starry-eyed approach to the problem may do more harm than good to planning for the poor."⁶

The need for vigorous involvement of the people in the planning for rural development was expressed in an unequivocal manner by the Ashok Mehta Committee in its report (1978).⁷ The Committee regretted that the planning agencies then were essentially bureaucratic despite some representation given to the representatives of people.

Of the writers who have discussed various issues - many of them are priority economic issues - with a lot of clarity, one who is quite prominent is V.M. Rao.⁸ Making a critical review of the course of decentralized planning in India with special reference to rural areas, Rao commented that the Indian approach to rural development had relied on short-term perspectives and low cost strategies. As a result the decentralized planning is not a functioning system. The methodologies for formulation of decentralized plans have remained inadequate in all the three fronts, namely, growth, needs and participation. One of the political processes for ensuring the effectiveness of decentralized planning is mobilization of rural poor. This mobilization is needed for putting pressure on both government and rural elite for a larger developmental share of the poor. In other words, people's participation on a much larger scale is what is needed to ensure trickle down of the fruits of decentralized planning in rural India. Rao hinted at the need for proper management of participatory rural development.

An elaborate analysis of dimensions of people's participation in rural development was given by S.N. Mishra and others in 1985.⁹ They contended that participation and development assumed greater significance particularly in the developing countries of the Third World whose economies were basically rural. Rural development is a complex process of change involving as it did several sub systems. Therefore, people's participation in rural development is a term difficult to define. Not surprisingly, its scope and meaning differed sometimes very widely depending upon a number of circumstances.

Mishra and others made a survey of the relationship between political participation and rural development. A broad picture as regards this relationship emerged in different parts of the country in the post-Independence period. Their analysis treated the national policy as the independent variable and the local feed back as the dependent one:

Time phase	National Policy	Local Feed-Back
1947-52	Participation	Development
1952-56	Development	Participation
1956-61	Participation	Development
1961-66	Participation	Development
1966-71	Development	Development
1971-76	Development	Participation
1977-79	Participation	Development
Since 1980	Development	Participation

After elucidating participation in decision-making, participation in implementation of development projects, participation in monitoring of projects and participation in benefit sharing it was emphasized that separate intuitional arrangements were to be evolved on decentralized basis to facilitate peoples participation. Then the authors added: "The

hypothesis is this that the smaller the unit of decentralization, the more direct the participation and the greater the involvement and control of the directly affected. This will serve yet another purpose that the process would also make the people more accountable to one another and thereby to the society at large".¹⁰ This turns out as the management of participative approach to planned programs of rural development. From the foregoing situation pertaining to the pre-reform period, the following become abundantly clear:

1. The Indian experiments and experiences did not provide the thrust of participation with clear cut and conclusive evidences. Therefore the question of management of participative approach as such was too distant and too imaginary;
2. Decentralized planning by itself could not ensure people's participation albeit the fact that the need for this participation was keenly felt. Therefore there was a strong case for management of this participation without which decentralized planning remained on paper; and
3. A definite and well-structured institutional arrangement on decentralized basis was necessary for people's participation to facilitate decentralization. This in turn indicated the need for a clear strategy for management of participative approach itself.

Post-Reform Scenario:

With the commencement of economic reforms, the emphasis on decentralization has increased, especially because new partners in both decentralization and development are emerging. In this new era where scope for government intervention is reduced, more and more research is needed to examine how far and how efficiently decentralization can be used as a strategy for rural development in

emerging India.

One of the major processes giving rise to more or less the same result which decentralization causes is privatization which involves a shift of power and resources from one major centralized power centre to another. In fact privatization is sometimes taken as final form of decentralization. In the reform era many governments both in developed and developing countries have transferred functions or tasks to industrial and trade associations, private companies, professional groups, religious organizations, cooperatives and voluntary organizations through privatization. However, privatization is a difficult cumbersome and painful process and therefore cannot be taken as a complete or perfect substitute for decentralized planning.¹¹

The main objectives of decentralization in the reform era are to maintain or improve democratic decision-making, foster responsiveness and accountability, improve effectiveness and efficiency in government which lead towards self reliance, people's participation in government policy formulation and implementation.¹²

There is a growing realization that decentralization policies should concentrate on three major aspects all related to the management of participatory rural development.¹³

1. Increasing the power of periphery by enhancing its ability to influence the government, to share in decision making and to understand the rights and obligations of the local people;
2. Reducing poverty by encouraging an equitable distribution of available resources; and
3. Expanding choice of the people drawing on the experience of cultural diversity and the sharing of knowledge.

In the 1970s and 1980s certain important developments took place eventually leading to the new wave of decentralization or Renaissance in the 1990s. The research studies conducted by a number of scholars were instrumental in highlighting that the centralized and hierarchical planning model had severe shortcomings as regards development. Even national leaders who officially endorsed the developmental plans found that it was difficult to mobilize support for centralized planning.¹⁴ The manner in which centralized planning could destroy institutional diversity required to sustain public debate and legitimate decision was pointed out by Hicks and Kaminski.¹⁵ The urgent need for developing necessary infrastructure facilities like rural roads, sanitation, education, electrification, and drinking water called for participatory mode of development. In fact there was no exaggeration in the observation that the development throughout the world in the 1980s buried the notion that centralization was a key to industrialization. The increased emphasis on equity with a sustainable growth rate rather than an increment in economic growth was not consistent with the philosophy of centralized planning. The change that was initiated in favour of decentralized planning in the 1970s and 1980s was expedited with the beginning of the era of new economic reforms in the early 1990s. The loss of popular confidence in the centralized state in the earlier decades thus created necessary backdrop for serious thinking on the need for taking constitutional or legislative measures for institutionalizing decentralized planning on a much stronger footing.

The two states namely West Bengal and Karnataka started in 1980s significant policy measures for institutionalizing planning with a number of purposes as has been stated by James Manor.¹⁶ One of the major purposes was enlarging opportunities for citizens to

participate in decisions affecting their lives. The other purposes like deepening democracy by extending liberal representative politics of lower levels, drawing on local knowledge and preferences about development bringing informal local mechanisms for the management of resources or the resolution of conflicts into the formal political process, promoting partnership between state and society were complementary to the purpose of promoting people's participation. Later in the post reform period there were separate constitutional amendments to direct states for enacting legislations for facilitating decentralized governance for development.

Four major factors that deserve our attention in the post-reform period are:

1. The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act that came into effect from April 24, 1993 provides for certain far reaching steps to strengthen Panchayat Raj system. It contains guidelines for the structure of Panchayats, composition, powers, functions, devolution of finance, regular holding of elections, reservation of seats for women and weaker sections. As the Task Force on Panchayat Raj in its report submitted in March 2000 observed, "With such a blueprint, the amendment has been hailed as a revolutionary step towards establishing grass root democracy; specifically it has given constitutional guarantee for peoples participation and self-governance. In order to translate the above into reality the state governments have been given necessary freedom to feed 'flesh and blood' to the framework provided by the amendment"¹⁷. To put it properly, the 73rd amendment contains the strategies of management for planning for rural development¹⁸;
2. The scope for people's participation in rural development programmes has got enlarged due

mainly to reduction in the state-level assistance for these programmes. This in turn has paved the way for increasingly self-reliant approaches in local-level planning and development;

3. Rural development, if it has to become sustainable, should be broad based to avert further "Environmental Crisis". Systematic environmental management has to begin at the local level in which the rural people should actively participate; and
4. The resurgence of interest in District Planning and Panchayat Raj system has now given birth to the vision of a New Society with some characteristic features i.e., harmony between bureaucracy and local government institutions, empowerment of people for their participation in rural planning and government institutions with sufficient local autonomy to give due regard to the collective wisdom of the people which the management strategies are expected to promote.

In brief, the post-reform scenario in India is characterized by a strong and concerted effort to institutionalize decentralized planning initiated by the centre and followed by States. A chief component of this planning in principle at least is the widened scope for participative rural development.

New Opportunities for Mass Participative Approach

Some distinct opportunities have emerged in the post-reform period which directly or indirectly add to the process of widening the scope for decentralized planning with people's participation in rural development.

Firstly mention needs to be made of the benefits of IT Revolution in agriculture and rural development in the reform era. With the help of a sophisticated econometric model, Kundu brings out this reality.¹⁹ He

states that information needed for planning is dispersed throughout the economy, which it may be too difficult and too costly to gather and analyse on the part of any central planner. Decentralized planning responds to it by requiring decision-making to be located in many centres and economizing on the transfer of information from one center to another.

Secondly, in the wake of 73rd Amendment Act many states have acted to strengthen village democracy by recognizing the significance of Grama Sabhas. Now one can reasonably argue that there is at least statutory provision for helping the rural people to air their views on a forum called Gram Sabha. Enough light has thrown on people's participation in the proceedings of the Gram Sabhas in the National Conference held at NIRD, Hyderabad on July 28-29, 1999. The Gram Sabha may be treated as an institution for reinforcement of sovereignty of the people. One of the recommendations of the Conference reads: "The Grama Sabha has to be the center of democratic power in the village and is the fulcrum of activity. The basic concept of Gram Sabha is to treat village as a collective body to discuss and decide holistically about the local issues and problems. Grama Sabha-based comprehensive planning must form the foundation of self-governance".²⁰ The rise of Grama Sabhas in different states, though modest, has opened up opportunities for brightening the scope for people participation in decentralized planning for rural development.

Thirdly, the birth of numerous grass root level institutions such as Users' Groups, Consumers' Forums, Self-help Groups and Joint Forest Management Groups is creating an environment conducive to people's participation in the local-level planning process.

Fourthly, Manor has identified the fields where decentralized planning with people's participation has considerable promise. Reversing the neglect of

institutional development, enhancing the responsiveness of government institutions, increasing the information flow between government and people, making development projects more sustainable and enhancing transparency are but some of the areas holding out a lot of promise for people's participation.²¹

Fifthly, the programmes and policies launched in some states have also become sufficiently fruitful in encouraging people's participation. These programmes endeavor to involve the people closely in the decision-making process.²² In Kerala the ambitious 'People's Plan Campaign' launched in 1996 has empowered villagers to prepare detailed development plans. In short, the preconditions for successful decentralization are to be created in the very process of decentralization.²³ In Karnataka several guidelines for the conduct of Gram Sabhas have been issued by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.

Thus the newly arisen opportunities in the post-reform era have improved the prospects for management of people's participation in planning at the grass root level for rural development.

Challenges of Management

While thinking about the prospects of decentralization planning with people's participation as a chief component, it is necessary to consider the challenges that confront the very process of decentralized planning. In the post-reform period in almost all parts of the country the condition of agriculture has deteriorated while the non agricultural income earning opportunities continue to remain inadequate. Therefore it would be unduly optimistic to expect that it is easy to mobilize resources for the successful implementation of local level plans. Mere people's participation cannot be an answer to all the problems which rural India is facing today.

The situation in rural India for the development of infrastructure is not favourable because while the requirements and expectations of the rural masses are rising, these are not matched by local level plans. The reduction of the financial support of the Centre and the State Governments for social service sectors is something that does not augur well for decentralized planning with people's participation for rural development.

Local level planning is viewed as a multilevel planning which is based on three major principles: 1) Principle of Function-sharing or Functional Decentralization, 2) Principle of Financial Decentralization and 3) Principle of Administrative decentralisation.²⁴ All these principles call for further decentralization of authority and power to reach the village level by the State Government. The meticulous sub-division of each responsibility is necessary. The state finance commissions should be able to decide about questions like the sharing of revenues and taxation powers to local bodies as well as the powers to borrow, subject to a limit, from the state government and financial institutions. Administrative decentralization or deconcentration is a prerequisite for the success of functional and financial decentralization.²⁵ The administrative decentralization is something that relates to the appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline of staff and their accountability. Unless all these administrative issues are carefully attended, decentralization planning may fail to get off the ground or may get delayed. There is also the possibility of withdrawal of people from various activities if their efforts are not matched by results.

James Manor has not failed to discuss the problems that come in the way of local level planning. There are areas or activities where decentralization has little promise. Alleviation of poverty which is mainly due to regional disparities, promoting planning from below,

promoting community participation in development and reduction in corruption are some of the areas where decentralization may not immediately deliver the goods.²⁶ Thus, the benefits of decentralization with people's participation are enormous; but these benefits cannot be realized with decentralized planning alone. In other words, any realistic assessment of the advantages of both decentralized planning and people's participation must take note of limits to decentralization also. Therefore this assessment too should have a management perspective.

Future Course of Action with Management Perspective

The following measures or action oriented programmes may be considered for realizing the benefits of decentralized planning accompanied by people's participation:

1. To forget that decentralization is a complex process requiring a lot of political will both for its origin and development would be dangerous. A team of experts in various fields must be maintained at least at the block level to review the progress as well as the pitfalls of decentralized planning and also to suggest necessary remedial measures to be taken on a priority basis without any delay.
2. The Panchayat Raj institutions with the definite goal of promoting peoples participation need to be formed at the earliest. The inadequacies of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act should be overcome through further amendments. This was very much admitted by the Task Force on Panchayat Raj. After giving a historical perspective of Panchayat Raj system in India, the Task Force has observed: "There may be further need for a constitutional compulsion to get the States committed to share their powers and resources

with Panchayats so that they might fulfill their mandate as institutions of self-government",²⁷

3. Since it is admitted on all hands that the Gram Sabha can promote democratic governance for development at the village level, the states should take measures to strengthen the position of these Sabhas. The greater budgetary allocation, well defined powers and relations of the Grama Sabhas with the Grama Panchayats and enabling Gram Sabhas to attend to important issues such as land reforms, environmental crises and gender inequality in rural areas are but some of the important matters which need to be tackled effectively to see that decentralized planning with people's participation in rural development becomes practically meaningful and sustainable reality. Therefore what is necessary is a proper management of physical, financial and human resources at the grass root level to do justice to the spirit content of the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, the supreme law of the land.

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