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PRIA

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Process of Participatory Panchayat Level Planning PRIA & NCRSOs

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "participatory planning" is fairly new, and it has a lot of promise in providing the missing link in India's planning efforts. Planning done at the national level does not always ensure its applicability at local levels, for each area has its own personality, potentiality, problems and needs. It is now a generally accepted fact that the top-down model of development has not benefited the majority of the people. It has peripherally touched those at the bottom of society - the poor, peasants, farmers, women and the illiterate. The non-involvement of the people has created an attitude in them of total dependence on the government for everything resulting in a lack of efforts on their part. Today, the rural people expect the government to build roads and schools, provide employment, drinking water facilities.

It is also being realised that unless the people are involved in directing and controlling the process of development, no real (human) development will take place. And in order for this to happen more powers regarding decision making, budgeting needs to be given to the villagers. Therefore, decentralisation of governance and development planning is a pre-condition for the realisation of untapped growth potential. This is because the needs of the people, the resources, the ecological setting, the social milieu and traditional knowledge of the people are all local specific. Only a decentralised structure of government can facilitate direct participation of the people. Thus, there is need for an effective village-level institution to energise and involve the people in controlling and managing their resources, to solve problems and generally to improve the quality of life.

Thus, the overall advantages of planning from below can be said as follows:

- A plan made by the people (that is the actual beneficiaries) is more responsive to local needs and conditions;
- Planning from below entails a more integrated development process which is different from the present watertight departmental development programmes;
- Mobilisation of local resources is more feasible - in terms of money, labour, material etc. Moreover, it ascertains area specific physical and human resource potential.
- Since, in this process there is greater participation of the people, it makes planning more transparent and implementation more efficient.

The concept of giving power to the people in order to ensure their involvement and participation in the development of their panchayat has been given definite shape with the passing of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992. The amendment has provided statutory status to Panchayati Raj. Reservation of seats for weaker-sections (scheduled caste, scheduled tribes' women) has been provided for each tier of PR1s. As per Article 243(G) of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the legislature of the state may, by law endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary with respect to

- a) the preparation of plans for social justice and economic development
- b) the implementation of schemes for economic: development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to matters listed in the Eleventh schedule." 29 items have been listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

There has been an increasing trend to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), to undertake development programmes aiming at alleviation of poverty besides other civil and welfare functions. But in reality, resources and capacity of PRI still fall short of the growing requirements.

Under these circumstances, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and the Network of Regional Support Organisations (NCRSOs) undertook strategic intervention for strengthening PRIs. The Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) of the network are CENCORED (Centre for Communication and Resource Development, Patna), CYSD (Centre for Youth and Social Development, Bhubaneshwar), SAHAYI (Trivandrum), SAMARTHAN (Bhopal), SSK (Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, Lucknow) and UNNATI (Ahmedabad).

The rationale for this intervention is to enhance the potential for community participation and responsibility for their own development, that is people centred and people-controlled development. The strategic intervention was based on the following principles:

- PRIs are to be viewed as institutions of local self-governance and not mere implementers of centrally determined development programmes.
- Emphasis must be placed on the active participation in decision making by women and other weaker sections with a view to enhance their role, status and leadership in local self-governance.
- PRIs should assert their access to and control over natural and human resources, as well as other development resources available with the state and national government.
- Strengthening PRIs will entail clarity of their roles, systems of governance, accountability, transparency and interlinkages.

One major component of this programme of strategic intervention of PRIA and NCRSOs was Participatory Panchayat level Planning.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop a simple and systematic framework for participatory planning process which can be easily carried out and replicated elsewhere.
- To develop participatory plan using existing and external resources, with special emphasis on women, poor, and people belonging to the backward class.
- To derive methodological insights on participatory planning towards developing plans for panchayats.

COVERAGE

Name of RSO	State	District	Panchayat
UNNATI	Rajasthan	Ajmer	Durgawas, Kabra, Naikalam, Jawaja
PEARL	Bihar	East Singhbhum	Bonta-Kuiani, Khokhro, Koira DAngdung
CENSORED	Bihar	Muzaffarpur	Belthi
CYSD	Orissa	Puri	Kapileswar
SAMARTHAN	Madhya Pradesh	Sehore	Jamunia, Raipura
SAHAYI	Kerala	West Kallada	Kollam
PRIA	Haryana	Jhajjar	Dhana, Khetvas
PRIA	Himachal Pradesh	Mandi	Kehar
SSK	Uttar Pradesh	Kushinagar	Pipra, Mathia, Madhupura

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

1. ENVIRONMENT BUILDING

The first phase of our intervention was to build a conducive environment suitable for carrying out participatory planning i.e. involving the people in thinking, planning and acting for their own development. This stage was very important, it built the foundation for all future activities.

The following actions were involved during this phase

- PRI members
- community
- government officials
- local NGOs and CBOs

In order to build rapport with the above-mentioned actors the following activities were undertaken by the RSOs and local NGOs:

This phase was initiated with informal I with the community members like one-to-one meeting, small group meeting with women, dalits, door to door visits. Cultural activities had also taken place as in the case of Bihar. Here also key informers and local opinion leaders were identified.

Report Building through folk media in Bihar

In order to gain confidence of the villagers matdata jagran (voter awareness campaign) and mahila sabha (women's meeting) was carried out. It is difficult to gain the confidence of the rural women and to collect them at one place in order to discuss their needs. So, it was decided to prepare a local folk media team to give messages on the new Panchayati Raj Act with focus on women's reservation and women's empowerment. Local youth and adolescent girls were trained in folk media like nukkad natal.: (street plays), storytelling, puppetry. These people had earlier been trained on Panchayati Raj Act. So, they formulated script on women and Panchayati Raj, need for bottom-up planning, need to strengthen Gram Sabha etc.

These folk media teams performed well in different villages and managed to generate a lot of interest especially amongst the women. This also resulted in large gathering of women in the mahila sabhas.

Other than this normal meeting was also conducted with youth clubs, mahila mandals and interested Gram Sabha members. These meetings were mainly concerned with the introduction of the concept of participatory planning, its importance and relevance and the role that the various community members including the PRI members can play in the process.

In Haryana an interested volunteers' group (IVG) was formed which consisted of wards members, youth and women from each ward.

Interested Volunteer Group in Haryana

In Haryana, the IVG emerged out of a series of meetings that has taken place at the wards level. This group helped in activating the existing groups i.e. youth clubs and mahila mandals. During discussion the issue of transformer was brought up which was not functioning for many months. The group decided to form a committee of 10 people and take up the issue with the concerned government departments. Through this initiative the problem was solved after a few months. This helped in building a sense of trust and acceptance among the villagers, which is very crucial for the involvement and participation of the people in the planning process. Later on, the IVG helped in organising a Gram Sabha meeting in their Panchayat.

In Himachal Pradesh, initially a core group was termed which consisted of village youth and staff of the grassroot NGO. Later on, volunteers were identified from each ward of the panchayat to form a group of volunteers consisting of young girls and boys. These volunteers then conducted ward wise

meetings in each ward of the panchayat to acquaint the community members about the concept and importance of participatory planning and their role in it.

Separate meetings were also conducted with elected PRI members who have a major role to play in the entire planning process. As a tool for familiarizing the people about planning posters and handbills were disseminated in Himachal and Kerala respectively.

2. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

This phase was important in order to understand and have an in-depth knowledge of the present

in order to plan for the future.

In order to understand the existing situation various tools and methods were used. Some of these have been listed below;

- Questionnaires were formulated with the help of some of the local volunteers and a detailed socio-economic survey was carried out. This happened in the case of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana.
- In Rajasthan separate questionnaire was administered to understand the status of PRI members
- Pictorial exercises including social mapping, resource mapping was also done in most of the panchayats
- Observation and documentation
- Issues based group discussions

3. COMMUNITY PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND NEED IDENTIFICATION

This phase is very crucial in the entire planning process since the community members are involved in it and they play an important role of identification of problems and needs. This sets them thinking which in turn might lead to action in the subsequent phases.

The following methods were used in the identification of needs:

In Rajasthan participatory need assessment exercise was undertaken mainly to involve the women, poor and the dalits. Many exercises like seasonality service maps, social maps, wealth ranking resource mapping were carried out. Based on this data a series of meetings were held in each panchayat and also separate meetings were held with the women.

Other methods used were community level meetings, ward and village level meetings, use of graphical representation of data on flip charts.

4. PRIORITISATION OF NEEDS

Prioritisation of needs is a very important phase in the whole exercise of planning since it enables the people and representatives of village organisations to discuss, and agree upon priorities. Prioritisation also creates community awareness and an interest in participation and action. Most important this method serves as a basis for development of village and panchayat level plan.

PRIORTISATION EXERCISE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

In Himachal Pradesh Prioritisation of the problems was done with the involvement of the community members in meetings in all the 11 wards of the panchayat. These problems had been identified by the Villagers at three different levels on separate charts

- individual: to identify the beneficiaries of different schemes
- village: to identify village specific problems
- panchayat: to identify panchayat level problems

Once problems and needs were listed, the major task of ranking them remained
The following prioritisation method was followed:

Step 1:

Three different coloured markers were used by the people to mark on the charts where the problems identified earlier had been written down.

Red - first priority

Green - second priority

Black - third priority

The method of prioritisation was explained to the people by the members of the facilitators team. They were asked to put three tick marks on each of the charts displaying the problems identified.

Step 2:

After this the people went up to the wall charts and using the 3 different colours prioritised their felt needs at an individual, village and panchayat level. In all they had to tick nine times, at this stage a lot of facilitation and guidance is required especially for the illiterate people.

Step 3:

Next, the total number of ticks marked were counted for each of the three colours separately for the three levels. After this the relative priority was calculated by giving points to the 3 colours.

Red being the first priority was given three points, green - two points and black- one point.

Relative priority- number of ticks multiplied by points

The priority obtained by an individual problem by this method was considered to be the most important development priority of the people. The second and third priority was also found out. Similar exercises were carried out for village and panchayat level problems.

5. FORMULATION OF PANCHAYAT LEVEL PLAN

The participatory planning process culminated in the formulation of village level plans in certain cases and finally panchayat level plan was made. The planning exercise culminated in Gram Sabha meetings. The Gram Sabha has been given constitutional status and it has been made mandatory for a filled quorum in Gram Sabha meetings. The plans were discussed with the people in these meetings and the required budget calculated.

In order to formulate the village and panchayat level plan Village Development Committee (VDC) were formed in Himachal Pradesh. The VCD is headed by the ward member and also has local technical expertise, women and scheduled caste. The VCD was responsible for finalisation of village/panchayat level plans and implementation of the same along with the Gram Panchayat.

PEOPLES CONFERENCE IN RAJASTHAN

UNNATI started participatory planning in four panchayats of Jawaja block. A PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE was organised which facilitated interface and dialogue between various stake holders on a particular issue.

The issue of rural primary education was taken up in the process of developing sector specific plans on the subject of rural primary education. This process would not only provide opportunity for people to come together but also an opportunity for us to learn more about the issue, that are relevant for planning.

The following were the stakeholders who participated in the conference:

1. Sarpanch and two ward panchs from each of the four panchayats that UNNATI is working with.
2. Parents (at least two) from each panchayat.
3. Students (at least two) from each panchayat.
4. Teacher and heads of primary schools.
5. Education Extension Officers from Jawaja Panchayat Samiti.
6. District official like Divisional Commissioner, DEO, Dy. Director of Rajasthan Education Board
7. NGO representatives

The issues covered in course of planning in the sector of rural primary education are mentioned below

- Areas of concern in rural primary education
- Action plans to counter the problems/ concerns
- Responsibilities for each stake holders

SUGGESTIONS

In course of our functioning for the last two years towards developing participatory plans for panchayats, we derived certain learnings. We also faced a series of problems of varied nature in the course of our intervention. Based on our practical observation and problems faced during the participatory planning process and also during the implementation phase, we suggest the following:

At Panchayat and community level

- In order to have effective participation of the people in the planning process Gram Sabha meetings have to be held regularly and with the required quorum representing all sections of the community including women, dalits and other backward classes. In order for this to happen first the meetings can be held at the ward or village level and then at the panchayat level. This will ensure participation of a much wider section of the community.
- Pictorial representation of the panchayat plan to be displayed as a hoarding at the entrance to the panchayat or at a central place.
- In order to save time and energy for participatory planning, the panchayat along with Gram Sabha members should take the initiative to collect essential data from each ward and update it from time to time. This could be done through various participatory methods such as ward meetings.
- To ensure the inclusion of views and opinions of all sections of panchayat smaller meetings at ward/village level can be organised for better attendance and participation so that the panchayat plan is more authentic and holistic.
- The data along with the various maps prepared and drawings list of beneficiaries, plan documents, budget, should be kept in a public place like panchayat ghar for everybody to see and refer to. Alternatively these documents could be kept in Panchayat Resource Centres or Village Information Centres set up for the purpose.
- For horizontal spread of participatory planning. exposure visits can be arranged for PRI representatives and other interested individuals to the panchayats where participatory planning initiatives have taken place.

- District and block level melas can be organised by the Vas in collaboration with the block and district level administration to spread the concept of participatory planning.

At NGO level

- Orientation of NGOs and other community-based groups on participatory planning for the horizontal multiplication or the process.
- Capacity building of NGOs on the various planning techniques like pictorial exercise (PRA), Peoples Conference and other relevant methods. Also build their capacities of facilitation and guidance to PRIs and community based organisations.

At Government level

- Village and block level government officials can take initiative in carrying out participatory planning in their panchayats and the assessment of their performance could be linked to the number of panchayats plans they have contributed to and the follow-up. These government officials can be made accountable to the Gram Panchayat.
- Incentives in the form of awards can be given to those government officials who have contributed in the preparation of people centred plans.
- Government training institutes, who are providing training to elected panchayat members and concerned government staff, can include a course on the process of participatory planning in their study curriculum.

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