

Salient Features of ‘Decentralized Planning’ in India with Recommendations of Actions and Ways Needed

¹Kandarp Saparia, ²Dr. Nanak Pamnani

¹PhD Research Scholar, ²Professor

¹Dept. of Civil Engineering,

¹Madhav University, Pindwara (Sirohi), Rajasthan, India.

Abstract: We cannot find sufficient nonfiction on Decentralized Planning in India. Although, the discussions and debates were on even before the days of independence and subsequently after independence in all Five Year Plans. It was periodically and sparingly put into practice on the field and of course there were isolated experiments. Hence, inadequate material and literature available on this area. Decentralized Planning gained much exchange among the policy makers and administrators, after sanction of the 73rd and the 74th Constitution Amendments to the constitution of India. Keeping all this bullets in mind, this study is prepared to understand the context, the objectives, the goals, the reasons for involving people in the process of planning and the approaches adopted in Decentralized Planning and followed by recommendations with actions needed to initiate vibrant Decentralized Planning along with ways of Practicing Decentralized Planning.

Index Term: Decentralized Planning, Decentralization, Public Participation, Development Plan, Five Year Plans.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralized Planning, Multilevel Planning, Participatory Planning, Peoples Planning, District Level Planning, Integrated District Planning, Planning from below and/or Planning at the Grassroots are being used interchangeably by the practitioners and policy makers in India. Broadly talking they are one and the same and they are not new to India now. At the time of Centralized Planning was initiated, Decentralized Planning was also assumed from the first five year plan period itself. The entire discussion originated from the arguments initiated by Mahatma Gandhi on ‘Panchayati Raj’. Gandhi is the initiator of decentralization and bottom up approach of planning and development. He was accountable for a major discussion on Panchayati Raj in INC (Indian National Congress) during the freedom fight which ultimately extended to constituent assembly first and Planning Commission subsequently. Methodology, approach policy, institutional mechanism may vary from time to time but the basic objectives and broader meaning are the same. But the fresh implementation started in many of the states under the new dispensation ‘Decentralization’ is due to the formation of ‘District Planning Committee’ constitutionally in each and every district in India. It is to be noted here that the Planning Commission in Center Government and the Planning Boards in State Government are not the formations of the Constitution of India. In order to make it clear, it is a constitutional mandate to prepare plan below from the lowest unit of governance and administration namely Gram Panchayat or Town Panchayat. District Planning Committee is formed in the Constitution of India.

2. DECENTRALIZED PLANNING: PERCEPTION AND IMPORTANCE

Decentralized planning is a strategy proposed over a period of time to prepare Development Plan from the lowest unit of governance and administration with an objective of meeting the felt requirements of all sections and all regions of India with enormous variations in terms of socio economic conditions and comprehensive cultural diversity. Decentralization and Decentralized Planning is a universal phenomenon in recent years. According to Hanumantha Rao, decentralization through the involvement of local level representatives’ institutions in the formulation of planning for development as well as their implementation is being advocated in the interest of proficient operation of resources and for ensuring more reasonable sharing of benefits from development. As lectured by Arvind Kumar, decentralization is deliberated as a process of sharing of powers by the central ruling groups with other groups, each having authority within the specific area or the state. Though it had been argued, discussed and debated and justifications were given that from the first five year plan period onwards, real incentive was given throughout the country only after integrating a provision in article 243ZD in the Constitution of India. The consideration was also on among the academics and policy makers for some time whether the planning unit can be created for decentralized planning activities either at unit level or at district level. Now it is created at the district level constitutionally and it is accepted as an obligatory process by which people have to be involved in the preparation of plan from the village panchayat constitutionally.

2.1 Historical Background

Even before the commencement of independence, micro level planning or decentralized planning was thought of and deliberated after the publication of a document “District Development Scheme: Economic progress by Forced Marches“ in 1939 by M. Visvesvaraya. It was the very first effort made in this country to evolve practice for decentralized planning. In his effort M. Visvesvaraya chalked out an action program for the economic growth of the rural areas. His aim was to involve people to ensure security to the people for food, cloth, amusement and to work for their skills. To achieve all these, he suggested a few steps namely, a) people to work systematically and scientifically to increase manufacture in close cooperation with the community; b) conducting a survey to assess the economic illnesses of the people and identify the problems and suggest avocation which gives profit; c) every district should have institutional arrangement to promote such a kind of development activities; d) spread elementary learning among adults to create informed citizenry and thereby efficiency, improvement and wealth could be achieved. To perform the above he suggested conception of a council called District Economic Council, a plan, budget and schedule of activities. This was the first perspective of Decentralized Planning in India before achieving independence.

The first two Five Year Plans' documents had clearly and emphatically maintained for Decentralized Planning but they did not put into practice as the two plan documents had not spelt out the needed mechanism to formulate decentralized plan. The third Five Year Plan though took some initiatives to prepare district and block plans, in few states, they were not integrated in to the state plan. Only in the fourth Five Year Plan guidelines and procedure have been evolved for the preparation of district plan. Based on the guidelines several states have prepared their district plans but they could not participate them with the annual plan of the states barring Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The Fifth Five Year Plan communicated much about block level planning. In this regard a working group was established in the Central Planning Commission to suggest ways and modalities for 'Planning from below'. On reference of the guidelines issued by the Planning Commission some of the states have prepared block plans with the help of private interventions. During this period another landmark event occurred for strengthening of Panchayati Raj. A committee on Panchayati Raj popularly called Ashok Mehta Committee was constituted to assessment the progress of Panchayati Raj Institutions, submitted its report in the year 1978. The committee also suggested that unit for planning should be at the district level.

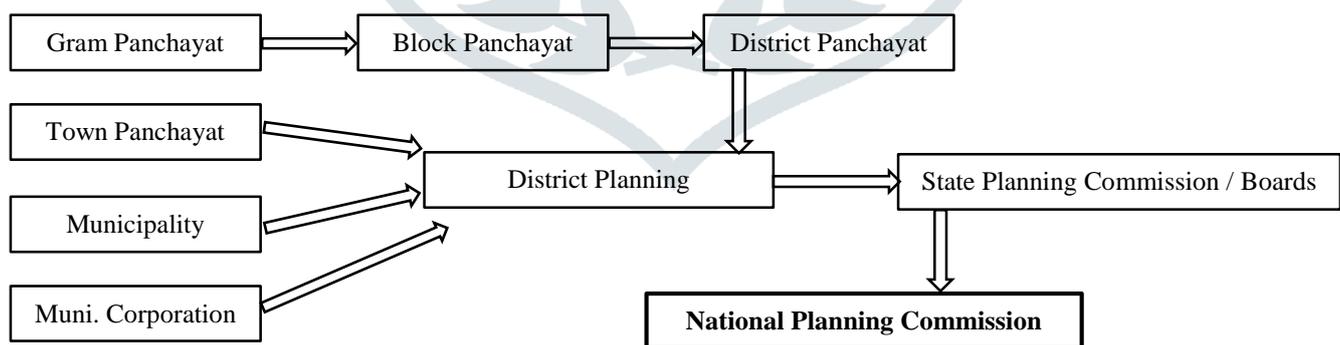
Sixth Five Year Plan document also repeats the significance and importance of local level planning. For the first time in planning, appreciation was rendered to reliable, updated, timely, scientific data for micro level planning. Thus data generation at the micro level added importance. It also stressed the requisite of strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions and of involving people in the process of implementation of Development Programs and Plans. During the same period, a working group was set up in Planning Commission on district planning and submitted report in the year 1984. The working group provided a comprehensive guideline and approach for the preparation of plan at the district level. This working group indisputably repeated the need of such a plan at the district level. The Seventh Five Year Plan also repeats the need of decentralized district plan as suggested by the working group of the commission. It is also recommended that the Decentralized Planning has to transfer from district to block. The Eighth Five Year Plan highlighted the need and consequence of the Decentralized Planning along with people's participation through people's institution. Ninth Five Year Plan document made it as an objective to encourage and improve people's participation in planning through democratic institution like Panchayati Raj Institutions. The District Development Plans will have to be prepared through the institutions of the District Planning Committee which is the formation of the Indian Constitution. 243ZD of The Constitution enables for formation of District Planning Committee. Yet much improvement was not succeeded. Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans are pushing the model of Decentralized Planning through a centralized initiative. Thus Decentralized Planning was much discussed and argued subject over a period of time but less practiced at the ground level. It is to be registered here that Kerala is a model for entire country for assertive Decentralized Planning through its powerful campaign approach.

Here we have to understand why decentralized planning is brought to practice constitutionally and what are the merits we find in decentralized planning have to be explained. Before coming to the merits of decentralized planning we have to recognize the demerits of the centralized planning. Though 'Decentralized Planning' as a theory or concept is in discussion from the dawn of independence, we practice in India is centralized planning.

In the 'Centralized Planning Process' macro targets for socio-economic development had been secure periodically and strategies and program had been evolved and implemented and yet unmet requirements are increased, inequality increased, regional imbalance has grown, gap between the people and governance is increased and peoples skill and knowledge are not utilized properly and profitably. To overcome all those problems and issues decentralization is through off. We have to understand the benefits and merits of decentralized planning.

2.2 Institutional involvement in Decentralized Planning

In this context, in India, 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act were approved. That provided opportunity for the people to participate in the process of preparing micro plan from the villages to the District level. The institutions at the grassroots are formed with a provision to include women and the other destitute people. Thus the plan has to be prepared from the lowest division of governance to top most level. It is explained through a structured diagram below:



2.3 Merits of Decentralized Planning

Decentralized Planning appreciates strategic advantages over that of Centralized Planning. According to Rondinell (1983) factual decentralization could reduce bureaucratic red-tape, reduce delays, overcome administrations irrelevances towards their clientele; improve quality of service, act as effective networks of communication between national government and local communities, promote greater participation of people in planning and decision making. Some of the merits of decentralized planning are stated here:

- Spatial level specific requirements of the people will be met through the Decentralized Planning;
- Resources will be utilized efficiently and wastages could be reduced and thereby demand – supply gap can be narrowed down;
- Greater sustainability can be succeeded through the Decentralized Planning;
- Decentralized Planning is cost effective as solutions are found out locally with the participation of investors and stakeholders;
- Elite capture of the programs will be excluded;
- Corruption in Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation programs can be abridged;
- Poor can emerge from livelihood to achieve economic growth;

- Poor can build revelation for their development;
- Resources and skills available locally will be utilized beneficially for the advantage of the stakeholders;
- Natural resources will be protected, preserved and developed;
- People capacity will be boosted;
- Possibility for harmonizing the needs of the people and schemes of the governments;
- People's felt need and requirement will be met;
- It will bridge the gap between people and bureaucracy and thereby government is taken closer with people;
- Regional imbalance and inequality will be reduced;
- People's abilities will emerge and they will be utilized for community development;
- Efficiency and productivity will be increased;
- Growth and progress will be made people centric;
- Greater mobilization of resources inside; and
- Healthy partnership will be achieved between the people and Government agencies.

All the above are the merits and advantages of the Decentralized Planning. They are drawn from the limited experience of Decentralized Planning prepared in various places. From the above we could visualize the possibilities of Decentralized Planning. But in actual, to recognize the potentials of Decentralized Planning lot of efforts are needed from the state governments and local bodies and more particularly the civil society. It could be possible when movement is built up from below for mobilizing the people for participation in entire development process. According to Narayana (2000), the success of Decentralized Planning depends on certain factors like: (i) the degrees of willingness of political leaders and bureaucracies to support decentralization and allocation of responsibilities; (ii) the degree of governing comportment, attitudes and culture conducive to decentralized decision making and administration mechanism; (iii) appropriate and proper designing of policies and programs; and (iv) adequacies of available financial, human and physical resources.

3. PRINCIPLES OF DECENTRALIZED PLANNING

There are certain principles which are authoritative for the success of Decentralized Planning. They are: (i) principle of functional transparency; (ii) principle of financial availability and self-sufficiency; (iii) principle of decentralized administration; (iv) principle of public participation; and (v) principle of integration.

3.1 Principle of Functional Transparency

Decentralized Planning would be effective only when all the institutions and organizations involved in planning process are clear about their roles, duties and responsibilities. Planning process includes multiplicity of institutions and they are to work with each other and enable each other. It is possible in the government segment only when adequate clarity is given to the role every institution has to play. It not only involves government but also people or civil society and other agencies. Having trained in narrow specialization and compartmentalization bringing interaction among the institutions is not so easy. There should not be any conflict or overlapping among the institutions and organizations and they should be reciprocally helpful and harmonious. Precision and clarity are needed for all involved in the preparation of plan and program.

3.2 Principle of Financial Availability and Self-sufficiency

Organization which are having earmarked responsibilities should have adequate resources and autonomy to spend the resources to discharge their responsibilities. Activities which are kept as per the plan document to the units should have financial autonomy to spend the resources on earmarked activities. At every level untied funds and autonomy to use the money are imperative for the preparation of implementation of Decentralized and Participatory Planning.

3.3 Principle of Decentralized Administration

To perform the decentralized function, adequate organizational powers have to be devolved to achieve efficiency. Many of the occasions even for a small arrangement to be implemented at a lower level all nightly gritty will be worked out at the point where the schemes are evolved and resources are allocated. When the circumstances are different at the ground, they could not implement properly and as a result one will find wastage of money and another is corruption. Hence no rules can be laid down at the higher level for action at a lower level. Rules can be evolved at the proper level for operation of project and activities. In such a way administrative flexibility should be given to different parts of governance.

3.4 Principle of Public Participation

For succeeding success and efficiency in decentralized planning public participation is an imperative. Even this public participation has to be succeeded through the process of empowerment as the marginalized and deprived sections could be involved in decision making. The public participation should not be an organized contribution but an empowerment participation. Normally in the organized participation the participation will elevate expression. But it is not their expression. It is the expression of somebody who mobilized them. In empowered participation, the individuals at their will participate and reflect their expression. Problems of the poor and banished people could be reflected only through empowered participation.

3.5 Principle of Integration and Incorporation

Hallmark of Decentralized Planning lies in integrating and harmonizing the plan documents of different areas and components at all levels. It requires appropriate framework and skill to participate the plans from the lowest level. To make the plan document implementable only through the process of harmonizing and synthesizing the plan documents. Village level plans are incorporated at the blocks and block plans are to be incorporated with District plans. While integrating plans of different units both Urban and Rural level plans of different units will be harmonized with District Plan.

4. GOALS OF DECENTRALIZED PLANNING

Decentralized participatory planning has contracted some fundamentals and they are popularly called as goals. The goals are the referral points and lens to look at the entire process of decentralized participatory micro plans in the background. They are (i) economic growth, (ii) social justice, (iii) welfare (iv) environmental security (v) coordination (vi) peoples contribution and participation.

4.1 Economic Growth

The plan should be developed in such a way that it has to achieve economic growth by increasing the production in small irrigation structure, agriculture, land improvements, animal husbandry, dairy and poultry and fisheries. Economic growth is the key in this development. To achieve economic growth and development, the whole process should depend on people's knowledge, skill and incorporated use of appropriate technologies.

4.2 Social Justice

The benefits of economic growth should reach the various categories of the community, particularly, it should reach the poor and the socially weaker and marginalized sections. The plans should further facilitate increased income by providing employment opportunities to the socially disadvantaged and the marginalized. At every level mechanisms for women and people of scheduled cast could be integrated into the plan or sub-plans could be created for people of scheduled cast and women.

4.3 Welfare

The plan should incorporate schemes for providing infrastructural facilities like road, water supply, drainage, housing, electricity, waste disposal, and also social welfare schemes like health, education, welfare of women, children and cultural activities. In the neo liberal framework, state moves away from the basic activities for prosperity and hence in order to overcome this situation, welfare activities should be made integral of the Decentralized Plan.

4.4 Environmental Security

The plans should have the module to protect wildlife, flora, fauna, landscape and environment. It should not cause damage to the eco-system, vegetation, plants, creatures and animals. It should have strategies to manage natural resources. It should aim for creating green, clean and thus ecofriendly towns and villages.

4.5 Coordination

The plan should ensure the total development and growth of the entire unit by integrating all the development plans of the concerned area, plans of the corresponding departments, schemes for individual benefits, schemes that are implemented by the government departments, schemes that are implemented by banks, NGOs and other development organizations.

4.6 People's Contribution and Participation

The plan should be on the basis of collection of data and confirmation of that data as well, assessing the needs, evolving activities and prioritizing the same with the active involvement of the citizens. People have to be involved at every level and people should own the plan and programs. For this purpose people have to be mobilized and more predominantly the poor and other marginalized segments. When they are prepared for participation, it should reflect opinion and voice of the poor and not the voice of others. Hence enrolment of people should on empowerment mode and not as beneficiaries. This process of enrolment is different from that of political utilization. Often political utilization reflects the voice of the mobilizers not the mobilized.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Actions Needed for Decentralized Planning

Following are the commanding activities needed to initiate vibrant Decentralized Planning:

- Data generation, data updation mechanism and data authentication process have to be done at all levels up to the level of the District Administration.
- There should be a gradual linkage among the three layers of planning units namely District Planning Committee, State Planning Commission and Central Planning Commission.
- Enabling information movement from the lowest unit to the highest unit of planning and vice versa has to be done.
- Planning machinery has to be created at every level where planning management and implementation is done.
- Planning units must be formed at different levels of governance down below the District and District Planning Committee is only the integrating and consolidating unit.
- Capacity Building for the elected Councils and the administrators involved in planning has to be conducted periodically.
- Decentralized Planning module has to be arranged and it is to be followed and monitored at every level.

5.2 Ways of Practicing Decentralized Planning

For effective practice of Decentralized Planning civil society organizations, retired government officers and academic institutions can support the Gram Panchayats and other layers of local governance for the preparation of participatory micro plan in the following ways:

- To generate data from the field or ground.
- To draft the plan document/s.
- To organize progress conference at the grassroots level.
- To mobilize people for involvement in plan preparation.
- To train Local Body Leaders and Functionaries in preparation of Decentralized plan.
- To implement the activities as per plan and program.
- To monitor the application of the planned activities.
- To evaluate the plan activities through social assessment.

REFERENCES

- [1] Sundaram, K.V. (1997), Multi Level Planning: Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi
- [2] Institute of Rural Management (2008.), The State of Panchayats: 2007 – 2008 An Independent Assessment Vol. I, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi.
- [3] State Planning Commission (1997), Report of the Working Group on Decentralised Planning and Panchayati Raj, Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai.
- [4] Mahipal, H. (2008), Decentralised Planning and Development in India, Mittal Publications, New Delhi.
- [5] Ranjitha Mohanty and Rajesh Tandon (eds) (2006), Participatory Citizenship: Identity, Exclusion Inclusion, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- [6] Mathur, Hari Mohan (1986), Administering Development in the Third World: Constraints and Choices, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- [7] Planning Commission (2009), Manual for Integrated District Planning, Government of India, New Delhi.
- [8] Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2007), Planning for the Sixth Schedule Areas: Report of the Expert Committee, Government of India, New Delhi.
- [9] Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2006.), Planning at the Grassroots Level: An Action Programme for the Eleventh Five Year Plan, Government of India, New Delhi.

