

Decentralised District Planning: Planning and Monitoring



Executive Summary

Centralised top down planning in India has so far resulted in multiple programmes without an integrated vision, reflecting priorities which are often not relevant to local needs. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj in its roadmap (2011-16) states, "The much needed convergence of related schemes and resources is possible only through the mechanism of constitutionally mandated decentralised and holistic planning through Local bodies and the District Planning Committees (DPCs)." Decentralised integrated district planning is envisaged under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to be executed by Panchayati Raj institutions and Urban Local Bodies, and consolidated by District Planning Committees.

Concept of Decentralised District Planning

Decentralised district planning is a

participatory process that seeks to provide a collective vision for the district through setting priorities, to facilitate rural and urban local bodies at all levels to prepare their plans with

community inputs, and to source funds through financial resource mapping. The planning exercise culminates in a District Development Plan that integrates plans for its constituent rural and urban areas, as well as sectoral allocations for various schemes for the urban and rural areas.

Concept of indicators for decentralised district planning

An indicator is a measure, used to monitor a process, its impact, a problem or a policy concern, over time to show trends towards or away from expected outcomes. Indicators show the robustness of a system, helping to measure progress, identify problems, achievements and areas for future action. Any decentralised planning process would require process indicators to ensure that the planning process itself is participatory, inclusive and relevant to community needs. It would

further require output indicators to measure the impact of plan implementation on rural and urban communities specifically on marginalised sections. With the potential to form a basis of community planning and decision making, participatory planning and monitoring can bring local residents together, enhance their sense of ownership and galvanise collective action.

Policy Messages for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)

1. Recognise autonomy of the local planning units: A radical shift towards promoting autonomy of local planning units is needed to ensure decentralised participatory planning can take place.
2. Invest in capacity building of the local planning units: Capacities of the local planning units have to be built to create and implement robust plans. This would include - training local bodies to elicit community participation, translating the wish list into concrete projects, and matching it to the resource envelope. The MoPR can partner with Technical Support Institutions (TSI) to create models for participatory decentralized planning and facilitate the capacity building process for local governance.
3. Recognise social audit processes as intrinsic to ensuring community engagement in monitoring: The value of using developed indicators lie in them being tested and adapted to social audit processes administered by the community and civil society, and tuned to the state specific contexts.



4. Have planning indicators that reflect process, outputs and outcomes: The indicator set has to ensure that the planning process, planning outputs and planning outcomes are captured.

Challenges for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj

Challenges to build an enabling environment for decentralised district planning

Early initiatives in decentralised planning met with limited success because of a long historical tradition of centralized planning beginning with the five year plans since 1951. As a result:

Planning remains mostly in the hands of state, especially in the hands of central government's line departments. These departments plan and fund national programmes some of which are now being implemented by local bodies as mandated. Local bodies act as the implementation arm of the government without an active role in decision making. In this scenario, the planning function gets reduced to mere selection of beneficiaries and projects are limited by the mandate of the national and/or state programmes.

Apart from a very limited role, local bodies are often completely bypassed in line department planning and implementation on subjects that in fact constitutionally belongs to their domain. Either the local bodies are only peripherally involved in such programmes, or are often completely unaware of them.

As a result, district and even state plans are an aggregation of

schemes to be implemented by local bodies and line departments into one document with no linkages between them, and no spatial and sectoral integration built in.

Poor capacities of the panchayats to plan is compounded by limited financial resources at their disposal. Consequently plans fail to reflect community needs.

Thus, substantial rethinking and rework has to be done to redesign district planning into a participatory, convergent process, such that community voices become the driving force behind planning.

Solution: Implement Decentralised Planning as per the Guidelines of the Planning Commission of India

The decentralised planning guidelines of the Planning Commission of India lists out the processes to be followed for integrated district planning. These include:

District Profile: An important aspect of any planning exercise is to know the district profile including data on the economy, socio-demographic information, human development indices, environments, and infrastructure in de-segregated forms to be able to point out broad spatial and sectoral development challenges.

District Visioning Exercise: Based on the district profile, the next task is to draw up a broad vision of development of the district, and its priorities of spatial and sectoral issues. The visioning exercise should be decentralised and conducted at all levels within the district. The exercise should lead to a 15 year vision document for the district.

Identification of Lead Sectors: The identification of lead sectors of a district needs to be looked at from a spatial point of view that also takes into consideration social justice, economic and human development. In this process, sectoral expertise should be pro-actively sought.

Budget Envelope and Financial Resource Mapping: For the district planning exercise to be meaningful, each planning unit should know its resource envelope, and include financial resource mapping exercises at all levels.

Planning Teams: Planning teams need to be constituted of elected representatives, experts and representatives from state and civil society at district, block, panchayat and municipality levels.

Capacity Building: Substantial investment to build capabilities of local bodies is required on the processes and procedures for decentralised planning, budgeting and monitoring.

Participatory Rural and Urban Micro Plans: Micro-plans should capture the needs of the communities at the village, habitation or ward-levels with the active involvement of rigorously trained facilitators and volunteers. This involvement can help in mobilisation and attitudinal change of the community from perceiving themselves as passive beneficiaries to active agents capable of demanding and designing solutions as a matter of their right.

Consolidated Rural and Urban Plans: Micro-plans prepared by the gram panchayats and municipalities have to be consolidated at higher levels (block, district and corporation respectively), so that the wish lists of the gram and area sabhas are reflected in the final district plan.



Box 1: Participatory planning process pilot in Raisen, Madhya Pradesh by Debate

- ❑ The objective of the pilot project conducted by Debate in Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh was to ensure participatory planning process at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level. Debate chose to work with marginalised sections of the community in 40 villages spread across 14 Gram Panchayats located in seven blocks of Raisen District.
- ❑ During initial field visits, the main difficulties highlighted by the community, were irregular supply through the Public Distribution Services and untimely supply of seeds. Debate worked with the Cooperative department and existing community based organizations (CBOs) at the GP level, focussing on timely delivery of seeds and fertilizers as these affected the well-being of the community.
- ❑ Debate established a working relationship with the Village Forest Committee (VFC). The Forest Department official is the ultimate authority in those villages that come under its jurisdiction. Since the community depended on the minor forest products, it was essential to develop a synergy between the forest department and the concerned CBO.
- ❑ Debate aimed to develop a model panchayat by reviving the standing committees and making them functional. Most panchayat representatives were unaware of their roles and responsibilities, and as a result took no initiative. Regular meetings and discussions with field staff of Forest and Cooperative departments and panchayats resulted in a plan which responded to community needs.
- ❑ As a result of the vision exercise and vision document prepared for rural and urban areas, the following ensued

- ❑ Various issues are now raised in the gram sabhas. For example in Rangpura Kesri GP, the issue of a pipeline that was inappropriately laid out had been long unaddressed. A dialogue between the community and the line department was initiated resulting in increased awareness and ownership over the developmental work in the gram sabha.
- ❑ Selection of Below Poverty Line card holders and Indira Awaz Yojana beneficiaries were also addressed after Debate's intervention.
- ❑ Seminars held with forest rangers and other officials resulted in their assuring help for implementing plans made by VFCs.
- ❑ Seminars with the cooperative department officials resulted in the Deputy Register from Raisen consulting with the GP in Udayapura.
- ❑ The officials of Abdullahgurj and Sanchi municipality started attending municipality meetings. The ward members of Sanchi Nagar Panchayat were not aware of the presence of the Advisory committee. Nor were the committee members aware of their roles and responsibilities or budgeting of the plan. The Debate intervention made them aware of the planning format and process of planning was explained to them. As a result, they started questioning municipality officials. Ultimately, a plan was made and approved according to community wishes.
- ❑ In short, Debate built the capacities of the panchayats to make the wish list, helped projectise the wish list into budgets and plans, and then matched them to the resource envelope available to the gram, block and zilla panchayats. It strengthened the capacities of the model GPs and municipalities to carry out the envisioning process, prepared micro plans with demonstration GPs, and trained all GPs using these models to demonstrate the micro planning process.

Rural Urban Integration: An integrated district planning exercise should provide a platform for mutual consultation and negotiations across planning units. It should simultaneously provide a framework to integrate sectoral aspects of rural plans with their focus on socio-economic development and spatial aspects of urban plans.

Concurrent Monitoring and Social Audit: A monitoring system should be developed that permits simple easy updating and access by all planning and implementing units to know current status of activities.

Monitoring & development of indicators for decentralised district planning

Monitoring systems of processes and outcomes at different levels and stages of decentralised planning should capture both (a) the rigour with which participatory planning processes are anchored and undertaken in each planning unit and b) the wide range of quantitative and qualitative outcomes that emerge. Indicators created for monitoring should be embedded in the local planning and state specific contexts, and involve key stakeholders such as the community, local bodies, state planning board, and technical support institutions.

The Planning Commission of India has determined the official guidelines for the planning process.

Civil society organisations and technical support institutions have simultaneously evolved participatory planning processes based on ground realities. Therefore, indicators would have to capture the essence of official guidelines and best practices emerging from civil society. Since the official guidelines require concurrent monitoring in the form of social audits, community participation has to be mandatory.

Challenges for measuring decentralised planning

Monitoring decentralised planning poses a challenge as currently a robust set of indicators does not exist, nor have the means of



verification been developed for each indicator. For example, if one indicator was whether a gram sabha was held for communities to participate, the gram panchayat members would necessarily answer in the affirmative since they know this is mandatory. A robust indicator would, therefore, require a means of verification, which in this case would be the minutes of the gram sabha which would also need to be triangulated across panchayat members and communities.

However, indicators should be practical, easy to use, and measurable. For unbiased, transparent monitoring of local bodies, an external entity such as the community or civil society needs to be involved. Furthermore, to ensure community ownership, help them set the development agenda and secure their faith in the decentralised planning process, community engagement in both planning and monitoring through social audits is vital. However this requires building their capacities, along with providing sufficient financial resources to do so.

Solution: Process and impact indicators to monitor decentralised planning

Developing process and impact indicators grounded in the state specific context can serve to monitor both the planning process and its outcomes. The process indicators are designed to measure whether the planning processes, as identified by the guidelines, have taken place with the participation of the stakeholders. Output indicators monitor immediate results of plan related activities, and determine whether planning goals and needs of the community are met. Box 2 provides robust indicators that cut

Box 2: Process and Impact Indicators

PROCESS	PROCESS INDICATORS
Stock Taking and Envisioning exercise	Process guidelines for stock taking developed Common data template for stock taking is developed, used and accepted for different planning units Vision document format accepted and used The plan is developed based on vision document
Sectoral Breakup of plans	Different sectors included in the plan
Capacity Building	Capacity building tools for planning developed and adopted A thematic plan showing adequate balance between social and infrastructure needs and The plan reflects an increased variety of resources
Financial Resource Mapping	Resource envelope for each tier and line department, known to all tiers, prior to start of actual planning process
Planning Teams and Demonstration of Micro Planning	Planning team formed Local authorities follow the micro planning process specified by the planning commission guidelines
Participatory Rural and Urban Planning	Plans reflect Gram Sabha/ward sabha resolutions Block and District Plans reflect consolidation of gram and block panchayat recommendations respectively
Integration of Plans: Spatial Integration, Sectoral integration, Cross-sectoral integration, Vertical integration, Rural-Urban Integration, and Integration of	Plans reflect balance between infrastructure and social sector issues Plans of the higher tiers reflect plans of the lower tiers Evidence of exploring any issue requiring collaboration between urban and rural bodies Rural-urban planning process guideline to be developed
Concurrent Monitoring	Social Audit tools developed and used GPs, municipalities and blocks monitor plan implementation Civil society organisations and community based organisations are engaged in community level monitoring
Impact	IMPACT INDICATORS
Measuring Impact of Plan implementation	Incorporation of Wish List in the plan Implementation of Wish List in the approved plan Utilisation of Open Source revenue Needs of the marginalised populations (women, SC, ST) are met Community participation in implementation of the plan Monitoring of the plan implementation by local bodies and communities Rural-Urban integration reflected in plan implementation Faith in the planning process demonstrated by communities



Elsewhere, communities have developed innovative monitoring mechanisms of the planning process that ensure desired outcomes and transparency (Box 3).

Thus, the indicators must not be a mere checklist. It must be standardised enough to monitor if planning indeed reflects the national guidelines. It should also be flexible enough to measure state specific processes, and variations based on geography (urban vs. rural) and level of institution (village, municipality, block, district).

Box 3: Data Exhibition

Federations of self help groups, along with the Assam Mahila Samata Society in Assam have designed an innovative process of citizen monitoring government programmes at the panchayat level to promote transparency in panchayat administration. The term 'Data Exhibition' refers to a display of information collected and exhibited in a public place such as a community hall or a school, for the benefit of the entire community. Data is compiled by federations (through detailed household surveys, along with official data obtained through RTI) which then reveal gaps between the ground reality and information reported by the Gram Panchayat or line departments. This information is then presented at an exhibition inviting the entire community, panchayats, and government department representatives. The Data Exhibition can be instrumental in providing data for the panchayat plans and make it participatory in its spirit. The Data Exhibition can be far more effective if integrated with the recent Planning Commission of India Guidelines on Decentralised District Planning. One guideline requires that the community takes stock of its needs by examining its information base. This data can be easily provided by the Data Exhibition process.

Impact:

- ★ Communities have an information base to assess their needs for the planning process.
- ★ Increased awareness of Gram Sabhas on their entitlements, programmes
- ★ Mobilisation of communities to participate in Gram Sabhas in the planning process
- ★ Poorest of the poor and excluded sections actually accessing their entitlements as a direct outcome of the data exhibition.
- ★ Inclusion of women and girls into the planning process and improved participation of women in public life.

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