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Planning and Management of Rural Development in Assam

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Abstract

Management, generally means - 'controlling, directing and organising men, materials, machines and market in such a manner in which it helps in maximum economic growth and result in the excellent performance of all the functionaries at all levels in furtherance of the objectives of an enterprise'. In the context of Rural Development, Management refers to activities, such as, Planning Organization Staffing, Co-ordination, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, Budgeting, Marketing, Credit, Infrastructure Development and so on. It is all comprehensive. Rural Development Management occupies a significant position in India as more than three-fourth of its population still lives in rural areas.

Planning is the primary task of any management activity. Plan is a blue print for action. It points out a precise way to reach a pre-determined goal or a set of goals within a pre-determined period of time with the means that are available with the planner under the prevailing circumstances. Thus, planning is concerned with what is to be done, for whom it is to be done, how it is to be done and when it is to be done.

In the administration of rural development, a special kind of management is followed where besides Government rural people are active participants from planning onwards. To realize the objectives of rural development, Government of India has adopted Decentralized and Multi Level Planning.

Like other states of India, decentralized planning has been implemented in Assam after the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee's Report, 1957 and more strengthen in the post seventy-third Amendment era. However, functioning of participatory planning has not been successful in true sense. It is still in initial stage.

In the above backdrop, the present paper is an attempt to understand significance and objectives of planning in Rural Development Management. It further examines how far participatory planning has been successful at grass root level and tries to identify the constraints in planning process.

Key Words : Rural Development, Management of Rural Development, Decentralized Planning, Seventy-Third Amendment Act, Gaon Panchayat.

Introduction

Rural Development occupies a vital place in the planning and policy formulation of developing countries like India. But today rural development is all comprehensive. There is hardly any aspect of social life which is left out from the preview of rural development. It is not only concerned with socio-economic, political, cultural and administrative aspects of society but aims at improvement of the quality of life of all sections of rural people. So it is all inclusive. In view of expanding nature of rural development, management becomes an urgent necessity. It can be reiterated here that due to lack of proper management, most of the *Rural Development Programmes* (RDPs) failed to achieve their objectives even after seventy years of Country's Independence.

With regard to Management, it is a universal process in all organized activity. Generally, management means 'controlling, directing and organising men, materials, machines and market in such a manner in which it helps in maximum economic growth and result in the excellent performance of all the functionaries at all levels in furtherance of the objectives of an enterprise'. It is equally essential for a business firm, government enterprises, military organisations, health and education services, trade associations and so on.

In India, management of rural development has acquired significance as more than three-fourths of country's population still lives in rural areas. In rural development, management has been used in a wider sense. It covers all activities – such as, Planning, Organization, Personnel Management, Co-ordination, Resource Management, Project Identification and Formulation, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, Rural Credit, Rural Marketing, Rural Enterprises, Infrastructure Development etc. etc.

Objectives:

In the present paper an attempt has been made to understand the meaning, significance and objectives of planning in rural development management. It also tries to find out how far decentralized planning has been successful at grass-root level in Assam and the constraints in the planning process.

Methodology:

The paper is mainly based on secondary sources collected from books, journals, articles, Government reports, newspapers and website relevant to the study.

Meaning, Significance and Objectives of Planning:

Planning is the first and foremost activity in management. Plan is a blue print of action. It lays down the objectives to be achieved within a definite period of time. So plan means what is to be done, for whom it is to be done, how it is to be done and when it is to be done. Thus, planning means deciding in advance the goals to be achieved. It is an unavoidable part of any organized human activity.

It is assumed that naturally occurred development may not be sufficient to maintain the expected level of living in the society. So development planning is essential for socio-economic development with government, intervention and people's involvement in the economic system. In India planning is used as a tool for socio-economic development and growth. Moreover, planning is essentially a way of organizing and utilizing the resources of a country in order to get maximum benefits in terms to defined social objectives. Considering the importance of planning today all countries big or small, with different types of governmental systems are engaged in planning and generating their economic activities. It is an essential ingredient of development process at all levels in regulating their economic activities. It also requires organized, conscious and continuous efforts to achieve the goals and objectives already determined.

The fundamental elements of Planning are as follows:

- Identification of goals for future
- Time-frame to achieve the goals
- Mobilization of human, material and financial resources
- The trade-off in pursuing the goals
- The organization of activities in achieving the goals.

The objectives of Planning in Rural Development Management are:

- To determine strategies of Rural Development for removal of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and backwardness from the rural areas.
- To determine infrastructure for various services.
- To determine social institutional framework.
- To increase the effectiveness of Rural Development Programmes of the Government more relevant and responsive to local needs and conditions.
- To provide more flexibility in the implementation process and to provide means of co-ordination to the various agencies involved at the regional or local level.
- To mobilise human, material and financial resources and their proper utilization for development.
- To increase official knowledge of local conditions, motivate community leaders to take up active role, create better communication between local residents and leaders and between local and national officials.
- To improve the quality of the Government and to make it responsive to popular opinion.
- To maintain the national security, national unity and economic growth to redistribute the benefits and development among the masses and to make an impact on the people below the poverty line.
- To generate spirit of sympathy, altruism, compromise and cooperation to create conditions for the success of democracy.

Thus, planning is concerned with decision making process regarding the use of resources to achieve the policy objectives. As such, it is an integral part of the political and administrative system.

In India, since the beginning of First Five Year Plan, the concern for Rural Development has got much importance and accordingly various approaches and strategies have been adopted for Rural Development. Each plan has made some references to decentralized planning. Besides, various committees, commissions, working groups and Task Force were constituted by Government of India for review of Decentralised Planning.

Decentralised Planning:

Decentralised Planning aims to bring the people closer to the planning process. Being the largest democracy in the world and follower of Gandhian Ideology, decentralized planning has been designed to make planning responsive to the will and aspirations of the common people. Decentralised Planning also defined as '*Planning at different level*' or '*Multi-level Planning*'. This may occur at National level, State level, District level, Block level and Panchayat level or could be planning for a region. The various levels of planning aims at development of both urban and rural areas.

In the planning for Rural Development, the levels below the State play very important role. Because local needs and aspirations may adequately be included in the plans only at the lowest level.

Decentralised Planning and 73rd Amendment Act, 1992:

Although decentralized planning has been given importance by the Government of India from time to time, it has got constitutional sanctity only after the passing of 73rd Amendment Act, 1992. Under this Act, Panchayati Raj Institutions have been recognized as the best instrument for decentralized and participatory planning. Article 243 of the 73rd Amendment Act envisages the devolution of powers and responsibilities in case of PRIs with respect to

- Preparation of plans for economic development and social justice,
- Implementation of matter listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

In the existing set-up the direct participation of people in rural development planning process at Gaon Panchayat level is ensured through the mandatory provision of Gaon Sabha. It provides a political forum to the village people to meet and discuss local problems, needs and aspirations of the community. Gaon Sabha are considered as gateway to Grass-root democracy.

Gaon Panchayats are the democratically formed lowest level local institutions of rural India. These institutions have to play a vital role in the process of participatory planning for rural development. Local needs of the Panchayat area are to be articulated by the Gaon Sabha and accordingly Gaon Panchayat has to prepare annual plan for its own area. The plans of the Gaon Panchayats are to be integrated in concerned Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level and finally Block Level Plans of a District are to be integrated in the plan of the District Panchayat.

Decentralised Planning in Assam :

Following 73rd Amendment of the constitution, the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 provided for a three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj system, eg. Gaon Panchayat at the Village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level and Zilla Parishad at the District level. The most important level is the Gaon Panchayat where all members are directly elected by people along with its President. The 73rd Amendment Act considers Gaon Sabha as the most significant institution for Decentralized Planning and Participatory Democracy. The Assam Panchayat Act 1994 provided various provisions for strengthening of Gaon Sabha in the planning process.

Role of Gaon Sabha in Participatory/Decentralised Planning:

Decentralised Planning at Gaon Panchayat Level starts with the preparation of draft development plan at Gaon Sabha level in each Gaon Panchayat. Based on the Gaon Panchayat Plans, the Anchalik Panchayat Plans and District Plans are prepared and *District Planning Committee* (DPC) has to finalise the District Plan for the whole District.

There are certain steps at the Gaon Panchayat level in the process of participatory planning.

The first step is the organization of Gaon Sabha for the identification of the needs of the people. Here local issues are identified by the people through discussion.

In the second stage, sector-wise discussions are held. These sectors are productive sector, service sector and infrastructure sector. At this stage groups are formed according to the interest of the members. After discussion the groups have to approve them.

In the third step, situational analysis, determinations of solutions have been pointed out by Standing Committees of the Gaon Panchayat in consultation with the officials and feedback from the Gaon Panchayat.

In the fourth stage intensive discussions are to be made among elected representatives, officials, representatives nominated from Gaon Sabha and among the experts. After thorough discussion, suggestions are made for broad policies and general strategies for development.

At this stage Gaon Panchayat level, priorities are indicated and funds are allocated from the budget of the Gaon Panchayat.

After this stage, in the second meeting of the Gaon Sabha, sector-wise plan perspective is made on the basis of the priorities of the Gaon Sabha and accordingly solutions are made.

The draft plan is finalised at this stage in the full meeting of the Gaon Panchayat. But due to shortage of fund sometimes selections have to be made by Gaon Sabha on the basis of priorities.

At this stage, projects are prepared with supports from the experts on various development sectors.

Thereafter the plan is vetted by the technical Advisory Committee consisting of both official and non-official experts. It is done either at the block level or at the district level. After this, the plan is forwarded to the District Planning Committee for ratification. Finally the plan is approved by the District Planning Committee. Thus, it appears that decentralized planning ensures large scale participation of people in the planning process. It tries to prepare a holistic plan covering all the sectoral departments like agriculture, animal husbandry, health, water supply, development of weaker sections etc. etc.

Constraints of Decentralised Planning:

The present paper also tries to probe how far decentralized planning has been successful in reality.

In most of the states, including Assam, DPC has not been constituted and the matter of decentralized planning has been handled by old pattern.

The most important defect of the decentralized planning is that departmental allocations and the schemes are being centrally fixed, the Panchayats have no skill to manage either inter or inter-sectoral priorities. Thus, their role was restricted only to the choice of location or to the selection of beneficiaries.

Again the quantum of the unified fund which was made available to the DPC was too small to facilitate local level planning. It is said that from the beginning of the nineties even the source of unified fund began to dry up. As a result Panchayat lost interest and the experiment was abandoned before it could flourish into the medal of decentralised planning.

Further, plans have often been regarded as mere collection of felt needs of people and demands for financial provisions without taking into account their local resources and infrastructure.

It has always been pointed out that there is always a gap between the power given and the power exercised. This is more obvious in Gaon Panchayat level. In most of the states Panchayats have been entrusted 29 to 35 functions but in reality they are hardly carried out. In Assam also out of 29 functions only 9 functions have been allotted to the Panchayats.

State Governments have retained many regulatory, supervisory and controlling powers under the professed system of decentralized governance. Line departments are still independent of Panchayats though they come under the Panchayat administration.

Decentralised Planning is initiated through Gaon Sabha which is known as the Village Assembly. But in most of the States conditions of Gaon Sabha is very pathetic. People are not conscious about its existence, role and purpose. Attendance in such meeting is very poor. There is no proper circulation of agenda of Gaon Sabha meetings. In Assam also the picture is not different. To a large extent, even the members of the Gaon Panchayat are indifferent to Gaon Sabha. So, discussions on development planning, Budget of Gaon Panchayat etc. are not satisfactory. Mainly the matters relating to selection of beneficiaries for various rural development programmes are discussed in Gaon Sabha meetings. However, in Kerala and Karnataka decentralized planning has been successful due to the adequate role played by Gaon Sabha.

It can be said by way of conclusion that there is a big gap between theory and practice of decentralized planning in India. Much more needs to be done to realize the objectives of decentralized planning for rural development.

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