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MULTI-LEVEL PLANNING IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION:

Multi-level Planning opposed to centralized planning is an exercise where local institutions are actively involved not only at the implementation level but MLP involves all hierarchies of administrative, geographical, political and regional levels in planning process. It seeks to involve active participation of the lower hierarchical levels in information generation, data collection, policy suggestion, plan implementation & monitoring of all developmental activities. A planning process can be either single-level or multi-level. In the single-level planning, the formulation of plans and decision making are done at the national level; the process is centralized and the lower territorial levels come into the picture only at the implementation stage. On the other hand, in the multi-level planning process, the national territory is divided into small territorial units, their number depending upon the size of the country, the administrative, the geographical and cultural settings. The concept of multi-level regional planning may be defined as 'planning for a variety of regions which together form a system and subordinate systems'. In multi-level planning, the various levels of planning provide bases for higher-level planning. Similarly, the higher-level regional plans provide the basic frame-work for the lower-level plans. In such plans, there is direct participation of the people in the planning process. In multi-level planning, every region/unit constitutes a system and hence, the planning process becomes more effective.

Since multi-level planning involves the sharing of policy and planning functions with the sub-national levels following six operational principles have been suggested for devising necessary mechanisms and procedures for effective flows of information for planning and for frequent interaction with the participating levels (Sundaram, 1997):

- (a) The Principle of function-sharing,
- (b) The Principle of financial decentralization,
- c)The Principle of administrative decentralization
- d) The Principle of public participation

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In India, our planning process has mostly been centralized and a single-level sectoral planning has been going on for a long time. On the other hand, in the multi-level planning process, the national territory is divided into small territorial units, their number depending upon the size of the country, its administrative, geographical and regional structure. In India following five stages of multi-level planning has been recognized. These include:

- 1. National Level-sectoral cum inter-state / inter-regional planning.**
- 2. State Level-sectoral cum inter-district / inter-regional planning.**
- 3. District/Metropolitan Level-regional planning.**
- 4. Block Level-area planning**
- 5. Panchayat Level-village planning. These also denote five different phases of change in the policy of planning in the country.**

Before the Amendment of the Constitution in 1992, the task of plan formulation was basically carried out by the Centre and the State governments. The other levels (district, block, and village) of the planning process came into the picture only at the implementation stage of planning. However, after 1992, the lower levels of planning have been given more powers in the formulation and implementation of their plans and financial provisions.

1. The First-Level Planning

At national level Planning Commission is the nodal agency responsible for the country's planning. The Prime Minister is the Chairman of this Commission. It not only prepares Plans for the country but also coordinates the sectoral development works of different ministries of the central Government, states and union territories. The functions of the Planning Commission are supervised through the National Development Council. The Planning Commission has been granted constitutional status through 52nd Amendment of the Constitution. No big plan can be executed without its prior approval by the Planning Commission. The Commission formulates

three types of plans: (a) Perspective plans for 15-25 years, (b) Five year plans, and (c) Annual plans within the framework of Five Year Plan. In real sense of the term the perspective planning is of little significance except that it helps in the achievement of long-term socio-economic objectives. The Planning Commission also issues guidelines to the states for perspective planning, monitoring and evaluation of existing plans, plan formulation, regional or district planning and for plan coordination.

2. The Second-Level or State Level Planning

At state level the mechanism of the planning is almost same of the national level. The state Planning Board acts like national planning Commission and coordinates the development plans of different ministries and the districts. It also has the responsibility of the formulation, implementation and monitoring of state plan.

It is in constant touch with Planning Commission regarding the formulation of plans and allocation of resources. Under the federal set up of the country states enjoy autonomy in certain state subjects and play pivotal role in the implementation of planning programmes.

It is at state level that all sorts of economic and social data are available and development plans could be formulated keeping regional interests and demands in mind. Hence, there is a need for more rigorous exercise of planning at state-level.

Those states which are conscious of their responsibility and are showing interest in plan formulation and implementation are displaying better performance in development programmes. Andhra Pradesh case may be cited as an example. Infact the Center and the States are the two principal actors in planning and they should move in unison to achieve the objectives and priorities laid down in the plans.

3. The District-Level Planning

There are generally three levels below the State level, namely, district, block and village. The district administration is under the overall charge of the collector, also known as deputy commissioner in some states). He is responsible for maintaining law and order in the district. He also works as a coordinator among various departments. Important departments located in the

district include the agriculture, minor, medium and major irrigation, animal husbandry, dairying, forestry, industries, public works, cooperation, education, medical and public health, social welfare and panchayati raj, etc. Besides, there are autonomous agencies with offices in the district such as electricity board, state transport and special agencies set up for special programmes such as SFDA, DPAP, etc. Though the collector generally works as a coordinator, his role is not defined properly and differs in different states. This introduces complexities and difficulties in the task of administration.

4. The Block-Level Planning

Block is an important unit of micro-level planning. These development blocks were created to supervise the implementation of development plans under the Community Development Programme initiated during the First Five Year Plan. Each district was divided into a number of blocks and each block comprised about 100 villages, with a population of about 60,000.

The programme visualized mobilization of local resources, participation of the people in the decision-making and implementation of the development schemes. Hence, a new unit of planning was created at block-level under the leadership of a block development officer and a team of various specialists and village level workers (officers).

The general supervision of blocks was made by the Block Samithis under the chairmanship of the Block Pramukh and elected representatives. Although the Community Development Programme failed but block continued to become an important unit of micro-level planning below the district. The Fifth Five Year Plan (1978-83) opted for area planning with a preference for block-level planning for achieving employment objectives and emphasis on rural development.

The main objective of this planning was to absorb local labour surpluses and greater involvement of people in the formulation and implementation of development plans. Hence, by the end of 1983 adopt system of block-level planning integrated into national system was available. The relevance of block-level planning is based on the viable areal and population-size, more of to the regional and local problems, easier identification of target groups, optimum utilization of regional/local resources, and greater participation of people in plan formulation and implementation. The entire strategy of such planning is based on employment planning, growth centre planning credit planning.

It is an action-oriented planning pertaining to the development of agriculture, irrigation (mainly minor irrigation), soil conservation, animal husbandry, pisciculture, forestry, minor processing of agricultural products, small and cottage industries, creation of local-level infra-structure, and development of social services like water supply, health, education, shelter, sanitation, local transport, and welfare plans.

The entire process of 1 block-level planning passes through seven stages. These include: (i) identification phase, (ii) resource inventory phase, (iii) plan formulation phase, (iv) employment plan phase, (v) areal or layout plan phase, (vi) credit plan phase, and (vii) integration and implementation phase. The main objectives of such planning include self reliance, solution to the problems of unemployment, removal of socio-economic disparities, creation of skill to promote self employment and self reliance, improvement in productivity and optimum utilization of local resources.

Thus the main focus of such planning is the identification of target group, introduction of development plans to generate employment, popularization of minimum need programmes and implementation of special programmes for weaker section of the society.

With the coming of Janata Government in power in 1977 the bottom-up approach was emphasized in planning. The report on the Working Group (1978) has emphasised following objectives of block- level planning. These include : (i) optimum utilization of the development potentials of the region, (ii) higher proportion of profit to weaker section (small and marginal farmers, land-less agricultural labourers, and rural artisans), fulfilment of minimum needs, construction of socio-economic infrastructural bases to achieve aforesaid objectives, formulation of institutions to check the exploitation of poor people, development of such infrastructural facilities which could generate assets for the interest of poor and weaker section of the society, technological upgrading and skill creation and removal of total unemployment through public works.

5. The Panchayat-Level Planning

The directive principles of state policy mention the village Panchayat which is an elected body at village level. Village, here, roughly corresponds to a revenue village (or a group of revenue villages). The Panchayati Raj System involves a three-tier structure: village-level, block-level and district level.

The first tier at village level is commonly known as Gram Panchayat (village assembly), the second tier at block-level as Panchayat Samiti and the third tier at district-level as Zila Parishad.

According to the provisions of the Panchayats Act 1996 the election to the village Panchayat is held at an interval of 5 years where there is proportionate seat reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and not less than one-third seats reserved for women.

Through the Constitution Amendment Act 1992 the Panchayat (also called Gram Sabha) has been authorized to look after the preparation and implementation of plans for economic development and social justice on an illustrative list of 29 subjects. The respective state has been given discretionary powers to prescribe powers and functions to the Gram Sabha to act as an institution of self government.

It has also been advised to constitute a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and Municipalities and prepare an integrated development plan for the district as a whole. It has also been directed to constitute a State Finance Commission (SFC) to review every five years, the financial position of Panchayats and to make recommendations about the principle governing the distribution of revenues between the state and the Panchayats, and determination of the grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Funds of the State.

The implementation of the plan at the Panchayat-level is the responsibility of the village development officer (VDO) and the secretary and is supervised by the Gram Sabha which is headed by the Gram Pradhan. Under the existing provisions, funds for the Gram Sabha (Village Panchayat) are directly being allocated from the centre to execute rural development programmes like IRDP, JRY etc.

The Panchayat has also been entrusted with the responsibility for the promotion of agriculture, rural industries, provision of medical relief, maternity, women and child welfare, maintaining common grazing grounds, village roads, tanks, wells, sanitation and execution of other socio-economic programmes.

In some places, they are also authorized to supervise primary education and collect land revenue. Presently, Gram Panchayats are involved in the identification of beneficiaries in antipoverty programmes. There are about 2.20 lakh Gram Panchayats, 5,300 Panchayat Samitis and 400 Zila Parishads in the country.

The new status accorded to the Panchayats by the Constitution has raised high hopes and expectations among the elected representatives and the rural folk at large. But owing to the political

complexions of the governments in the Indian states, the reluctance of the state-level political and administrative functionaries to part with power and authority, and some genuine financial and economic difficulties, the progress in operationalisation has been somewhat slow and halting.

It has been found that elected representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions are largely unaware of the political and economic dimensions of development issues and lack planning and managerial skills. This is particularly true of women elected representatives, who are performing their duties under some severe constraints of different kinds.

It is also argued that Gram Panchayat and Development Block are too small to act as the smallest unit of planning. Also there is complete lack of administrative framework and data collection system at these two levels. Hence, there would be a number of difficulties in the formulation and execution of plans at village and block levels.

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