

Democratic Decentralisation and Inclusive Development in India

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Abstract: In India, policies and strategies implemented from planning era have made considerable progress in few fields and comfortable improvement in many sectors. But, in the other side shows gloomy picture of development due to prevailing low literacy, ignorance, lack of assets, belonging to a minority group or religion. There is an understanding in general that, implementing centrally sponsored schemes through Gram Panchayat, integration of people's views in the regional development initiatives and making the bottom most people institutions as the prime body has created options for the disadvantaged section's involvement at certain extent. There is no doubt; democratic decentralisation brings lot of changes at the bottom where village people have easy access to various services. Democratic Decentralization refers to the devolution of powers, finances and functions to the local institutions and allows these institutions to take participatory decision making. It needs long way to go achieving the goal of equality and social justice in the country especially in the rural areas. This article discusses on the opportunity created for inclusion of excluded through participatory governance and planning involving Gram Panchayats, various forms of exclusion and approaches for further strengthening of the inclusive process at the grass root.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Inclusion and Exclusion, Gram Panchayat, Participatory Governance, Inclusive Growth, Dalits, Marginalised, Politically Dominants and Participatory Planning.

1. Introduction

India has been proved its identity as a super power in the global arena by achieving commendable status in the field of economic and technological development. The policies and strategies implemented from the planning era have made considerable progress in few fields and comfortable improvement in many sectors. But, in the other side shows gloomy picture of development due to prevailing low literacy, ignorance, lack of assets, belonging to a minority group or religion. It hurdles the poor people for access the process of economic opportunities and welfare measures available in the socio-economic and political institutions. The efforts and protective policies of the government have made lot of improvement only from the last two decades. Vibrating the Panchayat Raj system by strengthening the democratic governing institutions at the grassroots, making constitutional provisions enabled the excluded communities to participate in the process of political, administrative and developmental decision making. It further leads in positive impact in the

society and recognition of the unrecognised historically. Implementing centrally sponsored schemes through Gram Panchayat, integration of people views in the regional development initiatives and making the bottom most people institutions as the prime body created options for the disadvantaged section's involvement at certain extent. Inclusive strategies in education - allocation of certain jobs and other economic opportunities were encouraged the excluded category of people to get their share and joined in the mainstream of development. But, it is miniscule to mentioned that, majority of the poor people from Dalits, women, minorities, physically challenged are facing acute poverty and vulnerable to calamities. (Montek Singh Ahluwalia, 2010)

2. Democratic decentralization in India

The democratic decentralisation brings lot of changes at the bottom where village people have easy access to various services. Democratic Decentralization refers to the devolution of powers, finances and functions to the local institutions and allows these institutions to take participatory decision making. It further encourages, planning programmes and strategies by involving stakeholders and implement them for improving the life of the poorest of the poor. The 73rd Amendment in the Indian constitution paved ways for the process of democratic decentralisation. It allows transfer of certain important subjects dealing with basic necessity of the people from state government to PRIs. It includes a range of services like creation and maintenance of basic infrastructures namely water, roads, communication street lights, drainage, water bodies, village markets, health and sanitation, education, irrigation sources, burial ground or cremation centres, public utilities, etc. This enables Gram Panchayats to develop close and better relations among the communities. Democratic decentralization stands for people's right to initiate their own projects for local well-being and the power to implement on their own.

One of the major policies for inclusion of marginalised is reservation for SCs& STs and Women elected to the local administration in the form of elected representatives at various level. The recent report on panchayati raj reflects around 44% of women were elected to the panchayats. There are about 23% PRI elected representatives from SC&STs and 10.01% are from other vulnerable communities. The constitutional provisions

enabled and witnessed good number of downtrodden to participate in the local body administration but it is mere physical presence. The social hierarchy and economic inequality embedded in the traditional society make all kinds of hurdles and troubles to suppress the voice of the voiceless. But, Panchayats have become centre of attraction to poor in the rural areas based on its services in supporting the people specifically marginalised people. Panchayats have been implementing various centrally sponsored Schemes through the State Governments. Panchayats are being recognized as implementing institution for the plan schemes of line departments. The important programmes sponsored by the union government with the participation of respective state governments are Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), National rural Health mission, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojana (PMAY), Sawachha Bharath, etc. The marginalised sections become beneficiary any one or more of above programmes which help them to earn their livelihoods.

3. PRIs and participatory decentralized planning

In the developing countries marginal and small farmers and the people living in slum areas are non-participants in the process of development decision making. Their resources are very minimal and productivity is limited. Majority are poverty ridden and suppressed by the rich, the educated, and the politically dominant. They are powerless even to claim their rightful share of society. These are the basic problems of development before introduction to democratic decentralisation in India. But the initiatives under the new panchayati raj act created immense opportunities to even to the poor to raise their voice against injustice and pressure to claim their rights through Gram Sabha.

In India, the process of decentralization resulted in creation of people's institutions, local self-governments known as Panchayat. Local governing institutions are granted constitutional legality as Local Government bodies responsible for socio- economic development in the rural areas. There are 29 subjects for which the panchayat is responsible with the help of Standing Committees to cover all subjects. Each standing committee has the responsibility for the financial and executive administration of the schemes and programmes within the budgetary provisions of the panchayat. The budget includes both resources mobilized locally and funds devolved by the State Government. Through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) is strengthened with clear areas of jurisdiction, authority and funds. PRIs have been assigned several development activities including health and population stabilization. The Gram Sabha acts as a community level accountability mechanism to ensure the functions of the PRI respond to people's needs. While fiscal devolution is a significant issue, lack of institutional modalities and clear guidelines on PRI participation and variable capacity among PRI are key lacunae.

Even though participatory planning implementation and monitoring of rural development projects is mandatory for all PRI institutions, majority of the institutions have not put full-fledged effort for mobilizing people for participation and involve them in the development process. But, a good number of Gram Panchayats in the country have been making good attempts and also attain success in implementation of development programmes and achieved expected results in the field of provision of basic needs, health and sanitation, strengthening of livelihoods, natural resource management and village self-sufficiency through people participation. Available literatures show participatory planning and implementation yields good results in terms of material benefits to the stakeholders and evolve better transparency and accountability. Study of such good practices, strategies, approaches and factors of people participation in the process of planning will be very important in order to analyze for replication in other places.

4. Excluded/marginalized groups in India

In the Indian context the marginalized are categorized as the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, denoted tribes, nomadic tribes, and other backward classes.

1. *Women*: Under different economic conditions, and under the influence of specific historical, cultural, legal and religious factors, marginalization of women can be seen from their exclusion from certain jobs and occupations. Women belonging to lower classes, lower castes, illiterate, and the poorest region have been marginalized more than their better off counterparts.
2. *People with Disabilities*: The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations with disabilities, and thus has left in a severe state of impoverishment.
3. *Elderly*: Being past middle age and approaching old age; rather old. Ageing is an inevitable and inexorable process in life. Elderly women form the majority of marginalized groups among them.
4. *Ethnic minority*: A group that has different cultural traditions from the majority of the population. The term ethnic minority refers to marginalised people of the same race or nationality who share a distinctive culture. It may include any group that is subnormal with respect to a dominant group, in terms of social status, education, employment, wealth, and political power. They may be migrant, indigenous or landless nomadic communities, or religious minorities that have a different faith from the majority.
5. *Caste groups*: The caste system is a strict hierarchical social system based on underlying notions of purity and pollution. Dalits or the Scheduled Castes constitute the bottom of the hierarchy. The marginalization of Dalits influences all spheres of their life, violating basic human rights such as civil,

political, social, economic and cultural rights. Literacy rates, purchasing power and poor housing conditions among Dalits are common phenomenon. Physical segregation of their settlements is common. However, in recent years due to affirmative action and legal protection, the intensity of caste-based marginalization is reducing.

6. *Tribes*: In India, the population of Scheduled Tribes is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged group. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water. They constitute agricultural, casual, plantation labourers. This has resulted in poverty, low levels of education and poor access to health care services.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan of India stressed more on the strategy of the 'Inclusive Growth'. It liberalised the industrial policy and implemented a number of economic reforms resulted in accelerated growth on sustained manner. Yet, notwithstanding the considerable space given to Panchayati Raj, it benefitted rich to become rich but real poor could not able to reap the benefits. Much worry fact given by the Arjun Sengupta Committee in August 2007 that, 836 million Indians – over 75% of our people – as being 'poor and vulnerable', living with the meagre amount of Rs.20 Per capita per day. More than 300 million people in India still live in deep poverty at less than a dollar a day, while another 350 million live on less than two dollars a day. In this sense, the rich-poor divide has increased and poverty reduction figures for India are rising. India ranked 60th among the 79 developing countries in 2017 Inclusive Development Index (IDI) released in World Economic Forum's (WEF) 'Inclusive Growth and Development Report'. The index is based on 12 performance indicators and countries are ranked on IDI scores based on a scale of 1-7. It has three pillars Growth and Development, Inclusion and Intergenerational Equity, and Sustainability in order to provide a more complete measure of economic development than GDP growth alone.

5. Concept of inclusive growth

Inclusive society means that, it is a society in which all the sections of people irrespective of differences like race, sex, rich and poor, social hierarchy religion and other factors of inability, people have to equally participate, allowed to raise voice in the public forum, full-fledged participation in the governance and planning for welfare of the local commune. In reality, the power of participation is dream for many communities neglected over a period of time especially in the poverty ridden regions of north and north eastern regions. People belong to the higher social order even belonging to the poorest of the poor will be treated with high respect but in vice-versa a person coming from lower social status cuffed with poverty have to face multi-faceted attacks which will suppress the life which is already ruined by natural factors. With the passage of time, due

to multiple reasons, poor started living with accustom to the painful life. Women as a category are perceived as marginalised because in the patriarchal framework, historically women suffered denial all rights. After adopting democratic form of governance, India made effort to enlarge space meant for marginalised groups. There are many groups and social categories which have been termed as marginalised women. Important among these groups are widows, war victims, persons with disability, destitute, lesbians, trans-genders, AIDS victims and so on.

The former union minister for Panchayat Raj Shri Mani Sankar Iyar viewed that, the key component of 'strategy of inclusive growth' must be participatory of all sections representative governance at the grass roots level. Suitable platform and conducive environment are to be created through Gram Panchayats and capacitated to plan and execute the projects to remove the poverty on their own. Village self-reliance and participatory governance are the important areas for empowerment of rural people. The effective empowerment of the disadvantaged through the effective devolution of functions, finances and functionaries to the representative institutions of local self-government on the principle of subsidiarity, will help to reach inclusive growth. The vital strategies for inclusive development aim to increase investment in the villages on infrastructure supporting agriculture and allied sectors. Expanding credit facilities for small, marginal farmers and also to micro entrepreneurs and ensuring better prices for the rural products will increase the farmers as well as labourers income. Improving the quality of education and health and also effective support of social safety net strategies improve the quality of life for the poor.

A. Elements of inclusion

Development policies and thinkers of welfare society propagated a number of dimensions of concern as elements of inclusion which are worth to mention here- strengthening the effective implementation of the inclusive policies and legislation, permanent and protected space and dwelling unit for live, work and recreation, access to information and communication, access to public amenities, access to resources, access to basic services, including education, health care, clean water and sanitation, Transparent and accountable decision-making processes - Adequate income and employment opportunities, etc.

B. Origin of inclusive planning

The world leaders assembled and agreed on making required strategies for inclusion of the excluded categories of the people in the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) was held in Copenhagen in the year 1995. It was the stable beginning and recognised effort in this field. The 'society for all' concept was evolved and developed a concrete approach. The ultimate motto of the concept is to as a right every citizen in the globe has important role to play in shaping the economy and society, at the end even individual in any society. It allows and encourages

all the section of the people to involve in the process of planning, implementation and monitoring the programmes and projects of the government institutions responsible for development of the people and environment.

C. Need for inclusive planning

In India, there has been increasing attention on enabling the vulnerable communities to take part and raise voice for their development as well as against the atrocity on them. It is well understood that, the stakeholders of planning especially most vulnerable and marginalised like SC&ST, women, religious minorities, the older people, disabled, indigenous people and other groups like the youths are still not fully represented in the process and therefore the inclusive planning process still remains elusive. It is very important, because these group of people constitute more than 50% of the country's population in India. Moreover, Inclusive planning will through the real issues and viable solutions represented by the affected people themselves which will bring cost effective planning process. This is achieved through transparent decision making process that reduces conflict and facilitation to access local knowledge.

6. Approaches for inclusive planning

- i. *Identification of marginalized:* Social Inclusion refers to the process that enables equal opportunities everyone regardless of background. It is not confined to economic opportunities only and transcends to all aspects of human life to ensure individuals can realize the full potentials of their life. Therefore, it is important to have identification of the groups and related data.
- ii. *Understanding the characteristics:* Demographic, socio-economic and participation in political process and social/community activities among others are important issues for understanding the group's status and role, which in turn is critical in ascertaining how to integrate them in mainstream development activities through planning process.
- iii. *Analyzing the legal protective mechanisms for the marginalised:* Appropriate examination of the legal and regulatory framework is therefore required to ensure there are no structural impediments for the usually excluded groups. For planning purposes, it is important to the Government to analyze the prevailing constitutional and policy provisions for all to participate in the decision making process without any hurdles in addition to allocate the resources according to their reservations inclusive planning.

- iv. *Promoting participatory methods in policy development and planning:* examine the practice of participatory methods in regional policy making and planning exercises. Appropriate participatory methods like Gram Sabha are to be employed to enable the poor to participate without hesitation.
- v. *Focusing the marginalized Sections within the Planning Resource Envelope:* Usually overriding priorities in the planning process include poverty reduction, eradication of hunger and malnutrition, reduction of mortality for children, women, education for all and such other SDGs related and other global commitments. While most vulnerable social groups are poor and suffer from all other related deprivations they are usually not thought of in devising the target and thus receive no allocations either. This needs to be ensured to initiate inclusive planning for all. Including the concerns of marginalised not only the components of planning in general. It can be strengthened by allowing standalone initiatives for the vulnerable groups.

7. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview on Democratic Decentralisation and Inclusive Development in India

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