

Abstract on Participatory Planning

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Towards optimum utilization of available resources, economic planning was adopted in independent India as the instrument to achieve rapid economic development and reduction of poverty. Five year plans were formulated centrally since 1951 to achieve this coveted goal. However, the goal remained elusive over the years, considering the figures of poverty ridden families. It was soon realized that the process of planning to become successful, required to be spread out to the community for whom the development is intended. The concept of “Decentralized planning” received prominence from the experiments and experiences of the states that recognized its essence earlier and also from the reports of the committees formed to evaluate the plans and explore the corrective measures.

In its concept, decentralized planning recognized the importance of the local institution and empowered it with constitutional mandate to formulate, adopt and execute policies and actions for attaining “economic development with social justice”. The landmark 73rd amendment to the constitution in 1993 identified 29 subjects (enshrined in XIth schedule of the constitution) over which the people’s institutions i.e. the Panchayats have power to formulate and implement programmes and activities for the overall development and welfare of the local people. Accordingly, the state legislations empowered these institutions to raise and mobilize local resources to this effect. Popular forums in the form of “Gram Sabha” were earmarked to take up the activity of identifying and prioritizing the local needs and recommend means to fulfill them. The Panchayats (*and municipalities in urban areas*) have been made responsible and accountable to the “Local Parliaments” or “Sansads” at respective tiers (Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samity and Gram Panchayat *and wards in case of municipalities*). Art. 243-ZD also laid down the provision of “District Planning Committee” to converge and bring the components of rural and urban planning under the common umbrella of the district to synergize the efforts and resources towards However, the ideal concept gets vitiated by the vested interest of the power mongers, who take the advantage of the “lack of awareness” of the community rendering the “popular forums” to ceremonial entities.

In order to render Government projects into community assets “participation of the community” is sine qua non. Once owned by the community, the assets would indeed become social investment. To inculcate this ownership the different interest groups among the target beneficiaries e.g. the SHGs, the farmers, the fish farmers, the animal rearers, the cottage industry workers, the unorganized sector labourers, the craftsmen, etc. need to be organized structurally and functionally. Besides honing their trade skills, their skill in “community participation” and ability to transfer “development needs into perceivable micro plans” is indispensable. The process can be described using the following flow diagram :

