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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STATUS OF DISTRICT PLANNING COMMITTEES AND PROCESS OF INTEGRATED DISTRICT PLAN IN INDIA

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Abstract

The desire for decentralised planning was first expressed way back in the first five year plan, when it was suggested to break the planning process into national, state, district and at community level. Consequently, the Planning Commission issued guidelines for district planning in 1969, which led to several states formulating district plans. The 73rd and 74th Amendments of Constitution of India were the milestones since they provided the much needed constitutional legitimacy to local governance institutions. Followed by these developments and as response to the constitutional mandate, the state governments have constituted the district planning committees and guided for preparation of district plan. In this context, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj has conducted a nationwide study to understand status of formation of DPCs and their functional efficiency. This article is an outcome of the study, it presents evolution, composition, powers and functions and supportive mechanism created for DPCs in different states in India. It also presents on the process followed for preparation of District Plan.

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Introduction:-

Evolution of District Planning Committee (DPC):

The institution of District Planning Committee (DPC) as envisaged in the 73rd and 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution is the realisation of consistent and conscious effort towards decentralised planning since the process of planned development began in the country. The desire for decentralised planning was first expressed way back in the first five year plan, when it was suggested to break the planning process into national, state, district and at community level. However, the idea was given a concrete shape with the establishment of the District Development Council to consolidate plans prepared at the village level through a participative process. The newly established Local Self Government Institutions at the village, block and district level were to help prepare these plans. The Administrative Reforms Commission in its report of 1967 stressed on the need for meaningful planning at the district level especially focusing on local variations in development. Consequently, the Planning Commission issued guidelines for district planning in 1969, which led to several states formulating district plans. The widespread suppression and curtailment of powers of Local Self Governing institutions across the states during late 1960s and 70s led to the tormenting of district planning process.

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The revival of district planning process was reexamined again in 1984 through the Working Group on 'District Planning' headed by C.H. Hanumantha Rao. The Working Group recommended greater decentralisation of functions, powers and resources for meaningful district planning. Further it recommended setting up of district planning bodies of about 50 members with district Collector as Chief Coordinator. This planning body should be assisted by planning officers and technical experts at various levels. Other notable recommendations on strengthening planning and administration at the district level came from the G.V.K. Rao Committee on Administrative Reforms for Rural Development (1985) and the Sarkaria Commission for Centre-State Relations (1988). However, all these efforts at strengthening decentralised planning were met with consistent failure due to several reasons. Given this background of efforts at decentralised planning in India, the 73rd and 74th Amendments were the milestones since they provided the much needed constitutional legitimacy to local governance institutions, defined their functional domains and provided for financial devolution to these institutions and mandated the establishment of District Planning Committee (DPC) as the formal body for preparation of District Development Plan by consolidating the plans prepared by the rural and urban local bodies.

Composition of District Planning Committee (DPC):

Elected Members:

While the composition of the DPC and the manner in which the seats are to be filled have been left to the choice of states, article 243ZD stipulates that four-fifths of the total number of members of DPC will be elected by, and from amongst, the elected members of the Panchayat at the district level and of the municipalities in proportion to the ratio between the population of rural and urban areas in the district.

Nominated Members:

Nominated members usually represent the State & Central Government agencies including line departments. A larger proportion of nominated members could imply greater interference and control in DPC functioning by the State and Central administration. All states with the exception of Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, have a ratio of about four fifths or 20 per cent nominated members in the DPC. In Himachal Pradesh the ratio of nominated members is only 8 per cent, and in Karnataka it is 15 per cent. The extreme is in Chhattisgarh, all members are nominated. Through nominated members and special invitees from officers of district administration as well as members of the Central and State legislatures find representation in the DPC. Special invitees or permanent invitees generally include local MPs and MLAs, district administration officials, representatives from line departments. These invitees do not have voting rights in the DPC but participate in its deliberations.

Powers of District Planning Committee (DPC) in India:

The DPC is envisaged to play a nodal role in the district planning process by consolidating rural and urban plans prepared by the villages and towns in the district and then preparing a draft development plan for the district on the basis of the plans so received from within the district. DPC is thus crucial to the function of 'planning for economic and social justice at the district level', which is now a mandated local function, it provides vital link between rural and urban plans also for sectoral plans. In this respect, it is important that the DPCs have an understanding of the planning process and, if required, the assistance of qualified planners and technical experts. As per Article 243 ZD, DPCs should also pay special regard to issues of common interest between Panchayats and municipalities, such as spatial planning, sharing of physical and natural resources, infrastructure development and environmental conservation. Since the states have modelled their own legislative provisions for DPCs under Article 243 ZD, the role and functions of DPCs in the State Acts are listed similar provisions.

Functions of DPC as given in State PRI Acts:

In all the states, the DPC has the pivotal role of preparing the district perspective plan. In addition, only variations of powers given by the states are mentioned here.

Andhra Pradesh - Ensure that each local body in the district prepares a Development Plan & consolidate plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities in the district. Review implementation of Development Plan periodically & monitor achievements.

In *Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim* – DPC has to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the Municipalities and to prepare a draft development plan for the district

In *Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala* major function of DPC is devoted for consolidation of rural and urban plans and preparation of draft development plan for the district. Besides, the DPC shall perform any other functions relating to district planning, as may be assigned to it by the government.

Bihar – the DPC has to consolidate plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities in the district. Further, it has to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole. DPC would prepare details of socio-economic indicators on the basis of collected data, details of resources available in village, block, town and has to prepare the employment plan for the district.

Madhya Pradesh - Consolidate the plans prepared by the Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats & the Municipalities and prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole and also prepare employment plan for the district. Further it has the responsibility of Monitoring, evaluation & review of all schemes and programmes being implemented in the district and submission of periodic progress reports to the state government, are the major functions of the DPC.

Maharashtra – Assess the five year plan and perspective plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities and coordinate, prepare draft five year plan for entire district. Consolidate the Plan prepared by Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, Zilla Parishad and Municipalities.

Uttarakhand – the state panchayati Raj act makes DPCs responsible for consolidation of plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities. Based on the consolidated plan document, it has to prepare draft development plan including employment plan for the district. Further, DPC has to Collect, compile and update information relating to natural and human resources of the district to create a sound database for decentralized planning. Preparation of district and block resources profiles and mapping of amenities at village, block and district levels also earmarked to the DPCs. The committee allocates sectoral and sub-sectoral outlays within the overall framework of the district development plan. It enables, participation of people and other institutions in overall development process. Monitor, evaluate and review progress under the schemes and programmes being implemented.

West Bengal – Here also similar provisions are notified, i.e consolidation of local plans and preparation of draft development plan for the district. The budgetary provision for various departments for district-level items are disaggregated and disbursed to the DPC. Within these budgetary parameters, which have come to be known as divisible outlay, the DPC has the power to formulate its own plan on the basis of the "district-specific schemes" drawn from district-level sectoral plans and the "block and municipality-specific schemes" appearing in block and municipal plans.

The *Punjab* DPCs Act of 2005 also envisages a similar role for DPCs, giving them the responsibility for overseeing implementation and monitoring of development schemes and projects.

Institutional arrangements for DPC:

DPC can take support of institutions as well as technical experts in the process of consolidating plans and preparing draft development plan. Technical experts can also be nominated as members to the DPC. In Haryana, for example, the district town planner is a nominated member in 20-member committees and an eminent economist is also a nominated member. Chhattisgarh also provides membership to Economic and Statistical Officer of the district as a nominated member.

In Kerala, the DPC is assisted in scrutinizing plans and projects by Technical Approval Committees (TACs). The TACs have sectoral sub-committees to study the respective chapters of the district plan – for example the Municipal TAC for urban plans, under the guidance of District Level TAC. The DPC also consults with their working groups of technical experts as and when necessary.

In Rajasthan, different means have been adopted by DPCs for technical support. Plan consolidation work is being carried out by the Chief Planning Officer of the district. The DPC can also hire experts as consultants. Heads of all line departments are often invited in DPC meetings. Thus different arrangements have been made for DPCs to obtain technical support for performing their functions. In Karnataka, DPCs can constitute expert committees, and can also hire technical experts if they feel the need.

Procedure for Preparation of Integrated of District Plan:

Decentralized planning is a process of preparing an integrated plan for the region taking into account of available natural, human and financial resources. While preparation, it has to cover sectoral activities and schemes assigned to the units at the district and below. It has to include schemes implemented through local governments.

Objectives of Integrated District Plan:

The objective of decentralized planning is to arrive at an integrated, participatory coordinated idea of development of a local area. An essential step in this direction is to ensure that each panchayat at any level or Municipality is treated as a planning unit and the 'district plan' is built up through consolidation and integration of these plans as well as by considering the development of the district as a whole. It is a two-way interactive exercise, the district being viewed as a convenient local area. The various stages of 'District Plan' preparation have described below.

Building a Vision:

The vision would be primarily articulated in terms of goals and outcomes and would address basically, three aspects of Development, namely, human Development, infrastructure Development and Development in the productive sector. The articulation of a vision is best done in each planning unit, right down to the Gram Panchayat level starting from each area based on the needs and potential. It spells on what the attainable levels are and what the goals to be reached could be. Building a vision for basic human development indicators would essentially cover all the aspects of human life like health, education, women and child welfare, social justice and fulfilling of basic minimum services.

Data Requirement for Decentralized Planning:

While doing envisioning process, a stock-taking exercise has to be conducted for assessing human condition in the district, and to know the availability of natural, social and financial resources and infrastructure in that region. The data base prepared would be an invaluable resource for the stock taking exercise. Planning at district level require a careful study of human and natural resources along with field realities for optimum utilization and responsive planning. Data on physical resources, human and economic aspects are pre-requisites for an integrated plan.

Natural Resources Database:

1. Soil and Water: Type of sources, quantity, quality, adequacy and problems of access
2. Flora and Fauna : species of the region and optimal uses
3. Land use pattern : Different uses of land in the planning region
4. Livestock : Nature, Quantity, production and productivity levels.
5. Cropping pattern (season-wise)
6. Climate : variation subject to season and suitability for various options
7. Rainfall: Rainfall rate over a period of time, temperature variations and weather conditions are to be properly assessed.

Participative Citizen Surveys:

Data regarding demography of the region like male-female ratio, child population, education, employment status, caste system, land holdings, land-man ratio, wage rate, size of agricultural labourers and their migration, etc; to be collected to understand the sociological aspects while formulating a plan. Human resources are as important as physical resources. One of the reasons for the failure is under-utilization of the human resources. Therefore, the plan should clearly state the details of human resources that are available in their region. The planning team has to collect the demographical data like total population, sex, age, educational status, occupational status and skill availability.

Stock-Taking:

Data are to be collected on the availability of infrastructure in numbers, capacity, utility status and functional conditions. Infrastructure facilities are integral part of supporting the development process, much importance to be given for creating new infrastructures and strengthening of already existing structures. Therefore the following particulars have to be collected for better planning.

Economic infrastructure:

Markets : Types, availability, needed and location appropriateness; Banks/Financial Institutions: Numbers, area of operation, performance, etc.; Roads Transport, Communication /Electricity: Available, working, not working; Agri-input Centers, Agri. Extension Officers : Seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, Veterinary Centers.

Social Infrastructure Availability and their Utility: Schools/Colleges/Educational Institutions, Hospitals/Health institutions, Community Centre /Libraries/etc, Entertainment centres and Drinking water /sanitation.

Trade & Industry: Mining & quarrying, Small Scale Industries, Household /Cottage Industries, Handicrafts, Forest, Agro based industries; Wholesale/ Retail trade

Identification and Prioritization of Problems and Needs:

The next important step in planning process is identification of problems and needs of the local people and their prioritization. Planning team has to understand the nature and acuteness of various problems through observation in that region. Particulars on educational status, income and expenditure, level of poverty, consumption pattern of people, living standard and life styles have to be collected. The proposed plan should be given focus on solving the identified problems through satisfying the needs of people.

Concern on Environmental Sustainability:

Planning at the grass root or state or at the national level should aim at sustainability in development. Instead of planning for adhoc solutions, striving towards arriving permanent solutions create much impact on the development scenario in the region. For example, if a region is having problems of unemployment and poverty, the plan should pave the ways and means to provide permanent employment opportunities, either farm or off-farm for wage and self-employment. The programmes like providing wage employment through various government schemes may satisfy the immediate requirement but will not solve the problems permanently. Therefore, planners have to do maximum efforts to solve the problems through sustainable way by alternate mechanisms with suitable strategies. At the same time, the proposed industrial or business activities should not degrade the environment.

Formulation of Objectives:

Formulation of objectives is one of the major tasks of planning. The important points to be considered during formulation are: it should be formulated towards solving the problems of the local people and connected to regional prosperity. The planner should concentrate on the peculiar problems for immediate solution. The objectives should be achievable focusing on optimum utilization of locally available resources.

Designing of Strategies, Programmes and Targets:

After identification of the problems and finalizing the objectives and priorities, the team has to concentrate on preparation of proper strategies depending upon the problems encountered and objectives enunciated by involving people and acknowledging the people concerns. The strategies have to be prepared in order to deliver benefits to the local people within the stipulated time. Setting of targets is an important function in development planning. To fulfill the objectives, the targets are to be fixed in specific terms with a time frame and should be based on the availability of resources, ability of services, and capacity of the implementing mechanism and state policies.

Resource Envelope:

Resources in the form of men, material, money and energy, their proper distribution, steady flow of resources and finances are the vital factors contributing to the success of any plan. If any one of these resources is not available or scarcely available that will lead to delay in achieving the fixed targets. The local government component of the plan would emerge out of the resource envelope containing the following sources of funds:-

1. Own resources available for development
2. Transfers by State Finance Commission for development purposes
3. Central Finance Commission grants passed on by the State Government.
4. Untied grants for local planning.
5. Grants in respect of Centrally Sponsored Schemes assigned to local bodies for the purposes of implementation.
6. Grants for State Plan schemes assigned for implementation through Local Governments.
7. Grants for Externally supported schemes assigned for implementation through Local Governments.
8. Estimated contribution by the communities themselves.

Matching of resources to the plan:

Ideally speaking, each gram panchayat should be free to allocate resources in accordance with the assessed needs. However, at this stage of development, the local planning exercise has to take into account the diversity of sources of funds. The attempts should be to put them to best possible use. Therefore, once the order of resources for the plan are known, it is best to place them into a matrix that is divided into three categories, namely, purely untied funds,

partly untied funds and tied funds. Such a matrix would give each Panchayat an idea of how it can slot its priorities into the conditionality's associated with funding. This would ensure that funds, which are inescapably tied, should be first used and then untied funds are applied. Once needs are assessed at the Panchayat level, a process of linking each need to the source of funding can be adopted:

Consolidation of Rural and Urban plans:

Consolidation of rural and urban plans is one of the key tasks of the DPC and is also of great significance in the light of growing problems related to urban expansion into rural areas. The sequence to be followed in consolidation of rural and urban plans can be summarized as follows

1. Gram Panchayats prepare Participatory Plans and send to Intermediate Panchayat
2. Intermediate Panchayat compiles information sent by the GPs in the block and along with its own information, prepares a Block Plan and sends to ZP
3. ZP compiles information from Block Panchayats and along with its own information, sends to the DPC
4. Urban Local Bodies transmit plans to DPC
5. DPC compiles information from ZP and ULBs to form Draft Development plan (DDP)

Prioritizing areas for consolidation:

The starting point for creating the architecture that merges rural-sectoral and urban-spatial planning would be the identification of the functional responsibilities of panchayats and Municipalities and the possible commonalities in these. The 11th and 12th schedules of the Constitution lay out the functional assignments to Panchayats and Municipalities respectively. There are 29 matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule and 18 in the Twelfth Schedule respectively.

1. Spatial integration is integration of schemes such as roads that run through one or more local bodies,
2. Sectoral integration, which integrates several schemes relating to a larger sector.
3. Cross-sectoral integration, which is aimed to ensure maximum impact from different interventions by designing approaches that draw resources from various schemes.
4. Vertical integration, which separates out what has to be done at higher Panchayat levels, which have the advantages of scale and which cannot be done by the lower tiers of local government.
5. Integration of resources, which looks at identifying and planning for the channelization of several schemes both Centrally sponsored and State sponsored, which Panchayats can utilize, integrate into local plans and to which they can contribute additional resources.

Transforming a vertical planning process into a horizontal process:

With increased specialisation and sector-wise thrusts in development, there has been a tendency to concentrate on the preparation of sector-wise plans namely District Health Plan, Watershed Plan and Education Plan, etc. The vertical planning process is transformed into a horizontal planning process, where local governments and other planning entities work together and explore the possibilities of planning together. There is a need to harmonising the vertical planning process, so essential to ensure that sectoral expertise.

Presentation and approval of District Plan:

District draft development plan prepared by the DPC has to be presented in the meeting by the Chairman of DPC. It is discussed by the members along with the representatives of various sectors for better clarity. The committee will approve the plan with the support of the majority members.

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