

Involvement of Rural Masses in Governance: A study of district Sirsa of Haryana

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ABSTRACT

Involvement of rural masses in developmental planning, implementation of developmental programmes and governance is much required for democratic decentralization and to bring balance in development in society. Panchayati Raj system, a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies at the Village, Taluk and District levels. It ensures greater participation of people and more effective implementation of rural development programmes. There will be a Grama Panchayat for a village or group of villages, a Taluk level and the Zilla Panchayat at the district level. With the commencement of economic reforms, the emphasis on decentralization has increased, especially because new partners in both decentralization and development are emerging. The 73rd and 74th amendments, passed in 1992, were designed to devolve powers so that citizens would actually have their voices heard and play an active role in governance. At the panchayat level, through the implementation of the 73rd amendment, this has begun to happen. Its efficacy is not uniform and varies from state to state. Due to poverty, illiteracy, non-awareness, unemployment, deprivation of opportunities, people do not involve in governance. In this paper attempt is made to describe the barriers to involvement of rural masses in governance and suggestions are made to promote involvement of rural masses in governance.

Keywords: Development, Democratic decentralization, Governance, Panchayati raj.

GOVERNANCE

Governance refers to "all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or territory and whether through laws, norms, power or language."¹ It relates to "the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms and institutions."²

A government is a formal body invested with the authority to make decisions in a given political system. In the governance process, which includes all the actors involved in influencing the decision-making process (such as lobbies, parties, Medias), is centered on the relevant "governing body". Governance is the way the rules, norms and actions are produced, sustained, regulated and held accountable.

The World Bank defines good governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development³

An effective local governance mechanism plays a critical role in economic development and social justice. Rural areas are still plagued by problems of malnourishment, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of basic infrastructure like schools, colleges, hospitals, sanitation. Rural development aims at finding the ways to improve the rural lives with participation of the rural people themselves so as to meet the required need of the rural area.

INVOLVEMENT OF RURAL MASSES

Involvement of rural masses in local governance helps the ordinary citizens in assessing their own needs and participating in local project planning and budget monitoring. It also improves public resource management and reduces corruption, by making public servants and political leaders accountable to local masses. For involvement of rural masses in work, clarity and easy access of government information is needed, as well as the inclusion of members into decision-making from groups whose concerns are being addressed.

IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVEMENT OF RURAL MASSES IN GOVERNANCE

1. To support the development of the governance systems, structures, policies and practice that empower disadvantaged people – including women and people with disabilities, to involve in the decisions that affect their lives.
2. To achieve the desired results of the plans, programmes and welfare schemes
3. To reduce corruption and wastage of resources
4. To make the concerned authorities accountable to the people
5. To strengthen the democratic decentralization and democracy at grass root level.

TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT OF RURAL MASSES IN GOVERNANCE

People can involve in different stages

1. sometimes for informing or consulting, sometimes for more empowering, depending on the characteristics of the development program
2. Involvement can be different for different stages of development activities, such as for selecting, budgeting, monitoring or evaluating stages of a development program.
3. People can involve from the start to the end of the development processes
4. Through continuous involvement, people obtain power to control the development activities and make decisions according to their choice, which consequently makes development outcomes work in their favor.
5. Local people, including private sector participants who are major sources of funds and ultimate users of development activities, also need to adjust their mindset to join in development works that affect them, rather than just silently accepting the works.

When people involve only in the selection or initial stage, the quality of the work may not be ensured by the authority. Similarly when people involve only in the evaluation stage, project selection may not happen according to the people's choice. So, though a good quality of development may be ensured through participatory evaluation, the development may not be used by the people if they are not satisfied with the project initially selected by the authority unilaterally. This suggests that only continuous involvement of people with local development programs can ensure favourable outcomes.

Four categories of involvement of masses are follows:

- (1) Information sharing: Service providers like project designers and managers inform local beneficiaries in order to facilitate collective or individual action. Information equips local people to understand and perform their tasks better. In family planning or nutrition programs, such information sharing works well.
- (2) Consultation. At this process local people are consulted on key issues at some or all stages in a project cycle. There is an opportunity here for local beneficiaries to interact and provide feedback to the service providers which the latter could take into account in the design and implementation stages. If farmers are

consulted on extension practices and arrangements, project outcomes are likely to be better than if they were merely informed.

(3) Decision making. This phenomenon occurs when beneficiaries have a decision making role in matters of program design and implementation. Decisions may be made jointly with service providers on specific issues or aspects relating to a project. Thus slum dwellers may decide jointly with project staff on the design for upgrading their housing. Similarly, farmers may design a program for the distribution of water for irrigation.

(4) Initiating action. This is a different category of participation when beneficiaries are able to take the initiative in terms of actions/decisions pertaining to a project. Initiative implies a proactive capacity and the confidence to get services on one's own. When beneficiary groups engaged in a health project they identify a new need and decide to respond to it on their own; they are taking the initiative for their development.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

1. Most of the rural people are aware about the welfare schemes of the government and they are getting their benefits.
2. The sarpanches are playing important role in providing the benefits and awareing people about the welfare programmes and schemes
3. Rural people are getting services from the e-disha centres in the district like aadhar card, bill payments, property registration.
4. Poor farmers are getting financial help from the cooperative societies and public banks in the districts.
5. The findings have revealed that there are manifold problems contributing to the ineffectiveness of people's involvement.
6. None of the actors – such as government officials, elected representatives or local people – are aware of the value of people's involvement.
7. The mechanisms of direct people's involvement through different management committees are faulty.
8. There is no robust legal system to ensure that people's involvement is legitimate at the rural level.
9. Administrative decentralization is incomplete, which has empowered government officials over elected representatives in relation to financial matters.
10. The assessment systems in relation to people's involvement, and their satisfaction over the outcomes of the development programs, are inoperative.
11. Lack of social capital, mainly trust of local people in their elected leaders, is hindering true people's involvement through their elected leaders.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Understanding and using formal institutions of power, electing and appointing local officials, and bringing together citizens' groups and government officials to jointly formulate program plans.
2. Education and training are crucial in empowering citizens to effectively involve in local governance
3. Media is playing a crucial role in creating political awareness among the citizens. It has assumed the role of watchdog of democracy by providing unbiased information to viewers.

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