



Status and Process of Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) – An Analysis from Selected States in India

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Abstract

The PRIs are to be responsible for plan and implement the schemes for economic development and social justice at the grass root. Gram Panchayats need to develop a five-year “Shelf of Projects” which involves the identification, ranking and preparation of projects of development activities. The XIVth Finance Commission of India earmarked Rs. 200,292.2 Cr to the panchayats and necessitates urgent need of empowerment of the gram panchayats to plan and implement the projects to fulfil the basic needs of rural people. It is called Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). All the 2.5 lakhs Gram Panchayats have to prepare the GPDP pertaining to their local problems, conditions and local resources. But unfortunately, the GPs are facing problems like lack of supporting staff, lack of adequate knowledge, skills for planning, etc. This paper made an attempt to analyse the capacity gap, status of preparation of GPDP. This study is an outcome of field study conducted in five states namely Sikkim, Punjab, Kerala, Maharashtra and Bihar

1. Introduction

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, on Panchayat Raj was a historic event in the evolution of Indian democracy. The amendment provided necessary powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions to function as institutions of local self-governance. The PRIs are to be responsible for plan and implement the schemes for economic development and social justice at the grass root. Gram Panchayats need to develop a five-year “Shelf of Projects” which involves the identification, ranking and preparation of projects of development activities. In order to identify priority projects for improving rural accessibility, the Gram Panchayat needs to have an adequate overview of access and infrastructure constraints hampering social and economic development. The activities that need to be carried out by the Gram Panchayat to produce the “Shelf of Projects” are grouped into three main categories: Data collection and mapping, identification of problems and their causes and preparation of projects.

Followed by the constitutional provisions the ministry of Panchayats, Govt. of India has created an enormous opportunity for responsive local governance through the XIVth Finance Commission for the Gram Panchayats. It earmarked Rs. 200,292.2 Cr to the panchayats and necessitates urgent need of empowerment of the gram panchayats to make them to deliver their mandate functions of delivery of basic services responsibly and efficiently. In addition, the MGNREGS which is the most important flagship programme of the ministry of Rural Development allocates around 50,000 Crores every year to the panchayats. Further, the panchayats also receives funds like the SFC grants, Own Source Revenue and state government schemes funds.

One of the basic prerequisites for management of funds of this scale would be to have a comprehensive development plan at the GP level. In the context of the Constitutional mandate, this plan has to be a participatory plan involving the community, particularly the gram sabha, in the formulation of priorities and projects and will also have to ensure the mandates of social justice and economic development as mentioned in Article 243G. Therefore, the GP development plan will have to have clear components of addressing vulnerabilities of poor and marginalised people and their livelihood opportunities through an integrated poverty reduction plan that converge with the labour budgeting and projectisation exercises under MGNREGS as well. But for this to happen, there has to be a great deal of preparatory and capacitative efforts to be taken up at the GP levels.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the status, principles and implementation of guidelines in preparation of the GPDP
2. To study the process of GP level planning, People Participation with a focus on the role of disadvantaged sections, and their issues in the GPDP.

3. Methodology & Sampling

The states were pooled under four categories, namely the group of states following mechanism for preparation of GPDP viz., use of 1. **PLAN PLUS BASED GPDPs**, 2. **STATE SPECIFIC PLAN SOFTWARE**, 3. **MANUALLY PREPARED GPDPs** and 4. **STATES NOT PREPARED**. These classifications were done based on the data reported in the **PLAN PLUS SOFTWARE** - planning and monitoring web portal developed and maintained by the Ministry of the Panchayati Raj, Government of India. From the first group two states were selected, one state which has higher percentage in terms of completion GPDP and having better 'Devolution Index' (developed by the MoPR) and another state having lowest percentage of GPDP completion and better devolution Index were selected. Since, the first group covers more than 50% of states in the country, it was considered selection of two states namely **Sikkim and Punjab**. Subsequently, one state each from other three categories was selected. Therefore, **Kerala, Maharashtra and Bihar** were selected from respective group for field study. Followed by from each state two districts and from each district two Gram Panchayats were selected for the study.

4. Tools and Techniques

The methodology followed for the study include desk review of guidelines and survey method was used for collection of data from various stakeholders from selected gram panchayats. It covered and collected perceptions and opinion of elected members, officials, planning core groups, committees of the panchayat, gram sabha members. The study covered 50% of elected representatives, officials and various committee members and up to

10% coverage of Gram Sabha members for detailed study. Structured interview schedule was prepared and administered covering all the aspects listed in the 'study focus' and objectives.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The major Findings of the study are presented on various parameters relevant in preparation of GPDP. Those findings are based on the field data collected from the 10 Gram Panchayats selected from five states.

5.1 Personal Particulars

❖ The study has covered 64.0% males and 36.0% females. Among the study population 81% respondents are literates. The occupational statuses reflects 49.6% farmers, 29.1% engaged as labourers, 13.2% engaged in self-employment and around 8% was government employees. More than 75% households reported less than Rs. 50000 as annual family income. Around 37% households are living in the poorest of the poor category earning annual income of less than Rs.40,000.

5.2 Participation of GP Committees in Planning

❖ Enquiry on the opportunities for participation as member of Gram Panchayat committees, only very less number of households had/have opportunity. It was reported, 13.3% in Kerala, 15.9 in Maharashtra and around 20% in other states. Majority of the committees are in dormant in nature. In majority GPs, the committees were formed for official mandatory need but the purpose and functional responsibility are not known to members.

5.3 Views of Respondents on Gram Sabha and Participatory Planning Process

- ❖ Only 59.6% respondents participated once or twice in the gram Sabha meetings with high percentage in Kerala, Sikkim, only 50% in Punjab and 43% in Bihar. But is not clear to them whether the meetings were Gram Sabha or other purpose, role clarity was not known to the attended people.
- ❖ It was reported that difficulty to mobilise 1/10 of the electorate, therefore around 100 people were mobilised giving mandate responsibility to the Ward Members to bring at least 10 – 15 people from their respective ward.
- ❖ More than 62% households all together reported, gram sabha meetings were conducted with representation from all sections. But in the case of Bihar, it was not happened, only the elected representatives sit and make decisions regarding selection of works and beneficiaries. Even in Maharashtra also less efforts or less interest was shown by the elected representatives to mobilise people from all sections.
- ❖ It was observed in most cases that, the Mukhia (Village President) or members of dominant caste decides who will get what within the panchayat. Even in the mono-caste villages, the wealthy and people having muscle power use to dominate on others and influence the local decisions.
- ❖ It is noticed from the responses of the study, in the state of Bihar and Maharashtra chances for raising voices on public issues is very less for socially and economically weaker sections. In other states like Kerala, Sikkim and Punjab the scenario was far better. It may be due to caste less religious system in those states and of high literacy.

- ❖ Around 60% were interested to participate or participated during past in development activities of the panchayats. In general, weaker sections and marginalised have less interest in participation in the public events, especially women have numerous restrictions for public appearance and participation in any of the government or private gatherings. The study discussed with the female respondents regarding reasons for non-participation, it was revealed, social stigma among women specifically Muslim women, lower social status prevents SCs & STs in public participation.
- ❖ Around 53% respondents who participated in the GS meetings reported they participate on self-interest but remaining 44% were forced to attend the meetings for want of quorum compelled by ward members or President of the GP. Except Bihar, in all study states 50-60% respondents reported for voluntary participation.

5.4 Discussion related to the GPDP

- ❖ Around 52 percent know about the GPDP but almost equal percentages of people do not know. Among the states, higher level of awareness reported in Sikkim and Kerala, also around 50 percent in Punjab. In the states like Bihar and Maharashtra, majority people did not know about the GPDP. Even people who said having awareness about GPDP expressed their understanding on listing of activities of people's needs as 'plan of the panchayat'.
- ❖ The State Governments have not made much initiative to realise the people on the core elements of the GPDP. 61.4% did not understand on the objectives of the GPDP and it affects the real participation and hampering vision of overall development. Unfortunately, even elected representatives do not know about the importance of the panchayat development plans.
- ❖ Monitoring the planning process and scrutinizing the quality of the plans are not taking place in any of the states except Kerala. Therefore, the states instructed the GPs and in turn gram panchayats also conducted gram sabha meetings for preparation and finalization of GPDPs as mandatory function.
- ❖ The study reflects majority people were not informed about the preparation of the GPDP. The people were called to attend Gram Sabha meeting like any other panchayat meeting and resolutions were passed and approved in a ceremonial way.
- ❖ Invariably, all the sample GPs including advanced states like Kerala and Sikkim, in the name of GPDP, they prepared a list of activities and budget estimation on repairing or construction of infrastructures related to drinking water, road, street light, drainage, sanitation and office buildings. Holistic development thought is missing.
- ❖ The status of IEC activities about GPDP in the study states reflects less efforts on carrying information dissemination which resulted in around 45 percent people did not know the IEC activities conducted by the GPs.
- ❖ Due to lack of self interest and motivation, less percentage of people only comes forward voluntarily involve with the panchayats. This scenario was enquired with the respondents which reported around 70 percent have agreed on panchayat efforts on social mobilization. Further discussion revealed on the

percentage of people participate in gram sabha meeting would be less than 10 percent of the total population of the panchayat.

5.5 PROCESS of GPDP

- ❖ The study shows positive responses on conduct of household survey by the panchayats except in the state of Bihar. The gram panchayats are handicapped with data, majority are relying on census data which is published once in ten years and required dimensions may not be available.
- ❖ Majority of the gram panchayats are not having basic particulars related to resources, capacity, perennial problems, production and productivity of the various sectors, etc.. They have only particulars related to population, households, literacy and other very few items. Therefore, data required for development and welfare of the people are missing and which are essential for preparation of village development plans.
- ❖ It is interesting to note, majority respondents (66.2%) from the study region reported for conduct of PRA exercises like transect walk, social mapping and resource mapping to identify problems and potentials of the gram panchayat. But detailed interaction revealed PRA were not conducted in full spirit for identification of problems and needs, they conducted for documentation purpose.
- ❖ In the case of prioritisation of problems and needs, 60 percent were reported negatively. The reasons quoted by the respondents were majority of the works undertaken by the panchayats are scheme bound issued with the guidelines on items and areas of expenditure, therefore choice of projects would be difficult.
- ❖ Visioning for the GP is completely absent in all gram panchayats of the study states. Either elected representatives, officials or people of any category do not aware about 'Visioning'. Long term development thinking is missing in any of the GPDP.
- ❖ Due to lack of adequate expertise and technical knowhow the panchayats acting like an agency of implementing state and central government schemes and projects. Visioning and resource inventory requires technical experts to take the panchayats at certain scale of development in the long run.
- ❖ Respondents from study area reported except from Kerala, other states majority were reported for non-compliance of the guideline of GPDP.
- ❖ Lack of capacity to plan, make vision and lack of adequate personnel hamper the process of preparation of long term plan for the development.
- ❖ Around 73% reported on the plans prepared are not comprehensive except Kerala. The plans are in majority cases, a budget estimate of the wish list containing 2-3 pages prepared by the secretary or Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat and passed in the panchayat meeting.

6. Conclusion

In India discussions and action on development are placing more emphasis on good governance and democratic institutions. Good democratic governance, fully accountable to people and providing opportunities for all the people to participate effectively in all debates and decisions that affect their lives alone can respond effectively to the needs of poor people for better living. To strengthen the status of preparation of GPDP requires motivation

and Leadership, attitudes towards development and continuous Capacity building for elected representatives. Suitable administrative mechanism with Technical inefficiency in collection digitalisation and management of data are also important to prepare real GPDP. Inactive working groups need to be vibrated through verities of trainings. Finally, institutional partnership and Inclusion of subject specialists, planning experts and department representatives in the planning core group will bring change in the quality of GPDP.

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