

# Five stages of multi-level planning in India

In India following five stages of multi-level planning have been recognized. These include:

1. National Level-sectored cum inter-state / inter-regional planning.
2. State Level-sectored cum inter-district / inter-regional planning.

District/Metropolitan Level-regional planning.

4. Block Level-area planning

5. Panchayat Level-village planning. These also denote five different phases of change in the policy of planning in the country (Table 29.1).

It is pertinent to note that before 1993, the Indian Constitution did not specifically recognise district as a third stratum of planning.

## **(1) National Level**

At national level Planning Commission is the nodal agency responsible for the country's planning. The Prime Minister is the Chairman of this Commission.

It not only prepares Plans for the country but also coordinates the sectoral development works of different ministries of the central Government, states and union territories. The functions of the Planning Commission are supervised through the National Development Council.

The Planning Commission has been granted constitutional status through 52nd Amendment of the Constitution. No big plan can be executed without its prior approval by the Planning Commission. The Commission formulates three types of plans: (a) Perspective plans for 15-25 years, (b) Five year plans, and (c) Annual plans within the framework of Five Year Plan

In real sense of the term the perspective planning is of little significance except that it helps in the achievement of long-term socio-economic objectives. The Planning Commission also issues guidelines to the states for perspective planning, monitoring and evaluation of existing plans, plan formulation, regional or district planning and for plan coordination.

## **(2) State level**

At state level the mechanism of the planning is almost same of the national level. The state Planning Board acts like national planning Commission and coordinates the development plans of different ministries and the districts. It also has the responsibility of the formulation, implementation and monitoring of state plan.

It is in constant touch with Planning Commission regarding the formulation of plans and allocation of resources. Under the federal set up of the country states enjoy autonomy in certain state subjects and play pivotal role in the implementation of planning programmes.

ADVERTISEMENTS:

It is at state level that all sorts of economic and social data are available and development plans could be formulated keeping regional interests and demands in mind. Hence, there is a need for more rigorous exercise of planning at state-level.

Those states which are conscious of their responsibility and are showing interest in plan formulation and implementation are displaying better performance in development programmes. Andhra Pradesh case may be cited as an example. Infact the Center and the States are the two principal actors in planning and they should move in unison to achieve the objectives and priorities laid down in the plans.

### **(3) District Level**

The concept of the district-level planning is based on the principle of local level planning. It also assumes that success of the planning needs greater mobilization and utilization of local resources. Below the state, district occupies a pivotal position in planning because of its location and administrative advantages.

Not only it has sufficient administrative and technical expertise and good source of data and information to carry out plan programmes but has well-knit system to involve people's participation and make the gains of planning to reach to the grass-root level. Since the British days district has an effective system of administration and a store house of all sorts of information and data.

The District Board consists of elected representatives who can play significant role in the process of planning. Hence, there is a sizeable group

of scholars who consider district as an ideal and viable unit of micro- level planning.

It is also argued that Gram Panchayat and Development Block are too small to act as the smallest unit of planning. Also there is complete lack of administrative framework and data collection system at these two levels. Hence, there would be a number of difficulties in the formulation and execution of plans at village and block levels.

Although the importance of district-level planning was realized during the times of community development plans but the real breakthrough came with the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) in which emphasis was laid on the district -level planning to remove inter-district and intra-district disparities and make optimum utilization of natural and human resources at district level.

Infect failure of Community Development Plan also forced our planners to opt for alternative course for decentralised planning and involve local resources and people in the planning process. But despite this suggestion of the Planning Commission, the Indian Constitution did not specifically recognize the district as a third stratum of planning until 1993.

However, states like Maharashtra and Gujarat started allocating district-wise funds from the State's pool to carry on development activities since late '60s. In both these states District Planning and Development Councils functioned under the chairmanship of a Minister of State. Presently District Planning is supervised through Zila Parishad and its Chairman.

Its formulation and implementation are looked after by the District Planning Officer (DPO) or the District Magistrate. In Karnataka and Tamil Nadu district magistrate is the chairman of the Zila Parishad but in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh he participates in its meetings without any voting right. In some other states he acts as an adviser.

Despite this elaborate system, the task of preparing a reasonably sound District Plan has not made much headway in the States due to following constraints:

(i) Some lurking reluctance on the part of Governments and their sartorial heads to devolve sufficient authority-(administrative and financial) to the planning bodies at the district level.

(ii) Lack of effective co-ordination at the district level between various agencies involved in the planning exercises.

(iii) Institutionalised arrangements, for seeking consultation with various participants in the planning process, were either not well established or not sufficiently encouraged and developed.

(iv) Lack of trained staff, both in terms of number as well as quality. The inadequacy of training was a serious constraint.

(v) Lack of appropriate and reduced methodologies for planning, in tandem with the capabilities available at the local level. In this context, the non-availability of trained planning personnel posed a serious problem.

(vi) Planning without a clear and full understanding of the realities of resource constraints.

(vii) The database presented its own problems. Although a surfeit of data is available at the local level from numerous sources, yet, appropriate methodologies for selecting the “critical minimum information” for local planning from this mass of data and using the same for some simple analysis for decisionmaking, without going into highly sophisticated techniques, had not emerged, (viii) Lack of people’s participation in Planning.

In general, steps taken by different states during 1959 to 1993 to devolve powers and functions on Panchayati Raj bodies were isolated, half-hearted and lacked clear direction. In this context, unless various institutionalized pressure as well as user groups, i.e. “Poly-centric institutions”, are developed, the success of the district planning exercise will always be at the mercy of people, who may not be interested in it (Sundaram, 1997).

Attempts have been made to remove some of these constraints through the Constitution 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992 and the Panchayats Act of 1996. Now the provision has been made for the constitution of a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and municipalities and prepare an integrated development plan for the district as a whole.

#### **(4) Block Level**

Block is an important unit of micro-level planning. These development blocks were created to supervise the implementation of development plans

under the Community Development Programme initiated during the First Five Year Plan. Each district was divided into a number of blocks and each block comprised about 100 villages, with a population of about 60,000.

The programme visualized mobilization of local resources, participation of the people in the decision-making and implementation of the development schemes. Hence, a new unit of planning was created at block-level under the leadership of a block development officer and a team of various specialists and village level workers (officers).

The general supervision of blocks was made by the Block Samithis under the chairmanship of the Block Pramukh and elected representatives. Although the Community Development Programme failed but block continued to become an important unit of micro-level planning below the district. The Fifth Five Year Plan (1978-83) opted for area planning with a preference for block-level planning for achieving employment objectives and emphasis on rural development.

The main objective of this planning was to absorb local labour surpluses and greater involvement of people in the formulation and implementation of development plans. Hence, by the end of 1983 a system of block-level planning integrated into national system was available. It was built into a frame of district level planning which was adjusted to the overall State Plan. The State Plan already forms part of the national Plan.

The relevance of block-level planning is based on the viable area and population-size, more of to the regional and local problems, easier identification of target groups, optimum utilization of regional/local

resources, and greater participation of people in plan formulation and implementation. The entire strategy of such planning is based on employment planning, growth centre planning, credit planning.

It is an action-oriented planning pertaining to the development of agriculture, irrigation (mainly minor irrigation), soil conservation, animal husbandry, pisciculture, forestry, minor processing of agricultural products, small and cottage industries, creation of local-level infrastructure, and development of social services like water supply, health, education, shelter, sanitation, local transport, and welfare plans.

The entire process of block-level planning passes through seven stages. These include: (i) identification phase, (ii) resource inventory phase, (iii) plan formulation phase, (iv) employment plan phase, (v) areal or layout plan phase, (vi) credit plan phase, and (vii) integration and implementation phase. The main objectives of such planning include self reliance, solution to the problems of unemployment, removal of socio-economic disparities, creation of skill to promote self employment and self reliance, improvement in productivity and optimum utilization of local resources.

Thus the main focus of such planning is the identification of target group, introduction of development plans to generate employment, popularization of minimum need programmes and implementation of special programmes for weaker section of the society.

With the coming of Janata Government in power in 1977 the bottom-up approach was emphasized in planning. The report on the Working Group (1978) has emphasised following objectives of block-level planning.

These include : (i) optimum utilization of the development potentials of the region, (ii) higher proportion of profit to weaker section (small and marginal farmers, land-less agricultural labourers, and rural artisans), fulfilment of minimum needs, construction of socio-economic infrastructural bases to achieve aforesaid objectives, formulation of institutions to check the exploitation of poor people, development of such infrastructural facilities which could generate assets for the interest of poor and weaker section of the society, technological upgrading and skill creation and removal of total unemployment through public works.

#### **(5) Panchayat-Level**

The directive principles of state policy mention the village Panchayat which is an elected body at village level. Village, here, roughly corresponds to a revenue village (or a group of revenue villages). The Panchayati Raj System involves a three-tier structure: village-level, block-level and district level.

The first tier at village level is commonly known as Gram Panchayat (village assembly), the second tier at block-level as Panchayat Samiti and the third tier at district-level as Zila Parishad. According to the provisions of the Panchayats Act 1996 the election to the village Panchayat is held at an interval of 5 years where there is proportionate seat reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and not less than one-third seats reserved for women.

Through the Constitution Amendment Act 1992 the Panchayat (also called Gram Sabha) has been authorized to look after the preparation and

implementation of plans for economic development and social justice on an illustrative list of 29 subjects. The respective state has been given discretionary powers to prescribe powers and functions to the Gram Sabha to act as an institution of self government.

It has also been advised to constitute a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchyats and Municipalities and prepare an integrated development plan for the district as a whole. It has also been directed to constitute a State Finance Commission (SFC) to review every five years, the financial position of Panchayats and to make recommendations about the principle governing the distribution of revenues between the state and the Panchyats, and determination of the grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Funds of the State.

The implementation of the plan at the Panchayat-level is the responsibility of the village development officer (VDO) and the secretary and is supervised by the Gram Sabha which is headed by the Gram Pradhan. Under the existing provisions, funds for the Gram Sabha (Village Panchayat) are directly being allocated from the centre to execute rural development programmes like IRDP, JRY etc.

The Panchayat has also been entrusted with the responsibility for the promotion of agriculture, rural industries, provision of medical relief, maternity, women and child welfare, maintaining common grazing grounds, village roads, tanks, wells, sanitation and execution of other socio-economic programmes.

In some places, they are also authorized to supervise primary education and collect land revenue. Presently, Gram Panchayats are involved in the identification of beneficiaries in antipoverty programmes. There are about 2.20 lakh Gram Panchayats, 5,300 Panchayat Samitis and 400 Zila Parishads in the country.

The new status accorded to the Panchayats by the Constitution has raised high hopes and expectations among the elected representatives and the rural folk at large. But owing to the political complexions of the governments in the Indian states, the reluctance of the state-level political and administrative functionaries to part with power and authority, and some genuine financial and economic difficulties, the progress in operationalisation has been somewhat slow and halting.

It has been found that elected representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions are largely unaware of the political and economic dimensions of development issues and lack planning and managerial skills. This is particularly true of women elected representatives, who are performing their duties under some severe constraints of different kinds.